

## The Importance of the SATs and PSATs

Written by Julian Butler  
Thursday, 08 July 2010 14:53

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Many colleges and universities require a standardized test such as the SAT or ACT for admissions. The reason colleges and universities require these tests is to have a consistent way of measuring students who are applying to the school.

The Scholastic Aptitude Test, or SAT, is usually taken your junior and/or senior year. It is better to take it your junior year so that you can re-take it if you don't like your score and want to improve it. This test, most of the time, is a major part of your overall college application. To help prepare for the SAT, students take the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test or PSAT. This test is offered every October, and can be taken your freshman, sophomore, and/or junior year. The SAT occurs from October to June (check <http://www.collegeboard.com/> for specific dates).

The American College Test or ACT, like the SAT, is usually taken your junior and/or senior year. There are differences in the tests including the point structure. The most commonly stated difference is that the ACT is a content-based test while the SAT tests critical thinking and problem solving. The ACT occurs from September to June (check [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) for specific dates).

Most students focus on the SAT or ACT for college and don't really think about the PSAT. As a matter of fact, many of you are probably thinking what is the use of doing well on a test like the PSAT when colleges don't even look at it? Simply put: college funding. The test and program are cosponsored by College Board and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. There are contests based off of the PSAT that reward many scholarships to students that do well on this test during their junior year. The National Hispanic Recognition Program, National Scholarship Service, and Telluride Association all have their own awards for students who do well on these tests. The test can also give you a taste of where you are with other college bound students as well as give you an idea of what the SAT is like.

The SAT is obviously very rewarding because a good score can help you get in to the college of your choice. For example, this past year's incoming freshman class at Carleton University in Northfield, MN, scored a 650-699 on the math SAT, 700-749 on the writing SAT, and a 750-800 on the verbal SAT. For the University of Minnesota, the average total SAT score was 1152-1354 based off of the math and reading scores. St. Thomas University in St. Paul has a total average score of 1070-1270 based off of the math and reading scores. This tells you what score you should strive to get if you are interested in these schools.

The ACT is just as important as the SAT. In some cases it is more important. You will want to check with your college of choice to know which test weighs more. The test has four subjects: English, Math, Science, and Reading. There is also a writing section that is optional. At Carleton College, most of the students scored between 31 and 36. At the University of Minnesota, the ACT range was 25-30. At St. Thomas University, the score range was 22-28.

The ACT, SAT and PSAT are important tests that shouldn't be taken lightly. They can give you great scholarships for the college of your choice and even back you up to get into the college of your choice. Preparation is needed for these tests and it is needed early. You can prepare for these tests a number of ways, including ACT Online Prep ( [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) ), SAT practice ( <http://sat.colle>

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[geboard.com/practice](http://geboard.com/practice)

) , and Princeton Review (

<http://www.princetonreview.com/>

). Also talk to your school counselor about test preparation programs and which test may be best for you.

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