

# Test-Taking Information

## Using This Guide

Taking the PSAT/NMSQT® is a great way to find out how prepared you are for college and career. The PSAT/NMSQT is the qualifying test for entry to the National Merit® Scholarship Program (described on the flip side of this guide). The test also connects you to College Board programs and services that can propel you to opportunities you've earned. We've created this guide to help you:

- Become familiar with the test so you're not surprised or confused on test day. A complete practice test is included in this guide.
- Learn the test directions. The directions for answering the questions in this guide are the same as those on the actual test.
- Review the sample questions. The more familiar you are with the question formats, the more comfortable you'll feel when you see similar questions on the actual test. In particular, be sure to practice how to answer the student-produced response questions on the Math Test later in this guide.
- Be aware of what you need to know about taking this test. **You will be asked to agree to the PSAT/NMSQT Terms and Conditions (starting on page 34) on test day.** These Terms and Conditions have information on:
  - ◆ Acceptable photo identification
  - ◆ Required and prohibited items for testing
  - ◆ Acceptable and unacceptable calculators
  - ◆ Test security and fairness policies
  - ◆ Phone and electronic device policies
  - ◆ Privacy policies, including the use of student information
- *You will be bound by the Terms and Conditions as they exist on test day. Prior to test day, you must review any updates to these Terms and Conditions, which will be clearly communicated to you at [cb.org/pn-terms](http://cb.org/pn-terms).*

## PSAT/NMSQT Test Dates and Fee

Here are the test dates for 2021:

- **Primary Test Date:** Wednesday, October 13
- **Saturday Test Date:** Saturday, October 16
- **Alternate Test Date:** Tuesday, October 26

The fee for the 2021 PSAT/NMSQT is \$18, but you might not have to pay it—some schools cover all or part of the cost for their students. Schools sometimes charge an additional fee for administrative costs. Juniors from income-eligible families may be able to get fee waivers from College Board.

## How the PSAT/NMSQT Is Organized

The PSAT/NMSQT measures the knowledge and skills you have developed in reading, writing and language, and math. This test is not about memorizing words and facts you will never use again. Instead, it focuses on what you have already learned in school and what you will need to succeed in college and career. It measures your reasoning and critical thinking skills, which will be important to you through high school, college, and beyond.

The PSAT/NMSQT has 3 tests: the Reading Test, the Writing and Language Test, and the Math Test. The tests break down like this:

Component	Time Allotted (min.)	Number of Questions
Reading	60	47
Writing and Language	35	44
Math	70	48
Total	165	139

As part of scoring, every test goes through an equating process. Equating is a statistical process we use to ensure that scores mean the same thing no matter which version of the test you take or when you take it. In order to assist with future testing, College Board may conduct research studies in connection with the testing of a subset of students.

Also, the test occasionally includes test questions for research purposes. These questions may appear in any of the test sections, and testing time will be extended by 20 minutes so students have time to answer them. These questions will not be included in computing your scores. Students must complete all sections of the test. If you leave before dismissal, your scores will be canceled.

## How the PSAT/NMSQT Is Scored

All multiple-choice questions are scored by giving 1 point for each correct answer. No points are subtracted for incorrect answers or answers left blank. Hard questions count the same as easier ones. You won't lose any points for guessing, so try to answer every question. The table shows all the scores you'll receive on the PSAT/NMSQT.

PSAT/NMSQT Score Reported	Details	Score Range
Total Score	Sum of the 2 section scores	320–1520
Section Scores (2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Evidence-Based Reading and Writing</li> <li>▪ Math</li> </ul>	160–760
Test Scores (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reading</li> <li>▪ Writing and Language</li> <li>▪ Math</li> </ul>	8–38
Cross-Test Scores (2) Based on selected questions in the Reading Test, Writing and Language Test, and Math Test. These scores show how well you use your skills to analyze texts and solve problems in these subject areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analysis in History/Social Studies</li> <li>▪ Analysis in Science</li> </ul>	8–38
Subscores (7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reading and Writing and Language: Command of Evidence and Words in Context</li> <li>▪ Writing and Language: Expression of Ideas and Standard English Conventions</li> <li>▪ Math: Heart of Algebra, Problem Solving and Data Analysis, and Passport to Advanced Math</li> </ul>	1–15
NMSC® Selection Index Score	National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) uses this score (calculated by doubling the sum of the Reading, Writing and Language, and Math Test scores) as an initial screen of entrants to its National Merit Scholarship Program.	48–228

Your score report will include a total score, section scores, and test scores, and may include cross-test scores and subscores as well. You'll be able to see not only how you did overall, but also where your strengths are and where you need to improve. Once your scores are available, visit [studentscores.collegeboard.org](https://studentscores.collegeboard.org) to learn more.

