

## Chapter 4

# PSAT/NMSQT®

The PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) provides an excellent way to preview the SAT. Like the SAT, the redesigned PSAT/NMSQT will measure the skills and knowledge that are essential for college and career readiness and success. Taking the PSAT/NMSQT is one of the best ways to practice for the SAT: You'll be asked the same types of questions in the same subject areas that are on the SAT (Reading, Writing and Language, and Math), but at a level appropriate for sophomores and juniors in high school. You'll also get a sense of the time limits for each test. (Note that the Essay is available only on the SAT.) Because the PSAT/NMSQT is aligned with the redesigned SAT, taking the PSAT/NMSQT will not only offer you numerous benefits, including valuable information about your readiness for postsecondary-level work, but it can also enhance your confidence when your SAT test day arrives.



### REMEMBER

Since the PSAT/NMSQT mirrors the question types and content areas on the SAT, taking the PSAT/NMSQT is a great way to practice for the SAT.

## How the PSAT/NMSQT and the SAT Are Linked

The SAT, PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10, and PSAT 8/9 are part of an integrated system called the SAT Suite of Assessments. The exams are connected by the same underlying continuum of knowledge and skills that research shows are the most essential for college and career readiness and success. Your test results can be used to monitor your progress over time. The PSAT 8/9 is administered to eighth- and ninth-graders; the PSAT 10, which covers the same content areas as the PSAT/NMSQT, is administered to students in the spring of 10th grade. Schools administer the PSAT/NMSQT during the fall, primarily to high school sophomores and juniors.


The redesigned tests released in 2015–16 are designed to reflect the work students are doing in classrooms across the country and around the globe, and embody the eight key changes described in Chapter 2 and summarized briefly here.





**Words in Context:** Questions on the Reading and the Writing and Language Tests address word/phrase meaning in context as well as rhetorical word choice, with a focus on words and phrases relevant to a wide range of studies.


 **REMEMBER**


There will *not* be an essay on the PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10, or PSAT 8/9.


 **Command of Evidence:** Questions on the Reading and the Writing and Language Tests require students to demonstrate their ability to interpret and use evidence found in a wide range of passages and informational graphics, such as graphs, tables, and charts.


 **Essay Analyzing a Source (SAT only):** The SAT Essay prompt requires students to read a passage and explain how the author builds an argument to persuade an audience, a task that mirrors college writing assignments. The Essay will be an optional component of the SAT (although some school districts and colleges will require it).

 **Focus on Math that Matters Most:** Questions on the Math Test will focus on math content that most contributes to readiness for and success in college and career training.

 **Problems Grounded in Real-World Contexts:** Questions are grounded in the real world and are directly related to work performed in college and career.

 **Analysis in History/Social Studies and in Science:** Questions require the application of reading, writing, language, and math skills to answer questions in history, social studies, and science contexts.

 **U.S. Founding Documents and the Great Global Conversation:** Questions that require careful reading of sections of U.S. founding documents, such as the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, or that have been part of the Great Global Conversation about the nature of civic life.

 **No Penalty for Wrong Answers:** Students will earn points for the questions they answer correctly, with no deductions for incorrect answers.

## Other Benefits in Addition to Preparing for the SAT

A major reason to take the PSAT/NMSQT is that the score you receive is sent to the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). This organization oversees the distribution of almost \$50 million in scholarships a year and uses PSAT/NMSQT scores as an initial screen of entrants to their competition. Some students take the test before their junior year, but only the scores from the junior year are submitted to NMSC. Additionally, beginning in 2015, the PSAT/NMSQT will be used as a tool to broaden access to nearly \$180 million a year of additional scholarships from the American Indian Graduate Center and American Indian Graduate Center Scholars (AIGC and AIGCS), Asian & Pacific Islander American Scholarship Fund (APIASF), Hispanic Scholarship Fund (HSF), Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (JKCF), and United Negro College Fund (UNCF).

 **REMEMBER**

Taking the PSAT/NMSQT will make you eligible to receive scholarships from multiple organizations. Learn more at [collegereadiness.collegeboard.org](http://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org)

Another significant benefit of taking the PSAT/NMSQT (or the PSAT 10) is that you can import your results into Khan Academy to begin to establish a personalized study plan based on exactly what you need to work on next in order to improve your score. With your explicit permission, the College Board will send the question-level results of your exam to Khan Academy, which will use those data to recommend a study plan to set you up for SAT success. Learn more at [khanacademy.org/sat](https://khanacademy.org/sat).

