

Standardized Test Secrets

Confident. Prepared. Relaxed. Well rested. These are the traits of successful test-takers. How can you ensure that your high schooler does his best on standardized tests? Share these answers to the most common questions teens ask before, during, and after tests.

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Before:

Why do I have to take standardized tests?

Standardized tests are designed to give schools a standard for gauging the performance of their individual students and the success of their academic programs. Because all students take the same test, schools can compare their test results with those of other high schools across the country. College entrance exams (another form of standardized tests) provide admissions officers with a way to compare applicants.

What do the tests cover?

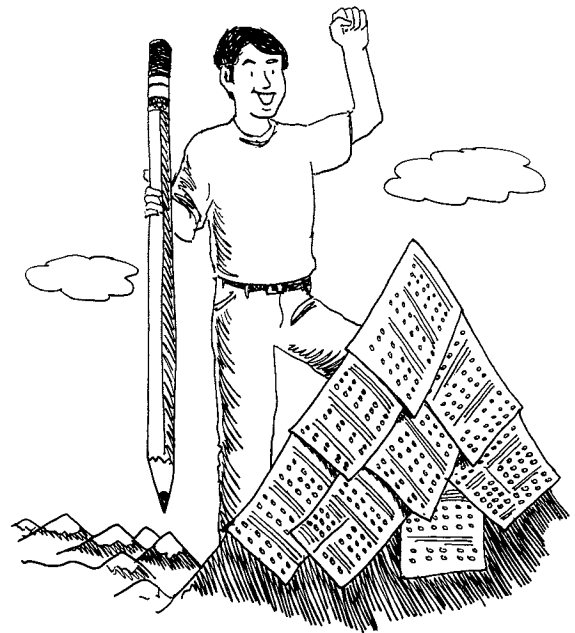
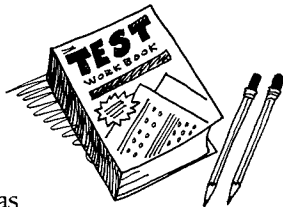
There are two main types of standardized tests. Achievement tests measure your ability to apply what you've *already learned* in specific subjects, like reading comprehension, English, math, and science. Aptitude tests demonstrate your *ability to learn* and can predict future performance. These tests measure verbal, math, mechanical, and reasoning skills, as well as creativity.

When should I take college entrance exams?

It's usually a good idea to take the tests in your junior year. If you need to raise your scores, you can take them again early in your senior year. Your guidance counselor can help you figure out which tests to take and when they're scheduled.

How should I prepare?

Chances are your teachers will give you practice exercises in class. They may also suggest ways you can study at home. For college entrance exams, you can use commercial test prep materials from companies such as the Princeton Review and Kaplan. Check your school and community libraries for their workbooks. Ask your teacher or school counselor for recommendations. *Remember:* You can't cram for these tests. Allow yourself plenty of time to become familiar with the format and to practice the skills.



How can I feel my best on test day?

While it may seem obvious, a good night's rest and a healthy breakfast are keys to success. Plenty of sleep will help you feel sharp. A well-balanced breakfast will give you energy. The menu might include cereal and milk, or eggs and toast, plus fruit or juice. Be careful not to eat more food than normal—being too full can make you sluggish.

During:

What should I take?

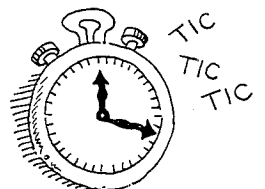
Be sure you have several new #2 pencils (avoid very sharp pencils, which break easily), a calculator (if allowed) with plenty of batteries, and a watch. For added energy, a snack of raisins, grapes, or granola bars is great for breaks. For college entrance exams, you may also need an admission ticket and a valid form of photo identification.

What if I don't understand the directions?

Read all directions slowly and carefully. If you can write in the test booklet, circle or underline important words. If you're confused about what to do, ask the teacher or test administrator right away. It's a good idea to familiarize yourself with instructions by taking practice exams.

How can I manage my time wisely?

Most standardized tests are divided into timed sections. At the beginning of each section, scan all the questions to get some idea of how much time to spend on each. One simple method



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is to divide both the amount of time and the number of questions in half. For instance, you may have 30 minutes to answer 20 questions. In the first 15 minutes, you should do at least 10 questions.

How do I complete a bubble answer sheet?

It's best to use firm, up-and-down pencil strokes to fill in the bubbles (circles). Be sure to completely erase answers you change and to avoid stray marks. To keep your place on the answer sheet, cover it with a piece of blank paper. Slide the paper down to reveal one row of answers at a time. From time to time, check to make sure the numbers of the questions and answers match.

Should I guess?

On most standardized tests, it's better to guess at an answer than to leave it blank. Cross off answers you know are wrong to improve your chances of guessing the right answer. Avoid spending too much time on difficult questions. If you have no idea at all, make your best guess and move on.

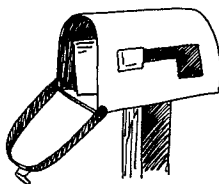


What if I finish before time is up?

If you reach the end of a section with time left over, go back and check your answers. Some students circle difficult questions as they go so they can easily find them later.

After:

When will I receive my scores?



That depends on the type of test you take. Some scores will be sent to your school and others directly to your home. Be sure to ask the test administrator when and how your scores will be delivered. Your guidance counselor can help you interpret them.

What if I don't do as well as I hoped?

Remember, all teens have skills and abilities that standardized tests cannot measure. Also, many factors can affect your score on a particular test (if you weren't feeling well or were especially nervous, for example). Avoid making major decisions about your future based on the results of one test. Consider your entire school history, your grades, and your activities and interests when weighing education and career goals.

Tests for college-bound students

Here is a description of the most common college entrance exams and where to go for more information. Your guidance counselor can also help determine which tests will be most useful for your future.

PLAN: This is the pre-ACT test taken in a student's sophomore year. www.act.org, 319-337-1029

Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT): A practice version of the SAT taken in the sophomore or junior year. www.collegeboard.org, 888-477-7728

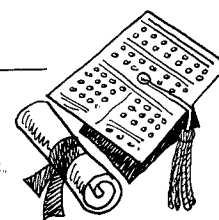
Advanced Placement Test (AP): This test measures subject-matter knowledge. High scores often can be applied toward college credit. (Not all high schools offer Advanced Placement courses and tests.) www.collegeboard.org, 888-225-5427

ACT Assessment (ACT): A college entrance exam that tests English, math, reading, and science knowledge. www.act.org, 319-337-1270

Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) Reasoning Test: A college entrance exam that measures verbal and math skills. www.collegeboard.org, 609-771-7600

Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) Subject Tests: These college entrance exams measure knowledge in specific subjects. www.collegeboard.org, 609-771-7600

Editor's Note: In order to have results in time for college admission deadlines, the AP, ACT, and SAT tests should be taken in the early fall of a student's senior year or earlier.



High School Years