

PSAT/NMSQT®

CollegeBoard / NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP CORPORATION

# PSAT/NMSQT® Understanding Scores

UPDATED WITH SCORE CONVERSIONS

2017



---

# Contact Us

## About the College Board

The College Board is a mission-driven not-for-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board was created to expand access to higher education. Today, the College Board's membership is made up of over 6,000 of the world's leading educational institutions and is dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in education. Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success—including the SAT® and the Advanced Placement Program®. The organization also serves the education community through research and advocacy on behalf of students, educators, and schools. For further information, visit [collegeboard.org](http://collegeboard.org).

## About the PSAT/NMSQT

The Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT®) is cosponsored by the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). It is administered for the College Board and NMSC by Educational Testing Service (ETS).

## About the National Merit Scholarship Program

The PSAT/NMSQT is the route of entry to the National Merit® Scholarship Program, an academic competition conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). Requirements for participation, steps in the competition, and awards offered are explained in the *PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide* and on NMSC's website.

Further information is provided in the *Guide to the National Merit Scholarship Program*. Questions about the scholarship program not answered in the published materials should be directed to NMSC:

**National Merit Scholarship Corporation**  
1560 Sherman Avenue, Suite 200  
Evanston, IL 60201-4897  
847-866-5100  
[www.nationalmerit.org](http://www.nationalmerit.org)

## CONTACTS FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

 [psathelp@info.collegeboard.org](mailto:psathelp@info.collegeboard.org)

866-433-7728  
+1-212-713-8105 (International)  
609-882-4118 (TTY)  
8 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET, Mon.–Fri.

## GENERAL CONTACTS

PSAT/NMSQT  
P.O. Box 6720  
Princeton, NJ 08541-6720  
610-290-8979 (fax)

## CONTACTS FOR EDUCATORS

[psat/nmsqt@info.collegeboard.org](mailto:psat/nmsqt@info.collegeboard.org)

- 888-477-PSAT (7728)  
*for educators only*

+1-212-237-1335 (International)  
609-882-4118 (TTY)  
8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET, Mon.–Fri.

---

# The **PSAT/NMSQT** and the **SAT** Suite of Assessments

## What is the **SAT** Suite of Assessments?

The SAT® Suite of Assessments is an integrated system of tests that includes the SAT (for students in grades 11 and 12), the PSAT/NMSQT® and the PSAT™ 10 (for grades 10 and 11), and the PSAT™ 8/9 (for grades 8 and 9).

The tests measure the same skills and knowledge in grade-appropriate ways. They work together to show college readiness over time so educators, students, and parents can monitor student progress. Their content reflects the kinds of meaningful, engaging, and challenging work that students find in the best middle and high school courses taught today.

## What does the **PSAT/NMSQT** measure?

The PSAT/NMSQT measures the skills and knowledge that research shows are the most essential for college and career readiness and success. The Reading Test measures comprehension and reasoning skills and focuses on close reading of passages in a wide array of subject areas. The Writing and Language Test measures a range of skills including command of evidence, expression of ideas, and the use of standard English conventions in grammar and punctuation. The Math Test covers a range of math practices, with an emphasis on problem solving, modeling, using tools strategically, and using algebraic structure.

## How is the **PSAT/NMSQT** scored?

Students receive a total score that is the sum of their scores on the two sections (Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, and Math).

To calculate section scores, we first compute the student's raw score—the number of questions correctly answered—for each section. Nothing is deducted for incorrect answers or for unanswered questions.

Next, we convert each of the raw section scores to a scaled score of 160 to 760. This conversion process adjusts for slight differences in difficulty among versions of the test and provides a score that is consistent across different versions. The scaled scores are the scores provided on score reports.

## How can I use the student score report?

The student score report clearly summarizes a student's current achievement levels and encourages next steps to increase college and career readiness. You can aid students by going over their score reports and helping them understand what their scores mean. See the details below.

### **CHECK-IN: ON TRACK FOR COLLEGE READINESS?**

The score report includes an indicator for each section that shows whether the student's score meets the grade-level benchmark. These benchmarks allow students and educators to understand how students are progressing toward college readiness.

- If a student is meeting the benchmark for a section, remind that student to continue to take rigorous courses and work hard to stay on track for college success.
- If a student is not meeting the benchmark for a section, connect the student to classroom work that is focused on areas that need improvement. Khan Academy® can help supplement this work.

