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COLLEGE

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TAKING COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

To get into the college of your choice, you need to do well on your college entrance exams. So start learning about the different tests available and how you can prepare for them.

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Types of College Entrance Exams

A college entrance exam is a standardized aptitude test. Aptitude tests measure your collective knowledge in various skill areas (such as verbal, math, analytical and writing skills). These tests are not designed to measure what you have learned in school; rather, they measure your potential to perform well in the future. Your high school courses will help you prepare for these exams. However, taking practice exams is an additional way to study for these types of tests, as they will help you become familiar with the types of questions asked, the format of the questions and the timing necessary to finish each section.

The college you are applying to and where you stand in school will determine which standardized test you need to take. Below is a list of tests colleges most commonly use to assess prospective students:

PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test)

The PSAT is a test taken by sophomores or juniors in high school looking to gain test-taking experience in preparation for the ACT and SAT. The PSAT serves as great practice and taking it qualifies you for the [National Merit Scholarship](#), which could eventually help you save on college. Because the PSAT is only a practice test, the score you receive on it does not affect your transcript. In fact, your PSAT score is for your betterment. By reviewing your PSAT score you can identify areas where you need to apply more study time, which may help you prepare for the ACT and SAT more efficiently.

More on the PSAT:

www.collegeboard.com/psat

SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test)

The SAT is a standardized aptitude test that measures a student's readiness for college. It is made up of three sections: Reading, Writing and Language, Math and an optional Essay. Questions are generally multiple choice, and the optional essay will involve analyzing a piece of writing.

Each section is scored on a scale from 200-800, with a total possible score of 1600. Optional essay results will be reported separately. Be sure to find out if your colleges of choice require SAT essay scores before you take the test. The SAT is offered seven times throughout the year, and you are given 3 hours to complete it, but the optional essay will take an additional 50 minutes.

More on the SAT:

- www.collegeboard.com/sat
- www.princetonreview.com/sat

SAT Subject Tests

Formerly known as the SAT II, SAT Subject Tests measure your knowledge in particular subject areas, as well as your ability to apply that knowledge. Administered separately from the SAT, they are usually only required by extremely selective schools. Of those selective schools, most recommend prospective students take two of the five Subject Tests available: English, History, Mathematics, Science and Languages. The tests are constantly updated to stay current with educational trends, but they are always multiple-choice exams about one hour in duration. Many colleges use the Subject

Tests for admission, for course placement and to advise students about course selection.

More about the SAT Subject Tests:

<http://sat.collegeboard.org/about-tests/sat-subject-tests> 

ACT (American College Test)

The ACT is another standardized aptitude test designed to measure a student's readiness for college. Like the SAT, the ACT measures a student's potential to perform well in college. Test questions are based on standard high school subjects.

The test is multiple-choice and consists of four subject areas: English, Mathematics, Reading and Science. There is also an optional writing section, which if chosen, complements the ACT English Test. Some colleges require the Writing Test; others don't. You should decide whether or not to take the Writing Test based on the requirements of the schools you plan on applying to.

Each section is scored on a scale of 1-36, and your final score is an average of all four subject areas. (If you take the Writing Test, you receive a Subject-Level Writing Score and an ELA score, which averages the English, reading and writing scores.) The ACT is offered 6-7 times a year, and the actual test time is just under three hours (not including the 30-minute writing section).

More on the ACT:

www.actstudent.org 

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

The TOEFL is a standardized test measuring one's ability to speak and understand English at a college level. This test is often a requirement for students applying from outside the U.S., and it can be taken over the Internet or as a written test. The TOEFL is a four-subject test covering Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening.

The range of scores varies depending on whether you take the Internet or written version of the test. Even with Internet availability, the TOEFL typically accrues a three- to four-month wait before you can take it, so plan ahead. The actual test time is four hours. Scores are valid for up to two years after the test date.

More on the TOEFL:

www.toefl.org 

AP (Advanced Placement)

Advanced Placement exams are a series of standardized achievement tests taken by high school students to test their mastery of college-level material in a variety of courses. Like the SAT Subject Tests, AP exams measure knowledge of the subject area learned in school. AP exams are generally taken after a student has completed (or come close to completing) an AP course. However, not all schools offer AP courses, and students may take the exams without completing the AP course. Each exam is scored on a 1-5 scale, and scores are based on the student's performance compared to all other students who have taken the exam. Scoring a 4 or 5 (sometimes even a 3) on the exam will often count toward college credits at most colleges and universities.

More about AP exams:

- www.collegeboard.com/ap 
- www.princetonreview.com/ap 

GED (General Education Development)

The GED exam is a test to obtain a certificate equivalent to a traditional high school diploma for people who didn't graduate from high school. It tests the skills and general knowledge of a four-year high school education and consists of five subject areas: Language Arts: Writing, Language Arts: Reading, Social Studies, Science and Mathematics.

More About the GED:

- <https://ged.com/> 

Test Preparation

The best way to get a good score on exams that measure knowledge (GED, SAT Subject Tests and AP Tests) is to study. You can prepare for them by taking college-preparatory or AP courses throughout high school if they are offered. Take practice tests and request detailed score reports so you can focus on the areas you need to improve. And, if need be, enlist a tutor for extra help, most high schools offer special tutoring programs for standardized tests. If you don't want to use a tutor, check out one of the many test preparation books at your school, local library or bookstore. There are dozens available, and you can get one specific to the test you are taking. Some private organizations also offer specific test-prep courses in person and online.

Aptitude tests (TOEFL, ACT, SAT, PSAT), sometimes referred to as ability tests, require slightly different preparation. Unlike knowledge tests, aptitude tests measure potential and ask questions that go beyond a specific curriculum. The results help determine your natural strengths and weaknesses, and college guidance counselors often use them as a reference for academic direction. The best way to prepare for an aptitude test is to become familiar with the types of information covered and the types of questions that are asked. You could start by purchasing a study guide. It will cover every area of the test so you know what to expect, and many include information on time limits and the test's scoring system. Also, take any practice tests available. Aptitude practice tests will allow you to get used to the types of questions asked, how they are worded and working against a time limit.

More on Test Prep:

- www.princetonreview.com 
- www.kaplan.com 

Checklist: Testing Tips

Imagine that it's the day before your college entrance exam. You've been preparing for months, but what do you bring to the actual test? What if you don't know a question? Do you leave it blank? Guess? What if you don't finish in time? Relax. Soothe admission test anxiety and stay organized by preparing in advance and following the Testing Tips Checklist.

[Checklist: Testing Tips](#)

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