Your score report will include the NMSC Selection Index score, which NMSC uses as an initial screen of entrants to its National Merit Scholarship Program. For further information about the Selection Index score, see the National Merit Scholarship Program section on the flip side of this guide.

Your score report also includes a message about your potential for success in AP® courses based on your scores. There's also some helpful advice about when to take the SAT®.

Scores will be available online. (If you provide your email address on the answer sheet, you'll receive an email letting you know when your scores are ready.) If you haven't received your scores by mid-January, see your counselor. Your school will be able to print a copy of your score report.

We send your scores and other information you provide during testing to our cosponsor, NMSC, which conducts the National Merit Scholarship Program. See the flip side of this guide for more information.

## How to Prepare

The same habits and choices that lead to success in school will help you get ready for the PSAT/NMSQT. The best way to prepare for the test is to take challenging courses, do your homework, prepare for tests and quizzes, and ask and answer lots of questions. This guide includes the following to help you prepare:

- Advice, sample passages, and sample questions for the Reading Test and the Writing and Language Test
- Advice, sample questions, and calculator information for the Math Test
- PSAT/NMSQT Practice Test #1, a full-length practice test
- Information about the National Merit Scholarship Program (on the flip side of this guide)

You can also go online for more help and information:

- Go to [collegeboard.org/psatpractice](http://collegeboard.org/psatpractice) for additional sample questions, practice test answer explanations, and another full-length practice test (Practice Test #2). Practice tests in pre-recorded audio (MP3 via streaming) and assistive technology-compatible formats are also available on this website. If you are approved for another format, such as braille, a practice test may be sent to your school, or you can call 212-713-8333 to request a practice test in a specific format.
- Go to [psat.org/scoring](http://psat.org/scoring) for more information about scoring and free, personalized practice from Khan Academy.

## Practice Tests with Scoring Guides and Answer Explanations

Take the PSAT/NMSQT on paper to simulate test day.

1. Use the PSAT/NMSQT Practice Test #1 included in this guide or download and print Practice Test #2 from [psat.org/practice](http://psat.org/practice) (select **Take the Practice Test** under “Paper-and-Pencil Practice”). Be sure to follow the instructions, and use the official answer sheet to bubble in your answers.
2. After you’ve finished the practice test, get instant feedback and question-by-question results by downloading the answer explanations and scoring guide for the test you took.

## Test Day Items

Refer to the PSAT/NMSQT Terms and Conditions on page 34 for a list of items you’ll need to bring for test day.

Though not required, consider bringing:

- Snacks and drinks (which must be under your desk during testing)
- Extra batteries and backup calculator

## What to Do If ...

**You know in advance that you cannot take the test on the date your school offers it:** Tell your counselor as soon as possible that you have a conflict, such as a religious observance. You may be able to take the test at a nearby school that has selected a different test date. If you test at another school, be sure to take your school code and an acceptable photo ID with you, keeping your ID with you at all times, especially if you leave the testing room. (See the PSAT/NMSQT Terms and Conditions on page 34 for information about acceptable photo identification.)

**You are homeschooled and want to take the PSAT/NMSQT:** Make arrangements in advance with your local school or another nearby school that is administering the test. (For a list of schools in your area, go to [ordering.collegeboard.org/testordering/publicsearch](http://ordering.collegeboard.org/testordering/publicsearch).) If this is not possible, contact the PSAT/NMSQT office (see inside front cover).

**You will be studying in another country when the test is given:** Contact the PSAT/NMSQT office and provide the name of the city and country and, if known, the name and address of the school you will be attending when the test is given. The PSAT/NMSQT office will send you instructions.