A third benefit of taking the PSAT/NMSQT (or PSAT 10) is AP Potential™, a free Web-based tool that allows schools to generate rosters of students who are likely to score a 3 or higher on a given AP Exam. Based on research that shows moderate to strong correlations between PSAT/NMSQT scores and AP Exam results, AP Potential is designed to help increase access to AP and to ensure that no student who has the chance of succeeding in AP is overlooked.

A final benefit for signing up to take the PSAT/NMSQT (or the PSAT 10) is that you become eligible to participate in the College Board's Student Search Service, which is a database that colleges, universities, and scholarship programs use to locate and recruit students with particular characteristics. These organizations join the service so they can search for students who might be a good match for their school or scholarship criteria.

When you sign up to participate in Student Search Service, your name, contact information, high school GPA, date of birth, grade level, high school, email address, extracurricular activities, and intended college major are entered into the system. Participating institutions can search for students by desired characteristics, such as "GPA 3.2 or above; choir/band; New Hampshire; botany/biology." Colleges are interested in a diverse student body. Being able to search for students with various interests and activities, hailing from U.S. states or countries overseas, helps colleges assemble a strong and diverse student population that will benefit students and faculty during college and contribute to cohesive, supportive alumni groups in the years following. If your information is made available to them, colleges and universities can invite you to apply for admission to their schools. The same holds true for scholarship programs, which often have very specific criteria relating to geography, family situation, and more.

If you sign up for Student Search Service, any updates you make to your profile (such as changes to your GPA, activities, or planned major) will be reflected in the search database.

Note that joining Student Search Service is your choice. Registering for an exam or an AP course makes the service available to you, but **you have to opt-in by checking the box**. Signing up is the only way your information becomes part of the database. Be assured that the College Board never forwards your scores to any college, university, or scholarship group (except the National Merit Scholarship Corporation) without your permission. Know, too, that the information you give to the College Board will be used only in the ways described

## PRACTICE AT

### [khanacademy.org/sat](https://khanacademy.org/sat)

If you allow the College Board to send your PSAT/NMSQT or PSAT 10 results to Khan Academy, Khan Academy will use the data to create a personalized study plan for you.

## REMEMBER

If you enroll in Student Search Service, participating colleges and scholarship institutions will be able to access your contact information and invite you to apply.

here. Information in the database will not be sold to a private company. Some students report receiving phone calls from companies that claim to have received student scores from the College Board. These are fraudulent and should be disregarded.

## How Do I Register and When Will I Learn My Results?

### REMEMBER

The *Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT* and the Khan Academy website are two excellent resources to help you prepare for the PSAT/NMSQT.

When the *Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT* arrives at your school in September, review the explanation sections and then take the full-length practice test. If any of the questions posed problems for you, return to this book again to review the appropriate chapters to improve your understanding. Use the Khan Academy website to review practice questions and tests. And, of course, keep working in your classes and with your teachers to hone your academic skills.

The PSAT/NMSQT is given in October at high schools both across the country and internationally. Check with your school counselor to register. If you're home-schooled, consult [www.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt/home-schooled-students](http://www.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt/home-schooled-students) for information about registering with a local school. (Students cannot register for the PSAT/NMSQT online.)

The scores for the PSAT/NMSQT are sent to your school in December, whereupon a counselor or test coordinator will give them to you. (Home-schooled students receive their results at home.) Additionally, you'll receive access to an online score report that gives you even more information about your performance.

### ARE SCORES SENT TO ANYONE ELSE?

Score results are sent to the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. One of the most important reasons to take the PSAT/NMSQT is to become eligible for scholarship competitions administered by both the NMSC and our other scholarship partners.

In some cases, your scores may be sent to school districts or your state's office of education so that student results can be averaged together and analyzed. This information can help districts and states assess overall student achievement levels and can help administrators who make decisions about curricula and professional development programs for teachers.

### WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT HOW THE TEST IS SCORED?

Every exam in the SAT Suite of Assessments is scored on the same scale, providing a powerful tool for measuring growth. This doesn't mean that a student who scores a 400 on the PSAT 8/9 Math Test is predicted to score a 400 on the PSAT/NMSQT Math Test (or SAT) one or two years later; it does, however, mean that students scoring a 400 on any of the Math Tests are demonstrating similar levels

of math achievement regardless of the particular test they took. You'll see in the following descriptions that although the SAT total score is reported on a scale of 400 to 1600, the tests for the PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 and the PSAT 8/9 have somewhat different score ranges. This reflects the fact that the exams assess the same underlying knowledge and skills, but at a level appropriate to the student populations for each exam.

## PSAT™ 8/9

In addition to the PSAT/NMSQT, the College Board offers the PSAT 8/9, which is taken in the fall or spring of eighth and/or ninth grade. Scores from the PSAT 8/9 serve as a foundation for interpreting progress as students enter high school. If students stay the course on the areas they're strong in and work harder on their weaker areas, they'll be more likely to be on target for being college and career ready by the time they leave high school. Scores range from 120 to 720 for each of the Math and Evidence-Based Reading and Writing sections.

### REMEMBER

Scores from the PSAT 8/9 can help you identify areas you're strong in and areas in need of improvement as you enter high school.

## PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT™ 10

The PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 cover the same content domain, and both serve as a “check-in” on student progress by pinpointing areas for development. Students will take the PSAT/NMSQT in the fall of 10th and 11th grade (though only juniors are eligible for the National Merit Scholarship Program). In addition to delivering the PSAT/NMSQT to 10th-graders in the fall, some schools may also deliver the PSAT 10 in the spring.

Most of the same scores, although using different ranges, are reported for PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 as for the SAT:

A **total** score on the PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 will be provided on a 320 to 1520 scale, and be the sum of the scores on the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section and the Math section.

**Section** scores will be reported on a 160 to 760 scale for both the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section and the Math section. **Test** scores will be reported on a scale of 8 to 38 for each of the three tests: Reading, Writing and Language, and Math.

Cross-test scores will be reported on a scale of 8 to 38 and will be based on selected questions in the Reading, Writing and Language, and Math Tests that reflect the application of reading, writing, language, and math skills in history/social studies and science contexts.

Seven different subscores, each on a scale of 1 to 15, will provide more specific information about how you're doing in a few more specific areas of reading, writing, language, and math.

Two subscores will be reported for Writing and Language: Expression of Ideas and Standard English Conventions. The Expression of Ideas subscore

 **REMEMBER**

The SAT Math Test requires a deeper knowledge of a smaller number of math topics that research has shown are integral to college and career success.

 **REMEMBER**

As on the SAT, the PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 won't test you on the meaning of obscure, seldom-used words and phrases presented with little context. Rather, you'll be tested on contextually based words and phrases that often appear in college courses and beyond.

 **REMEMBER**

When you're unsure of the answer to a question, eliminate as many answer choices as possible and select from the remaining choices. Never leave a question blank!

will be based on questions focusing on topic development, organization, and rhetorically effective use of language. The Standard English Conventions subscore will be based on questions focusing on sentence structure, usage, and punctuation.

The Math Test will report three subscores: Heart of Algebra, Problem Solving and Data Analysis, and Passport to Advanced Math. Heart of Algebra will focus on linear equations and inequalities. Problem Solving and Data Analysis will focus on quantitative reasoning, the interpretation and synthesis of data, and solving problems in rich and varied contexts. Passport to Advanced Math will focus on topics central to the ability of students to progress to more advanced mathematics, such as understanding the structure of expressions, reasoning with more complex equations, and interpreting and building functions.

The final two subscores — Words in Context and Command of Evidence — will be based on questions in both the Reading and the Writing and Language Tests. The Words in Context questions will address word/phrase meaning in context and rhetorical word choice. The Command of Evidence questions will ask you to interpret and use evidence found in a wide range of passages and informational graphics, such as graphs, tables, and charts.

As with the SAT, the subscores provide additional insight into your strengths. These results will also allow you and your parents, educators, and counselors to locate specific areas that you need to work on. The scores can also be used to find appropriate AP courses.

As with the SAT, there's no penalty for guessing on the PSAT/NMSQT or PSAT 10. Your scores are derived only from correct answers. Blank answers have no impact on scores.

