

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Most colleges require that you submit scores from either the SAT or ACT; international students may have additional testing requirements or exceptions. We generally recommend that our students take a diagnostic test of each to ascertain whether they perform better on one format than the other, and whether or not they have a preference so they can focus their test preparation efforts.

Preparing for standardized tests can have a significant impact on your scores. You can prepare on your own by working through practice tests, either with books from the testing agencies themselves or online through affiliated websites. If you prefer to work with a tutor, we recommend one-on-one test preparation whenever possible which can focus on the individual student's areas of weakness, rather than group classes which are less tailored by definition. Feel free to ask us if we would recommend ACT or SAT tutoring in your case and whom we could recommend for you.

While you may self-report your scores on your applications, most colleges require that your results be sent to them directly from the testing services (the College Board and the ACT). **You are responsible for instructing the College Board and ACT to send your scores to your colleges before application deadlines.**

Most colleges will “**superscore**” (use the highest section scores from multiple test dates) SAT scores to create a new, higher combined score; many will also superscore the ACT.

All standardized testing should be completed no later than mid-November for Early Decision and Early Action applications, and by December or sometimes January for Regular Decision. (Check with your colleges to confirm that they will accept November results for ED or EA applications and January for Regular Decision.)

A growing number of colleges—mostly smaller liberal arts colleges—no longer require standardized test scores or offer flexibility in what applicants submit, such as accepting three Subject Tests in place of either the ACT or SAT. **A list of test optional and test flexible colleges can be found at [fairtest.org/university/optional](https://www.fairtest.org/university/optional). As this list is bound to change, you should visit individual college websites to determine their specific testing requirements.** Students who do well in the classroom but not as well on standardized tests should consider applying to some test optional colleges. If you decide to apply to a test optional college, please discuss with your Dunbar consultant whether or not to submit your test scores.

Careful test planning is essential. It is important to schedule your testing on appropriate test dates—consult with us to develop your optimal testing plan.

The PSAT

The PSAT is intended to expose students to the SAT format. It can also be a reasonable predictor of scores on the SAT and can identify areas of weakness that would benefit from focused preparation.

While **colleges do not require or even see PSAT results**, National Merit recognition and scholarships are awarded on the basis of junior year PSATs. (The top 1% in each state become Finalists.) Generally, high school juniors take the PSAT in October, registered by their schools. (Many independent schools also have sophomores take the PSAT; in many public schools, sophomores can take the PSAT if they coordinate with their guidance counselor in time.) We generally recommend PSAT preparation for those students who have demonstrated the potential for National Merit consideration based on their sophomore PSAT results. Scores are generally not available before December.

The SAT

The SAT, which was redesigned in March 2016 to be more of a curriculum-based test, contains two sections: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, and Math. Each section is scored on a scale from 200 to 800 with the highest possible combined score being 1600. There is also an optional Essay, which we encourage all students to do since many selective colleges require it. Each essay has two readers who score the essay from 1-4 on three dimensions, reading, analysis and writing. Scores range from 6 to 24.

The SAT is offered on several test dates each year and may be taken multiple times if you wish. Most students take it twice: the first time in the second half of their junior year (although some may take it twice) and the second (or third) in the fall of their senior year. As the College Board is in the process of changing their calendar, we suggest you confirm test dates and registration deadlines at <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/dates-deadlines>.

We do not recommend taking the SATs more than three times. While the College Board's **Score Choice** option will allow you to submit only your highest scores to colleges, some colleges will require all your scores. Therefore, to avoid appearing over-anxious to admissions officers and to maintain an appropriate focus in the classroom, it would be best to take the SAT no more than three times.

While your high school registers you for the PSAT, you are responsible for registering yourself for the SAT at www.collegeboard.org (the registration deadline is typically one month before each test date). At the time of registration, the College Board offers students an opportunity to send test scores to four colleges at no additional charge; we do not recommend sending test scores at this point, sight unseen. Students may order test scores to be sent to their colleges later in the process.

Historically, we have recommended taking the SAT on a date when the College Board offers the **Question-and-Answer Service (QAS)**. The QAS will allow you or a tutor to fine-tune your studies by returning a copy of the test you took, the correct answers and your own answers, along with your scores. Those dates have included the January, May and October test dates in the past but you can confirm this through the College Board website and sign up for the QAS when you register for your test dates. You can also order QAS by calling Customer Service.