## USE STUDENT SCORES TO IDENTIFY STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES:

- Use test scores, cross-test scores, and subscores to evaluate a student’s relative strengths and weaknesses and see what skills need practice.
- Use the red/yellow/green coding on test scores and subscores to evaluate how your student is performing relative to students who are meeting or exceeding the benchmark.
- Highlight the areas in green as the student’s strengths.
- Prioritize areas in the red range for additional work and practice.

## HELP STUDENTS DECIDE ON NEXT STEPS:

- Use the “Your Scores: Next Steps” section to identify the specific skills that the student should address.
- Work with your student to think of ways to develop each of the skills you have identified for focus and improvement.
- Encourage students to go online for more details and to link their College Board account to Khan Academy for a personalized study plan.

For further guidance on interpreting score reports, see the Professional Development modules for K–12 educators at [sat.org/k12](https://sat.org/k12).

## Score-Reporting Features

On pages 13–14 of this booklet, you will find an annotated sample score report that includes detailed explanations of the information that students receive about their college readiness skills. Students can access their online reports to obtain more information and guidance, including personalized Khan Academy instruction and practice based on their results.

The online reporting portal at [k12reports.collegeboard.org](https://k12reports.collegeboard.org) offers you an array of powerful tools to assess your students’ progress and plan instruction that delivers what they need. The tools include:

- Flexible reports that can be sorted and filtered by key demographics
- Instructional planning support using test subscores in specific content areas, benchmarks, information for cross-subject tasks, and data for prescribing interventions when students are behind or ahead
- Question Analysis Report that helps educators connect subscores to state standards, analyze students’ strengths and weaknesses, learn which mistakes were most common, and look for opportunities to reinforce skills
- Access to the AP Potential™ tool to pinpoint students who are likely to succeed in more challenging courses

---

# PSAT/NMSQT

## Scores

### Total Scores

The total score is the sum of the two section scores; its range is 320–1520.

### Section Scores

Your students receive scores in the range of 160–760 for each of two sections. The Evidence-Based Reading and Writing section score combines the scores for the Reading Test and the Writing and Language Test. The Math section score is derived from the Math Test score, including the calculator and no-calculator portions.

### Test Scores and Cross-Test Scores

The range for the following test scores is 8–38:

- Reading
- Writing and Language
- Math

The range for cross-test scores is also 8–38. These scores represent student performance on questions across the three tests and show a student's strengths in the following domains:

- Analysis in History/Social Studies
- Analysis in Science

### Subscores

Subscores in the range of 1–15 offer feedback on student performance in the following skill areas:

- Command of Evidence
- Words in Context
- Expression of Ideas
- Standard English Conventions
- Heart of Algebra
- Problem Solving and Data Analysis
- Passport to Advanced Math

### Score Ranges

A student's ability is better represented by score ranges than points. Score ranges are derived from the standard error of measurement and show how much students' scores would likely vary if they took a different administration of the test under identical conditions.

From recent administrations of the PSAT/NMSQT, these ranges are approximately:

- Total:  $\pm 40$  points
- Section:  $\pm 30$  points
- Test Scores, subscores, and cross-test scores:  $\pm 2$  points

---

# Score Scales and Score Changes

## How can PSAT/NMSQT scores be used to project SAT scores?

The SAT Suite—from PSAT 8/9 through the SAT—uses a common score scale for the total, section, test, and cross-test scores. The ranges reported for each assessment reflect grade-level appropriateness within the common scale. Thus, while the total range for SAT is 400–1600, the total range for PSAT/NMSQT is 320–1520.

This common score scale means that a student who took the PSAT/NMSQT and received a Math section score of 500 would be expected to also get a 500 on the SAT or PSAT 8/9 if they had taken either of those tests on that same day; a score of 500 represents the same level of academic achievement on all three assessments.

This also means that student growth is easy to see across the SAT Suite. If a student takes the PSAT/NMSQT this year and receives a 500 Math section score, and then takes the SAT next year and earns a 550 Math section score, that student has shown a growth of 50 points, which likely resulted from hard work both in and out of school.