## Score Report

Your PSAT/NMSQT Score Report gives you feedback on your performance, plus other valuable information including:

- ▶ PSAT/NMSQT scores and score ranges
- ▶ Percentiles for juniors or sophomores
- ▶ Selection index used by NMSC for initial entry into their scholarship competitions
- ▶ Comprehensive question-by-question feedback
- ▶ Academic skills feedback
- ▶ Online access to question-and-answer explanations
- ▶ Basic eligibility criteria and status for National Merit Scholarships
- ▶ Guidance information to help in college and career planning

## What Is the Test Like?

### TIMING

Total testing time: 2 hours and 45 minutes

### COMPONENTS:

**Reading Test:** 60 minutes; 47 questions

**Writing and Language Test:** 35 minutes; 44 questions

**Math Test (including a calculator and a no-calculator portion):** 70 minutes; 48 questions

**Total:** 165 minutes (2 hours, 45 minutes); 139 questions

As with the SAT, the PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 are composed of three content-area tests: Reading, Writing and Language, and Math. Sample questions and a practice PSAT/NMSQT are available at [collegereadiness.collegeboard.org](http://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org) and in print through schools.

### WHAT TO BRING ON TEST DAY

- ▶ Two number 2 pencils with erasers
- ▶ An approved calculator (see the College Board website for details about what's allowed)
- ▶ Current and valid school or government-issued photo for students not testing at their own school and for home-schooled students

### WHAT NOT TO BRING

- ▶ Protractors, compasses, rulers
- ▶ Dictionaries or other books
- ▶ Pamphlets or papers of any kind
- ▶ Highlighters and colored pens or pencils
- ▶ Any device that listens, records, copies, or makes photographic images, including cell phones and smart watches

### DURING THE TEST, YOU CAN HAVE ON YOUR DESK:

- ▶ A test book
- ▶ An answer sheet
- ▶ Number 2 pencils with soft erasers
- ▶ An approved calculator — only during the designated Math portion

**Are You Home-Schooled?**

Contact a local school's principal or counselor to make arrangements for the PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10, or PSAT 8/9 well in advance of the test dates — preferably over the summer.

**TESTING WITH ACCOMMODATIONS**

Make arrangements through your school counselor for the accommodations you'll need.

Home-schooled students who are approved for accommodations on test day should notify the school where they are testing and complete the forms by August 27, prior to the October test.

**Why Take the PSAT/NMSQT?** **REMEMBER**

As you can see here, there are many great reasons for taking the PSAT/NMSQT!

- ▶ Practice for the SAT.
- ▶ Assess your progress in the knowledge and skills that are essential to college and career readiness and success. A comprehensive score report gives helpful feedback about the areas that you need to work on.
- ▶ Compare your performance with that of other 10th- and 11th-graders from around the country.
- ▶ Kick off your practice for the SAT by importing your PSAT/NMSQT results into Khan Academy for a personalized lesson plan.
- ▶ Qualify for entry into scholarship competitions.
- ▶ Participate in the Student Search Service.

**Preparing for the PSAT/NMSQT**

- ▶ Review the test-taking reminders and tips throughout this book, including ideas about marking up the test booklet, how to make an educated guess, and the usefulness of sleep.
- ▶ Read Chapter 3, “Read This! Keys to Doing Your Best on the SAT.” Many sections in this chapter are relevant to taking the PSAT/NMSQT, including the descriptions of questions in the Reading, Writing and Language, and Math Tests.
- ▶ Before the test, become familiar with question types and directions by doing practice questions. Directions for the SAT can be found in Chapter 3.
- ▶ Take the practice test that is included in the *Official Student Guide to the PSAT/NMSQT*. You'll be able to find the correct answers and explanations on the College Board website.

**PRACTICE AT** **khanacademy.org/sat**

Reading and understanding all test directions before test day will save you time and ensure you know exactly what to expect on test day.



- ▶ Although Khan Academy practice is focused on helping you succeed on the redesigned SAT, you can also use Khan Academy tools for PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 practice because of the close alignment between the assessments.

**FINAL NOTE:**

The best preparation for the PSAT/NMSQT is to take challenging courses, read widely, write frequently, and develop problem-solving skills both in the classroom and through extracurricular activities. These are the same habits that prepare students for the SAT and the AP Exams as well as for college and career.