

Preparing for College Entrance Exams/Standardized Tests

The best way to prepare is to take the practice tests. The PLAN, which is practice for the ACT, was offered in the fall of your sophomore year. The PSAT, which is practice for the SAT, was offered in the fall of your junior year. Not only are these great practice because the tests are timed the same way the SAT and ACT are, but research shows the more familiar you are with the type of test questions, the better you will do on the real thing. Another important reason to take these practice tests is because the results give you an idea of what areas you need to work on to improve your scores. Refer to the printed material given to you with your score sheet for ways to access personalized suggestions for improvement. When you begin to research schools during your junior year, you can use your PSAT and PLAN scores in place of the real tests since most of you don't take the SAT and ACT until toward the end of the year, usually in May and/or June of your junior year.

There are also additional practice tests available in the C&CC as well as on the websites. Some students also purchase College Board, Princeton Review or Barron's SAT/ACT Review Books with CDs for more in-depth test taking tips, vocabulary and practice tests.

Types of College Entrance Exams/Standardized Tests

SAT Reasoning Test: Includes a Critical Reading, Math and Writing component; the score range for each area is 200-800. Not all colleges and universities use the Writing component in admissions decisions. Many schools will use the highest Critical Reading and Math scores over multiple test dates. Example: If you received a 550 in Critical Reading and 600 in Math in June, then received a 600 in Critical Reading and a 590 in Math in October, the college could view your score as a 1200 overall. When students are researching SAT admission scores from various publications it is important to take note of whether or not the Writing score is being included in the total score.

ACT (with Writing): Includes tests in English, Math, Science and Reading as well as an optional test in Writing. *We recommend that all students take the optional writing portion of the ACT, as colleges and universities will often require it.* The ACT measures knowledge and skills that you have acquired throughout high school. Your test results reflect individual scores in each of these areas as well as a composite score, which is the average of your scores on the four subject area tests. ACT test scores and the Composite score range from 1 to 36. Writing scores range from 2 to 12 and are not part of the Composite score.

SAT Subject Tests: These are one-hour multiple choice tests that measure how much you know about a specific academic subject and also how well you can apply that knowledge. You may take up to three Subject Tests at one time. There are 20 different SAT Subject Tests and these fall into the five core areas of: English, history, math, sciences and languages. The score range for the Subject Tests is 200-800.

Certain colleges and some specific majors may require SAT Subject tests. Students majoring in engineering are often asked to report SAT Subject Test scores. Doing well on a Subject Test can help you place into higher-level courses in college. The appropriate time to take certain Subject Tests varies. For instance, for each of the science subject tests it is appropriate to take the test at the end of the school year during which you took that particular science. If you take chemistry during your junior year, the appropriate time to take the Chemistry Subject Test is in June of that year. It is generally recommended that you take a Subject Test if you have an 85 average or better in the particular course. For the other core areas when you should take the test is determined by how many years of preparation you've had and also by specific topics covered.

Because the SAT and ACT are scored so differently, we have included an SAT-ACT Comparison Chart (*) so that you can see how your scores translate between tests.

Extracurricular Activities and Community Involvement

Involvement in a variety of activities outside of the classroom is also very important. In school these could be clubs, sports, honor societies, peer tutoring or any other way to productively spend your time. Outside of school, volunteer experiences (such as youth group participation) or having a part-time job is the best way to show schools that you are a well-rounded, active member of the community as well as demonstrating responsibility and time management skills. The important thing is not to be involved peripherally in too many things, but instead to take active roles in the things that are important to you. Taking on leadership positions is a great way to indicate that you are ready for the demands of a college curriculum. Even if you have not been involved in a lot of these activities until now, there is still time. The best way to showcase your extracurricular involvement is to create an Activity Sheet/Resume (*), highlighting the activities that you are most proud of or where you were most involved. This should be a typewritten list describing your involvement. A copy of your Activity Sheet (*) should be given to your counselor during the spring of your junior year and then again when it's updated in the fall.

(*) = document available in Appendix