**You missed the test but want to enter the National Merit Scholarship Program:** For information about another route of entry to the National Merit Scholarship Program, see the box on page 7 of the flip side of this guide.

## Testing Guidelines

- Plan ahead and bring equipment that’s in good working order. Testing staff might not have extra batteries or calculators.
- When marking answers:
  - ♦ Use a No. 2 pencil with a soft eraser on all parts of the answer sheet. Do not use a pen or mechanical pencil.
  - ♦ Make sure you fill in the entire bubble darkly and completely.
  - ♦ Erase any changes you make as completely as possible.
- Store any snacks or drinks you bring out of sight in a paper bag under your desk. You may only eat snacks during breaks. The testing staff will tell you where you can go to have your snack.

## Privacy Policies

College Board recognizes the importance of protecting your privacy. Please review our privacy policies at [collegeboard.org/privacy-center](https://collegeboard.org/privacy-center) ("Privacy Policies") and the PSAT/NMSQT Terms and Conditions on page 34 to understand our collection, use, and disclosure of your personally identifiable information.

## Telemarketing Scams

We sometimes get reports of phone scams when callers posing as employees of College Board or National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) try to sell test preparation products or request sensitive, personally identifying information, such as credit card and Social Security numbers. College Board and NMSC do not make unsolicited phone calls or send emails to students or families requesting this type of information. This type of activity, known as telemarketing fraud, is a crime.

## Test Fairness Review

All new PSAT/NMSQT test questions and complete new editions of the tests are reviewed by external, independent educators from throughout the United States. These reviews help ensure that the questions are unambiguous and relevant and that the language used is not offensive to or inappropriate for any particular group of students based on race/ethnicity or gender. Assessment staff ensure that the test as a whole includes references to men and women as well as to individuals from varied racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. Statistical procedures are used to identify questions that are harder for a group of students to answer correctly than would be expected from their performance on other questions in the test; these questions are excluded from appearing on tests.

## Test Question Inquiries

If you find what you consider to be an error or an ambiguity in a test question, tell the test coordinator immediately after the test. You may also email [psatquestion@collegeboard.org](mailto:psatquestion@collegeboard.org).

In your inquiry, provide your name and mailing address, the date you took the PSAT/NMSQT, the name and address of the school where you took the test, the test section, the test question (as well as you can remember), and an explanation of your concern about the question.

The PSAT/NMSQT Program will send you a written response after your inquiry has been reviewed thoroughly by subject-matter specialists.

**IMPORTANT:** We will not respond via email, so be sure to include your full name and mailing address.

## Additional Information

Complete descriptions of the content of the test and information on test preparation and sample questions are provided in the **PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide** ("Guide") and online at [psat.org](https://psat.org).

### Additional Information on the SAT

A primary purpose of the SAT is to determine how prepared students are to succeed, both in college and in career training programs. Extensive research on the predictive validity of the SAT has established its utility and value as a College Entrance Exam through studies on the relationship between SAT scores and first-year grade point average ("FYGPA"), retention, domain-specific course grades, GPA through each year of college, as well as completion. A 2019 national SAT Validity Study ([collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/national-sat-validity-study.pdf](https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/national-sat-validity-study.pdf)), based on data from more than 223,000 students across 171 four-year colleges and universities, found the following:

- SAT scores are strongly predictive of college performance—students with higher SAT scores are more likely to have higher grades in college.
- SAT scores are predictive of student retention to their second year—students with higher SAT scores are more likely to return for their sophomore year.
- SAT scores and High School grade point average ("HSGPA") are both related to academic performance in college but tend to measure slightly different aspects of academic preparation. Using SAT scores in conjunction with HSGPA is the most powerful way to predict future academic performance.
  - ♦ On average, SAT scores add 15% more predictive power above grades alone for understanding how students will perform in college.
  - ♦ SAT scores help to further differentiate student performance in college within narrow HSGPA ranges.
- Colleges can use SAT scores to identify students who may be in need of academic support before they start college and throughout their college education by monitoring predicted versus actual performance and help position these students for success.

# Evidence-Based Reading and Writing

The Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section is composed of 2 tests that assess different but related skills and knowledge. The Reading Test gives you a chance to show how well you understand what you read. The Writing and Language Test asks you to revise and edit text.

