

STANDARDIZED TESTING

Testing often causes undue anxiety in families. Students and parents alike may place greater emphasis on test scores than do the colleges themselves. While testing can indeed be important, colleges are emphasizing it less and less—in fact, some no longer require it at all. The transcript and the difficulty of the student’s academic program are what most colleges evaluate first. SAT and ACT scores are additions to the story, not the story itself. Our purpose is to help students put their testing in perspective, to marginalize the scores and focus instead on having the best academic year possible.

PSAT

The Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), which takes place in the middle of October, serves three purposes:

- 1) The scores give students in grades 9-11 an indication of how they may do on SATs in the 11th and 12th grades. However, it’s only an indication—scores may go up, down, or remain the same.
- 2) The PSAT score report helps uncover weakness and strength so students can better prepare for the SATs later on.
- 3) Scores are used to qualify juniors for the National Merit Scholarship. Colleges, however, will never see your scores.

SAT vs ACT

Check the admissions requirements for any colleges you are interested—they vary a great deal. Most, however, will accept either the ACT or SAT. If you are submitting SAT scores, many colleges also require 1-3 Subject Tests (formerly the SAT II)—sometimes specific ones. A few schools have special requirements for students from homeschools or ungraded schools. Know the requirements before you apply.

We recommend that students take the SAT in the spring of their junior year and again in the fall of their senior year.

Occasionally students take the ACT as well as or instead of the SAT. Two of the benefits of this test are that it’s achievement-oriented and there is no penalty for guessing. Furthermore, if you submit ACT scores rather than SAT scores, you will probably not need to submit Subject Tests.

According to ACT: “The ACT and SAT are different tests that measure similar but distinct constructs. The ACT measures achievement related to high school curricula, while the SAT measures general verbal and quantitative reasoning.

“ACT and the College Board have completed a concordance study that is designed to examine the relationship between two scores on the ACT and SAT. These concordance tables do not equate scores, but rather provide a tool for finding comparable scores.

“You can find the concordance tables and guidelines for proper use on our website at www.act.org/aap/concordance.”

SAT

Beginning in spring, 2004, the SAT (formerly the SAT I) added a Writing section to the Verbal and Math. Each part is scored separately, with possible combined total of 2400.

Subject Tests

The other part of standardized testing is the Subject Test (formerly the SAT II). Many colleges require one or two Subject tests; some require three or even four. Students, with the advice of their teachers, should take science Subject tests soon after the relevant course is completed—usually students take the Physics test. French with Listening is only offered in November. To take Math IC, students should have completed algebra, trig, and precalculus; for Math IIC, Calculus I. Literature is another Subject Test taken often by Waring students.

ACT

The ACT is a subject test: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science, each with a maximum score of 36. They are averaged to give a Composite Score. An optional section is Writing. We urge all Waring students to take the ACT with Writing.

TEST PREPARATION

We don't endorse any particular testing preparation agency. On the other hand, we never discourage any student interested in using the services of one. In addition to courses, College Board, Peterson's, Princeton Review, and others provide online prep and practice.

In our experience, the best preparation is familiarization—with the kind of test, with the timing, and by practicing test-taking strategies. Take sample tests in the College Board books or purchase manuals in bookstores. Extra review and practice in reading comprehension and math are effective methods for improving scores. Do not be misled by false claims or seemingly wonderful promises. SAT test-taking strategies can be picked up from a book for considerably less time and money than through a course.