QAS reports typically arrive 6 to 8 weeks after the test date, if you order during registration. You may order a QAS report up to five months after a test date and it should take 3 to 4 weeks to arrive.

SAT Subject Tests

Subject Tests are offered in a variety of academic subjects (for the list of subjects, see collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat-subject-tests/subjects). Each test is one hour long and you can take up to three tests on the same test date.

Some of the more selective colleges require (or strongly recommend) two Subject Tests, and sometimes three, in addition to the SAT or ACT. For example, engineering programs often recommend or require Subject Tests in math (either Math Level 1 or Level 2) and a science (usually Chemistry or Physics). Some colleges also use Subject Tests for course placement, and a strong score in a foreign language Subject Test might exempt you from a college's language requirement.

Subject Tests are best taken at the end of the academic year when the material is fresh in your mind. Please discuss with us which tests might be appropriate (that will depend on your academic program), and the best timing. For instance, you might take the Biology Subject Test as early as the freshman or sophomore year if you are in Advanced or Honors Biology and doing well in the course. We also recommend that you ask your teacher if he or she believes you are prepared for and could do well on the test.

Subject Tests are offered on the same dates as the SAT. Therefore it is not possible to take Subject Tests and the SAT on the same test date. As not every Subject Test is offered on every test date, it is critical to plan ahead.

The College Board's Score Choice option allows students to decide which Subject Test scores to submit to colleges by the individual test—although, again, some colleges will insist on seeing all scores.

The ACT

The ACT is a curriculum-based achievement test. The test is divided into five sections including the optional writing section. Each section is scored from 0-36 and the English, Math, Reading and Science section scores are combined to create a composite score (also 0-36). The ACT format requires quicker pacing than the SAT, therefore students who read or process slowly may be better off taking the SAT. Diagnostic practice tests should help determine which test format is better for you.

Because the ACT is broken out into subject areas, most colleges that require SAT Subject Tests will accept an ACT with Writing instead of the SAT plus Subject Tests. However, some colleges will still require SAT Subject Tests even if you are submitting an ACT. As requirements may change from year to year, you should check each college's website to confirm their current requirements.

As with the SAT, you may take the ACT multiple times but we discourage taking it more than three times for the same reasons mentioned above.

Similar to the Question-and-Answer Service on the SAT, the ACT offers **Test Information Release (TIR)** for December, April and June test dates.

Although the ACT Writing section is optional, many selective colleges require it and we encourage students to take it. The section is scored by two readers across four dimensions (Ideas and Analysis, Development and Support, Organization, and Language Use and Conventions) and scores range from 2 to 12.

Advanced Placement Exams (APs)

Advanced Placement courses follow college-level curricula developed and audited by the College Board; students taking those courses sit for their Advanced Placement Exams in May and get their scores in early July. The AP Exams are scored from 1 to 5; some colleges will give credit for scores of 4 or 5; some give credit for 3s. Most colleges will use AP scores for placement purposes. In addition, strong AP scores from 11th grade or before enhance an application, as does a good grade in the course. Although AP scores are not required by any college, we encourage students to submit all AP scores of 4 or 5 and generally recommend not submitting scores lower than 3. To receive academic credit, you will need to instruct the College Board to release your AP scores to your chosen college when they become available in July after you graduate.

The courses currently offered by the College Board can be found at:
apstudent.collegeboard.org/apcourse.

Accommodations

If you are currently using accommodations for learning differences in class, you may find similar accommodations helpful on standardized testing such as the SAT, Subject Tests, AP Exams, and/or the ACT. Accommodations can range from extra time to taking the test in an alternate setting to using a keyboard, depending on the nature of the learning difference.

Generally speaking, you must be able to present documentation of your learning difference, either through a school verification process or a document review. Either process takes several weeks or more so please plan accordingly.

The link to learn more about accommodations for the SAT is:
collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/special-circumstances/students-with-disabilities

The comparable link for the ACT is:
act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/ACT-TestAccommodationsChart.pdf