

## STANDARDIZED TESTING

Historically, most colleges have required that you submit scores from either the SAT or ACT; international students have also had 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.

In many cases, you may self-report your scores on your applications, rather than sending them directly from the testing services (the College Board and the ACT), which can add up to a significant savings. However, some colleges still require official score reports from the testing companies to review your application. If you are applying to any of these colleges, **you are responsible for instructing the College Board and ACT to send your scores to your colleges where necessary 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; this number has grown to include a great number of colleges during COVID-19. **A list of test optional and test flexible colleges can be found at [fairtest.org/university/optional](https://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.

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. Research also indicates that most students achieve their best scores on the second or third sitting, with few seeing improvements beyond that.

While your high school registers you for the PSAT, you are responsible for registering yourself for the SAT at [www.collegeboard.org](http://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.

We recommend 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 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.

As of January 2021, SAT Subject Tests are no longer offered in the US; June 2021 is the last date for international Subject Tests. If a student has Subject Test scores from earlier test dates, they are welcome to submit them.

## **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.

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, some selective colleges require it and we have encouraged students to take it in the past. 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. As of January 2021, the SAT has eliminated their Essay section and we believe it is only a matter of time before the ACT does the same with their Writing section.

## **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](https://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, 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](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/special-circumstances/students-with-disabilities)

The comparable link for the ACT is:  
[act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations.html](https://act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations.html)

## International Students

In addition to the SAT or ACT, most colleges require students whose first language is not English and did not attend an English language high school to show their proficiency by submitting scores from the **Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)** or other language tests. The TOEFL is a three-hour test measuring reading, listening, grammar and writing. The Internet-based TOEFL (iBT) is the most commonly used format and is scored on a 0-120 scale (0-30 in each section). Many colleges look for a minimum total score of 80; more selective colleges will expect 100+. Note: some colleges have minimums for the individual TOEFL sections.

Many colleges will also accept results from the **International English Language Testing System (IELTS)**. The IELTS, also about three hours in length, is scored on a 1-9 (9=highest) scale with most colleges requiring a minimum of 6.5 or 7.

**Duolingo** is third English proficiency test option accepted by colleges. It is only one hour long and is significantly less expensive than either the TOEFL or IELTS tests. Colleges typically require minimum scores of 115-125.

Students can take the **Duolingo** and **TOEFL** tests online from their home whenever they wish. The **IELTS Indicator** test, a modified version of the **IELTS** test made available during the Covid pandemic, is also available online but only once per week and may not be accepted by all colleges.

Note: Some larger universities with English as a Second Language (ESL) programs may grant a conditional acceptance if your score is lower than their minimum TOEFL or IELTS and if they are otherwise satisfied with your academic credentials.

In those cases, colleges will accept you provided you enroll in their ESL program and subsequently achieve their minimum TOEFL or IELTS score.

Details about the TOEFL and registration may be found at [ets.org/toefl](https://ets.org/toefl), about the IELTS and registration at [ielts.org](https://ielts.org) and about Duolingo at [englishtest.duolingo.com](https://englishtest.duolingo.com).

International students are generally subject to the same SAT/ACT requirements as U.S. students; therefore, it is best to assume that you will need to take one or the other. There are a few colleges that waive their normal SAT/ACT requirements for international applicants.