

PSAT/NMSQT Primer 2018

Overview

The Preliminary SAT[®]/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is a co-sponsored program by the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). The PSAT/NMSQT measures: reading and writing skills and math problem-solving skills. The test is taken to enter the competition for scholarships from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (grade 11) and to help prepare for the SAT.

The PSAT Exam is composed of 4 sections, which are always in the same order. The exam is 2 hours, 45 minutes long, not including the break. The exam answer type is mainly multiple-choice, but there are 8 grid-in responses on the math tests as well.

PSAT/NMSQT Exam Format: 4 sections

Reading Test	60 minutes	47 questions
Writing and Language Test	35 minutes	44 questions
Math Test – No Calculator	25 minutes	17 questions
Math Test – Calculator	45 minutes	31 questions

Scoring

The maximum score that you can attain on the PSAT is a **1520**. To calculate the final score, the Reading and Writing scores are combined and the two Math scores are combined, using a conversion chart. Scores for each of the two test areas range from 320 - 760. A perfect 760 in both areas would add up to a 1520 score. Scores will be available online in mid-December, and paper score reports will be sent to schools in 2019. Ask your counselor for details on score reports.

Schedule and Registration

Students can register for the PSAT at their school. There is no online registration. The 2018 PSAT will be given on October 10, during the school day, or Saturday, Oct. 13. The alternate day option for schools is Wednesday, October 24.

Cost

\$16, though schools can charge more. Fee waivers are available, please ask your counselor. Some districts may choose to sponsor the exam for their students.

Be sure to get a copy of the free ‘Official student guide to the PSAT/NMSQT’ from your counselor. It contains material that will help you to prepare for the test. There are also test prep books available such as “Cracking the PSAT” by the Princeton Review.

PSAT Reading Test Strategy

- The Reading Test will present several passages, or pairs of passages, each followed by a number of questions. The Reading Test always includes:
 1. One passage from a classic or contemporary work of US or world literature
 2. One passage from either a US founding document or a great global conversation
 3. One passage related to the humanities, such as economics, sociology, etc.
 4. Two science passages related to earth science, biology, chemistry, or physics.
- The main reason that many students run out of time on the Reading Test is because they spend too much time **READING!** Unless you are a speedy reader, you must develop a strategy for answering the questions correctly without reading all of the passage.
- **One strategy for the Reading Test:**
 1. Read the preface (author and date)
 2. Read the first sentence in each paragraph (or two sentences if the paragraph is long). You are looking to grab the main idea of each paragraph and understand the overall essence of what is going on in the passage. Go for big picture, not memorization.
 3. Read the last sentence of the final paragraph to see how the passage closes.
 4. Answer each question, referring back to the part of the passage that will most likely contain the answer, based upon what you saw during your first look.
 5. Remember to stay aware of the time! If you get stuck, use process of elimination and guess. **KEEP IT MOVING!**
- **The passages are NOT all the same.** As you do your initial pass through the passage, you should be looking for specific things:
 1. **Literary passage** questions tend to ask about how characters in the passage ‘feel’ and how they get along with each other. **Focus on the WHO, WHERE, and WHY?**
 2. **Science** questions tend to ask about specific details in the passage. Thus, you should pay attention to the **WHAT, WHEN and HOW?**
 3. **Social Science and Humanities** questions are generally a mix between the prose fiction and the science style of questions.
- Some questions will direct you to a certain line (or lines) in the passage. The answer is sometimes right there, but it is good to read a little ahead and a little behind that part to better understand the **context** around that line (or lines).
- Two tricks to look out for on the Reading Test questions:
 1. Sometimes the test writers will offer answer choices that use totally different words to express the same meaning as the words in the original passage.
 2. Other times the test writers will steal words or phrases right out of the passage, but use them in a way that does not agree with the original meaning at all.
- **Manage your time:** The PSAT Reading Test is 60 minutes long and has 47 questions. That’s about 1 minutes and 16 seconds per question. Remember though, that is only for the questions, and **DOES NOT** include reading the long passages! Thus you must have a strategy that helps you to read just enough to get the questions right in the allotted time!