## Reading Test Overview

- Total questions: 47 passage-based reading questions with multiple-choice responses.
- Time allotted: 60 minutes.
- Calculators may not be used or be on your desk.
- The questions often include references to direct you to the relevant part(s) of the passage(s).

## What the Reading Test Is Like

When you take the Reading Test, you'll read passages and interpret informational graphics. Then you'll use what you've read to answer questions. Some questions ask you to locate a piece of information or an idea stated directly. But you'll also need to understand what the author's words or a graphic's data imply.

## What You'll Read

Reading Test passages range in length from about 500 to 750 words and vary in complexity. The Reading Test includes:

- 1 passage from a classic or contemporary work of U.S. or world literature.
- 1 passage or a pair of passages from either a U.S. founding document (such as an essay by James Madison) or a text in the Great Global Conversation (such as a speech by Nelson Mandela).
- 1 passage on a social science topic from a field such as economics, psychology, or sociology.
- 2 science passages (or 1 passage and 1 passage pair) that examine foundational concepts or recent developments in Earth science, biology, chemistry, or physics.
- 2 passages accompanied by 1 or more informational graphics.

## What the Reading Test Measures

To succeed in college and career, you'll need to apply reading skills in all sorts of subjects. You'll also need those skills to do well on the Reading Test.

The Reading Test measures skills and knowledge you'll need to apply when reading in college and workforce training programs. The test will ask you to find and interpret information and ideas, analyze how texts are put together and why they're written the way they are, work with data from informational graphics, and make connections between paired passages.

You'll be asked questions that require you to draw on the reading skills and knowledge needed most to succeed in the subjects the passages are drawn from. For instance, you might read about an experiment and then see questions that ask you to examine hypotheses, interpret data, or consider implications.

Answers are based only on the content stated in or implied by the passages and in any supplementary material, such as tables and graphs.

## Command of Evidence

Some questions ask you to:

- Find evidence in a passage (or pair of passages) that best supports the answer to a previous question or serves as the basis for a reasonable conclusion.
- Identify how authors use (or fail to use) evidence to support their claims.
- Locate or interpret data in an informational graphic, or understand a relationship between a graphic and the passage it's paired with.

## Words in Context

Some questions focus on important, widely used words and phrases that you'll find in texts in many different subjects. The words and phrases are ones that you'll use in college and the workplace long after test day.

These questions focus on your ability to:

- Figure out the meaning of words or phrases in context.
- Decide how an author's word choice shapes meaning, style, and tone.

## Analysis in History/Social Studies and in Science

You'll be asked to read and analyze passages about topics in history/social studies and in science.



## Tips for the Reading Test

To answer each question, consider what the passage or passages say directly, and use careful reasoning to draw supportable inferences and conclusions from the passage(s). The best answer to each question is derived from what is stated or implied in the passage(s) rather than from prior knowledge of the topics covered. All of the questions are passage based.

- Reading carefully is the key to finding the best answer to each question. The information you need to answer each Reading Test question is always in the passage(s). Don't be misled by an answer that looks correct but isn't supported by the actual text of the passage(s).
- The questions don't increase in difficulty from easy to hard. Instead, they are presented as logically as possible. Questions about central ideas and themes, point of view, and overall text structure generally come early in the sequence. After that come more specific questions about such matters as facts, details, and words in context.
- Stay with a passage until you have answered as many questions as you can before you proceed to the next passage. Don't jump from passage to passage.
- The questions often include references to help direct you to relevant part(s) of the passage(s). You may have to look elsewhere in the passage, however, to find the best answer to the question.
- In your test booklet, mark each question you skip so you can easily go back to it later if you have time.
- Remember that all questions are worth 1 point regardless of the type or difficulty. You don't lose points for guessing wrong, so you should try to answer each question as best you can.

## Sample Reading Test Materials

Following are samples of the kinds of passages and questions that may appear on the Reading Test. For each set of sample materials:

- Read the passage(s) and any supplementary material carefully.
- Decide on the best answer to each question.
- Read the explanation for the best answer to each question and for the answer you chose (if they are different).

On the actual test, each passage will be followed by 9 or 10 questions. The directions that follow match the directions on the actual test.