The total, section, test, and cross-test scores have been vertically scaled to allow the accurate measurement of growth from test to test. Encourage students to focus on the section scores if they are curious about the growth they can expect to see in their scores over the next year. They should look at the set of projected score ranges we have provided (only in online score reports) for students that reflect typical growth. Of course, a student's individual growth will be shaped by the courses taken and the practice the student undertakes between assessments.

Subscores are not on a vertical scale, and therefore comparing performance year after year should be based on relative performance rather than by calculating student growth across tests.

Students who wish to improve their performance on the SAT should follow these guidelines:

- Develop academic skills through challenging coursework.
- Read extensively and develop strong writing skills.
- Engage in deliberate practice in the three math areas that are emphasized the most in the assessments.
- Take practice tests and upload their results to Khan Academy for personalized practice of the skills they need to improve. To learn more, go to [psat.org/practice](https://psat.org/practice).

# Benchmarks and Red/Yellow/Green Performance

## What are the PSAT/NMSQT grade-level benchmarks?

The SAT Suite offers grade-level benchmarks that can be used to gauge whether students are on track for becoming college ready each year in grades 8–12. Grade-level benchmarks represent the section scores on each assessment that students should meet or exceed to be considered on track to be college ready.

The PSAT/NMSQT reports separate benchmarks for 10th and 11th graders to help students understand their level of readiness for college and career training programs. The benchmarks help educators better understand how many students and also which students are on track to have the skills necessary for college-entry, credit-bearing courses. Equipped with this information, educators can support students who need extra help while there is still time for improvement. Teachers can also accelerate the progress of students who meet or exceed the benchmarks.

### RECOMMENDED USES

Grade-level benchmarks can help educators:

- Identify students who are on track for success in college and career readiness.
- Identify students who may need extra support while there is still time for improvement.
- Find students who may be ready for more challenging coursework.

Grade-level benchmarks should not be used to assign academic tracks, to discourage students from pursuing college, or to keep students from participating in challenging courses. Rather, the benchmarks are intended to help all students better prepare for life after high school.

## How are the benchmarks calculated?

The College and Career Readiness Benchmarks for the current SAT predict a 75% likelihood of achieving a C or higher in related first-semester, credit-bearing college courses. The benchmarks are set at the section level, so there is a benchmark for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and a benchmark for Math.

Score reports for the PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10, and PSAT 8/9 include grade-level benchmarks based on how students grow from year to year toward the SAT benchmarks.

PSAT/NMSQT Grade-Level Benchmarks		
	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing	Math
10th Grade PSAT/NMSQT	430	480
11th Grade PSAT/NMSQT	460	510

## What additional information is provided to help understand progress toward college readiness?

The student score report provides further context for understanding scores by showing a color-coded bar chart for the section scores. Students who met or exceeded the benchmark will be in the green portion of the score band. If students did not meet the benchmark but were close (within one year's growth), the score will be found in the yellow portion. Students who have a score indicating more than a year's growth below the grade-level benchmark will see their score in the red portion of the score band. Additionally, for each of the test scores and subscores, we have provided a color-coded guide to a student's relative strengths and weaknesses. The colors on each of these score scales represent the typical performance of students in their grade who met (green), approached (yellow), or were further away (red) from the benchmark.

# Percentiles

A student's percentile rank represents the percentage of students who score equal to or below the score the student obtained. For example, if a student's score is in the 75th percentile, 75% of a comparison group achieved scores at or below that student's score. Two types of percentile ranks, comparing student scores to two different reference populations, are provided in this publication for both total and section scores.

**Nationally representative percentiles** are derived from a research study of U.S. students in 10th or 11th grade and are weighted to represent all U.S. students in those grades, regardless of whether they typically take the PSAT/NMSQT or the PSAT 10.

**User group percentiles** are based on the actual scores of students who took the PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 administered in 2015–16 and 2016–17.