PSAT Writing and Language Test Strategy

- The Writing and Language Test covers concepts in several areas of English, including:
 - Grammar
 - Punctuation
 - Sentence Structure
 - Language skills such as understanding main ideas or strengthening the passage.
- The Writing and Language Test will present passages on the left side of the page. There will be words and phrases underlined throughout each passage. Your task is to determine whether the underlined portion is correct as written or whether one of the other answer choices is correct.
- Be sure to read ALL of the text in the Writing and Language Test. Determining the correct answer often requires you to understand the context around the underlined portion.
- The Writing and Language Test is a test of standard written English. Do not choose answers just because they ‘sound’ right. You will often see answer choices that sound like things you hear every day, yet are grammatically incorrect.
- If you narrow the choices down to two that don’t contain any errors, choose the shortest of the two.
- Do not be afraid to select NO CHANGE, which is frequently offered as the first answer choice. NO CHANGE will be the correct answer several times during the Writing and Language Test.
- **Sentence Structure concepts to study:** Sentence Fragments, Independent and Dependent Clauses, Comma Splices and Run-Ons, Misplaced Modifiers and Construction Shifts, Parallel Construction
- **Grammar and Usage concepts to study:** Pronoun Case, Subject-Verb Agreement, Pronoun-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense
- **Punctuation concepts to study:** Commas, Semicolons, Colons, Apostrophes, Dashes
- **There are several types of Language Skills questions:**
 - Some questions will ask about the main idea of the passage or whether a given statement strengthens or weakens the passage.
 - Some questions ask you whether a new sentence should be added to the passage or which answer choice best concludes the paragraph.
 - You may also be asked to interpret data presented in charts within the passage.
- **Manage your time:** The Writing and Language Test is 35 minutes long and has 44 questions. That is less than 48 seconds per question on average. Make sure you stay on pace to finish strong!

PSAT Math Test Strategy

(No Calculator Section: 25 minutes, Calculator Section: 45 minutes)

- The math on the PSAT covers a wide range of math, from arithmetic to trigonometry. All concepts in that range are fair game, so you should review your math thoroughly.
- Trust your knowledge of math and your intuition. Confidence is a huge part of doing well on the PSAT.
- You must memorize many formulas in order to do well on the math sections. Knowing formulas by heart will help you to solve answers more quickly.
- You may have learned many of the basic concepts tested in the PSAT Math Test, but do not underestimate the importance of reviewing those basic skills. Work through all of the questions on your practice test to ensure mastery of the concepts.
- The questions are not in order of difficulty in the math sections. Easy, medium, and hard questions are given throughout the test.
- For grid-in problems, always start gridding in the leftmost column to help avoid mistakes.
- Make sure that you answer the ACTUAL QUESTION. Be careful not to select an answer choice that represents a ‘step along the way’ to the actual answer.
- The PSAT Math questions are presented in paragraph form. You must be good at converting ‘words’ into ‘equations’. Know your math terminology well so that the words don’t trip you up. For example: prime number, quotient, factor, ratio, slope, diameter, function, etc.
- **Arithmetic Concepts:** Fractions, Decimals, Percents, Exponents, Roots, Averaging, Ratios, Absolute Value
- **Algebra Concepts:** Solving Linear and Quadratic Equations, Factoring, Collect Like Terms, Solving Simultaneous Equations, and Inequalities
- **Geometry Concepts:** Angles, Lengths, Triangles, Circles, Area, Perimeter, and Volume
- **Coordinate Geometry:** Slope, Distance, Midpoint, Parallel and Perpendicular Lines
- **Trigonometry Concepts:** You must know the SOHCAHTOA equations. Know that $\tan = \frac{\sin}{\cos}$.
- **Manage your time:** You must pace yourself. You have 25 minutes to complete 17 questions without a calculator, then you have 45 minutes to complete 31 questions with a calculator. That’s about 1.5 minutes per question on each math section.
- If you find that you haven’t begun to solve a math question after looking at it for 30 seconds, then guess and move on.