## Percentiles for Total Scores

Total Score	10 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE		11 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	
	PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES	
	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User
1520	99+	99+	99+	99+
1510	99+	99+	99+	99+
1500	99+	99+	99+	99+
1490	99+	99+	99+	99+
1480	99+	99+	99+	99
1470	99+	99+	99+	99
1460	99+	99+	99+	99
1450	99+	99+	99+	99
1440	99+	99+	99+	98
1430	99+	99+	99+	98
1420	99	99	99	98
1410	99	99	99	97
1400	99	99	99	97
1390	99	99	99	96
1380	99	99	99	96
1370	99	99	99	96
1360	99	99	98	95
1350	98	98	98	95
1340	98	98	98	94
1330	98	98	97	94
1320	98	98	97	93
1310	97	97	97	92
1300	97	97	96	92
1290	97	97	96	91
1280	97	96	95	90
1270	96	96	95	89
1260	96	96	94	89
1250	95	95	94	88
1240	95	95	93	87
1230	94	94	92	86
1220	94	93	92	85
1210	93	93	91	84
1200	92	92	90	82
1190	91	91	89	81
1180	91	90	88	80
1170	90	89	87	78
1160	89	89	86	77
1150	88	88	85	75
1140	87	86	84	74
1130	86	85	83	72
1120	84	84	82	71
1110	83	83	81	69



## Percentiles for Total Scores (continued)

Total Score	10 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE		11 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	
	PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES	
	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User
1100	82	81	79	67
1090	81	80	77	65
1080	79	79	76	64
1070	78	77	74	62
1060	76	76	73	60
1050	75	74	70	58
1040	73	72	68	56
1030	71	71	65	54
1020	69	69	63	52
1010	67	67	61	51
1000	65	66	59	49
990	63	64	57	47
980	62	62	55	45
970	60	60	53	43
960	58	58	51	41
950	56	56	48	39
940	54	54	46	37
930	52	52	44	36
920	50	50	42	34
910	48	48	39	32
900	46	46	37	30
890	44	44	35	29
880	42	42	33	27
870	40	40	31	25
860	38	38	29	24
850	36	36	28	22
840	33	34	26	21
830	31	32	24	19
820	28	29	21	18
810	26	27	20	16
800	24	25	18	15
790	22	23	15	13
780	19	21	14	12
770	17	19	12	11
760	15	17	10	9
750	13	15	8	8
740	11	13	8	7
730	9	11	7	6
720	8	10	5	5
710	6	8	3	5
700	5	7	2	4
690	4	6	2	3

Total Score	10 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE		11 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	
	PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES	
	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User
680	3	5	1	3
670	2	4	1	2
660	2	3	1-	2
650	1	3	1-	2
640	1	2	1-	1
630	1	2	1-	1
620	1	2	1-	1
610	1-	1	1-	1
600	1-	1	1-	1
590	1-	1	1-	1
580	1-	1	1-	1-
570	1-	1	1-	1-
560	1-	1	1-	1-
550	1-	1	1-	1-
540	1-	1-	1-	1-
530	1-	1-	1-	1-
520	1-	1-	1-	1-
510	1-	1-	1-	1-
500	1-	1-	1-	1-
490	1-	1-	1-	1-
480	1-	1-	1-	1-
470	1-	1-	1-	1-
460	1-	1-	1-	1-
450	1-	1-	1-	1-
440	1-	1-	1-	1-
430	1-	1-	1-	1-
420	1-	1-	1-	1-
410	1-	1-	1-	1-
400	1-	1-	1-	1-
390	1-	1-	1-	1-
380	1-	1-	1-	1-
370	1-	1-	1-	1-
360	1-	1-	1-	1-
350	1-	1-	1-	1-
340	1-	1-	1-	1-
330	1-	1-	1-	1-
320	1-	1-	1-	1-
Mean Score	939	935	969	1014
Standard Deviation	170	178	168	195

## Percentiles for Section Scores

10 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE					11 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE			
Evidence-Based Reading and Writing			Math		Evidence-Based Reading and Writing		Math	
Score	PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES	
	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User
760	99+	99+	99+	99+	99+	99+	99+	99+
750	99+	99+	99+	99+	99+	99+	99+	99
740	99+	99+	99+	99	99+	99	99+	98
730	99+	99+	99	99	99+	99	99	97
720	99+	99+	99	99	99+	98	99	97
710	99	99	99	99	99+	97	98	96
700	99	99	99	98	99+	96	98	95
690	99	98	98	98	99	95	97	95
680	98	98	98	98	99	94	97	94
670	98	97	97	97	98	93	96	93
660	97	97	97	97	97	91	95	92
650	97	96	96	97	96	90	95	91
640	96	95	96	96	95	88	94	90
630	95	94	95	96	93	86	93	89
620	93	92	95	95	91	84	92	87
610	92	91	94	94	90	82	91	85
600	90	89	92	93	88	79	90	84
590	89	88	91	91	86	77	88	81
580	87	85	89	89	85	74	86	79
570	85	83	86	87	82	71	83	75
560	82	81	84	85	80	67	81	72
550	79	78	82	82	77	64	77	68
540	76	75	79	80	74	60	73	65
530	73	72	76	77	71	57	69	61
520	70	69	72	73	67	53	65	58
510	66	65	69	71	63	50	62	55
500	63	62	66	68	60	46	58	52
490	59	59	62	64	55	43	54	47
480	56	55	57	59	50	40	49	43
470	53	52	52	55	46	36	43	39
460	49	49	49	51	42	33	40	35
450	46	45	46	47	39	30	37	32

## Percentiles for Section Scores (continued)

10 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE					11 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE			
Evidence-Based Reading and Writing		Math			Evidence-Based Reading and Writing		Math	
Score	PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES		PERCENTILES	
	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User	Nationally Representative Sample	PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 User
440	43	42	40	42	35	28	31	28
430	39	38	36	38	31	25	26	25
420	36	35	31	35	28	22	23	23
410	32	31	26	29	26	19	20	19
400	28	28	23	25	23	17	18	16
390	24	24	19	21	20	15	14	13
380	21	21	15	16	16	12	11	10
370	17	17	12	13	12	10	9	8
360	13	14	10	11	10	8	6	7
350	10	11	7	8	7	6	3	4
340	7	8	5	6	6	5	2	4
330	5	6	3	5	4	3	1	3
320	3	4	2	4	2	2	1	2
310	2	3	2	3	1	2	1-	2
300	1	2	1	2	1-	1	1-	1
290	1-	1	1	2	1-	1	1-	1
280	1-	1	1-	1	1-	1	1-	1
270	1-	1	1-	1	1-	1-	1-	1
260	1-	1	1-	1	1-	1-	1-	1-
250	1-	1-	1-	1	1-	1-	1-	1-
240	1-	1-	1-	1	1-	1-	1-	1-
230	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
220	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
210	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
200	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
190	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
180	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
170	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
160	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-	1-
Mean Score	468	470	470	465	480	510	489	504
Standard Deviation	94	99	88	92	92	105	88	102

---

# NMSC Selection Index

The National Merit® Scholarship Program is an annual academic competition among high school students for recognition and college scholarships. The program is conducted by National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance.

## What is the NMSC Selection Index?

Reported on a scale ranging from 48 to 228, the Selection Index score is calculated by doubling the sum of the Reading, Writing and Language, and Math Test scores. For example, a Reading score of 23, a Writing and Language score of 20, and a Math score of 26.5 would result in a Selection Index score of 139 [2(23+20+26.5)].

## How NMSC uses the Selection Index

NMSC uses the Selection Index score to designate groups of students to receive recognition in the National Merit Scholarship Program. Entry to NMSC's competition for scholarships to be offered in 2019 is determined by students' responses to program entry questions on the 2017 PSAT/NMSQT answer sheet. Both the printed PSAT/NMSQT student score report and the online report show the student's Selection Index, the student's responses to four entry items, and whether the student meets participation requirements. Currently, about 1.6 million test takers meet requirements to enter NMSC's competition each year. Almost all entrants are in their third year (grade 11, junior year) of high school.

Of the 1.6 million NMSC program entrants, about 50,000 will earn 2017 PSAT/NMSQT scores high enough to qualify them for recognition. These students will be notified of their standing through their high schools in September 2018. Students who qualify to continue in the competition for scholarships to be offered in 2019 must then meet academic and other requirements specified by NMSC to be considered for awards.

A detailed description of the National Merit Scholarship Program is published in the *Guide to the National Merit Scholarship Program*, mailed to high school principals each fall. For students and parents, information about the competition is given in the *PSAT/NMSQT Student Guide* and at [www.nationalmerit.org](http://www.nationalmerit.org).

For inquiries about any aspect of the National Merit Program—including entry requirements, the selection process, and awards to be offered—contact NMSC directly:

 [www.nationalmerit.org](http://www.nationalmerit.org)

- (847) 866-5100

National Merit Scholarship Corporation  
1560 Sherman Avenue, Suite 200  
Evanston, IL 60201-4897