National Merit Scholarships

Get more info at www.nationalmerit.org

Overview

The Preliminary SAT®/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test is a co-sponsored program by the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC). The PSAT/NMSQT test measures: reading, writing, and math problem-solving skills. The test is taken in October of 11th grade to enter the competition for scholarships from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

National Merit Scholarship Program

The National Merit® Scholarship Program is an academic competition for recognition and scholarships that began in 1955. High school students enter the National Merit Program by taking the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT).

October - Each year, as many as 1.6 million high school **juniors take the PSAT/NMSQT**, which automatically enters them into the competition for National Merit Scholarship Program recognition and scholarships.

April - 50,000 high scorers qualify for recognition and get to name two colleges for NMSC to send official letters of recommendation to on the student's behalf (no money awarded).

September of senior year, 16,000 students notified that they are Semifinalists and their names are released to the news media. Semifinalists are designated on a state representational basis and they are the highest scoring entrants in each state.

In **late September**, the other 34,000 students receive Letters of Commendation

October or December - Semifinalist seniors must take the SAT exam.

February - 15,000 that meet academic and other criteria are notified that they are Finalists. High school principals are notified and provided with a certificate to present to each Finalist.

March - 7,500 students are notified that they will receive National Merit Scholarships. Winning is based upon: the Finalist's academic record, information about the school's curricula and grading system, two sets of test scores, school official's written recommendation, information about the student's activities and leadership, and the Finalist's own essay.

March - another 1,200 students will also receive special scholarships provided by corporate sponsors. These students are not Merit Finalists, but are the winners chosen amongst those that completed scholarship applications sent out in November and December of the senior year.

For more information, please read the National Merit Scholarship website at <http://www.nationalmerit.org/>

Many colleges offer full and partial tuition scholarships to National Merit Awardees. Be sure to indicate your award status on your application and notify the financial aid office of your chosen school. <http://thecollegematchmaker.com/52-colleges-offering-full-tuition-scholarships-national-merit-finalists/>

National Hispanic Recognition Program (NHRP)

The College Board's NHRP program is an academic honor that can be included on college applications. It's not a scholarship, but colleges do use this program to identify academically exceptional Hispanic/Latino students.

- October of **junior year** - 250,000 Hispanic/Latino entrants take the PSAT/NMSQT
 - Must be at least one-quarter Hispanic/Latino descent. Make sure you mark your ethnicity on the PSAT answer sheet!
 - Must achieve the minimum required PSAT/NMSQT cutoff score (this index score may vary by state, region and territory each year).
 - Must achieve a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.5 or higher by the middle of your junior year.
 - Must be a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident with a valid permanent resident card or passport stamped I-551.
 - Your high school counselor will provide your junior year cumulative GPA and verify your ethnicity designation.
- February-March of junior year
 - NHRP invites eligible students to apply online.
- Spring of junior year
 - Work with your school to submit a form confirming your ethnicity and your cumulative GPA.
- Mid-June
 - Application deadline.
- September of **senior year**
 - NHRP mails congratulatory letter to the student's home address.
 - NHRP mails award certificates to the high schools for presentation.
- **Recognition:** The NHRP does not provide a financial reward, but being named is an important academic recognition, and this achievement should be indicated on your college applications. NHRP also makes this information available to colleges and universities.

What is the NHRP's definition of Hispanic/Latino?

To qualify for this program, you must be at least one-quarter Hispanic/Latino. Hispanic/Latino is an ethnic category, not a racial category; you may be of any race. For purposes of the NHRP, you must be from a family whose ancestors came from at least one of these countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay or Venezuela.

For more information, send an email to NHRP@scholarshipamerica.org or call 866-545-8467.