

Recommended Testing Schedule for Potomac Students 2019-2020

9th grade

- June: SAT Subject Tests (only for students in Precalculus)

10th grade

- October PSAT
- Practice ACT (administered at Potomac, spring)
- June Subject Tests (only for students in Precalculus or AP Chemistry)

11th grade

- October PSAT
- December SAT (recommended first sitting)
- December ACT (recommended first sitting)
- February ACT
- March SAT
- April ACT
- May SAT
- June SAT Subject Tests (as appropriate, see college counselor)
- June ACT

12th grade

- July ACT
- August SAT (if necessary)
- September ACT (if necessary)
- October SAT, ACT, or Subject Tests (if necessary)
- November SAT Subject Tests (language with listening)

These dates indicate when the tests are available - we are not suggesting that students sign up for every administration. It is not recommended to take these exams more than three times - taking it more than that will not result in any measurable increase, studies have shown. **Our recommended testing schedule has students taking the ACT for the first time in either December or February, and the SAT in either December or March of their junior year, after most have covered sufficient math (especially trigonometry & some precalculus) to be prepared for the test and after taking the PSAT twice.** Most students will then retake the ACT in April/SAT in May of the junior year and, if necessary, again at the beginning of senior year.

Potomac is not a test center.

Information on Standardized Tests

Standardized tests are used by most colleges and universities in determining admission. One of many factors in the admission evaluation, these tests are secondary to an applicant's course selection and grades. Activities, persistence, commitment, and demonstrated interest are also more important to some colleges than standardized test scores, and an increasing number of colleges do not even consider

standardized test scores in their admission decisions. (A list of these colleges is available at www.fairtest.org.) All Potomac students, though, will take some of the tests described here.

PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test)

Taken primarily by sophomores and juniors in the U.S., the PSAT/NMSQT is administered at a student's high school. Sophomores take it only for the experience of practicing a test of this nature. Juniors take the PSAT in preparation for the SAT, and their scores determine qualification for the National Merit Scholarship competition. (The National Merit Corporation is a not-for-profit organization that administers some scholarship money for undergraduate study.) With the exception of a written essay, the PSAT matches the format of the SAT. However, **PSAT scores are not sent to colleges and play no role in college admission decisions.**

SAT

The SAT is a three-hour test (plus 50 minutes for the optional essay), which assesses the knowledge, skills, and understandings that research has identified as most important for college and career readiness. Students receive a score on a scale ranging from 400 to 1600, and that score is the total of two separate scores, ranging from 200 to 800 each, for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and Math. The 2 to 8 score on each of three dimensions for the essay is reported separately. The essay, for students who take it, is given at the end of the SAT, and colleges will determine whether they will require the essay for admission; hence, students are advised to take the optional essay component at least once.

To stand the best chance of being assigned their preferred testing centers, students should register for the SAT online at www.collegeboard.org as soon as they have decided on the test dates they want. Potomac is not a test center, so students generally register to take the SAT at the centers closest to their homes. Registration must be submitted about four weeks prior to the test date, and the SAT is administered in the months of August, October, November, December, March, May, and June. Juniors planning to take the SAT are encouraged to test in March, May, or June. Seniors may take it in August, October, November, or December to meet most college admission application deadlines.

ACT

Accepted by every college that relies on standardized tests, the ACT is a curriculum-based test that includes four sections: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science. It is designed to measure students' educational development. Each of the four multiple-choice sections is scored on a scale from 1 to 36 and then averaged to derive a composite score. Students have the option to register for the ACT *or* the ACT with Writing. The latter includes an essay, which does not factor into the composite score, but contributes to a separate combined English Language Arts (ELA) score. A student may register online at www.actstudent.org, and the ACT is administered in September, October, December, February, April, June, and July each year. We recommend the December, February, April, or June dates for juniors.

Registration Information for the SAT and ACT

- The Potomac School Code: 471396
- Register for the ACT at www.actstudent.org.
- For the SAT and Subject Tests, register at www.collegeboard.org.
- Students should register as soon as they know when they want to test, as test centers can fill up. Potomac is not a test center, so students typically choose the centers closest to their homes.
- Registration must be submitted about four weeks prior to the test date.

SAT/ACT Comparison Chart

Characteristic	SAT	ACT
Sections	Reading, Writing and Language, Math	English, Math, Reading, Science
Content Covered	Reading, words in context, grammar & usage, math (through trigonometry), and writing (optional)	Reading, grammar & usage, math (through trigonometry), science, and writing (optional)
Scoring	Total score range of 400 to 1600, comprised of 200 to 800 points for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and 200 to 800 for Math	Reading, Math, English, and Science scores range from 1-36 and are averaged to produce the composite score
Highest Possible Score	1600	36
Total Testing Time	3 hours, 50 minutes (with essay)	3 hours, 35 minutes (with writing)
Number of Questions	154	215
Number of Sections	3: Reading, Writing and Language, and Math (the first two comprise the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Score) 4 sections with optional essay	4 (without writing) or 5 (with writing)
Essay Included	Recommended, but many colleges do not require it	Recommended, but many colleges do not require it
Wrong-Answer Penalty	No	No
Super scoring (combining the best section scores across different test dates)	Most colleges superscore the SAT	Most colleges officially use the composite score (not the super score), but it is still advisable to report all scores needed to arrive at the super score

SAT Subject Tests

SAT Subject Tests are one-hour, multiple-choice tests that offer an assessment of the student's learning in a particular subject. There are twenty subject tests offered covering mathematics, literature, history, science, and foreign languages. The tests are scored on a scale of 200 to 800, and students may take up to three tests per administration. Subject Tests are required or recommended by a relatively small number (fewer than 2% nationwide) of colleges and universities as part of the admission process, and among this group, some colleges will allow ACT test-takers to be exempt from the Subject Test requirement. If you are considering schools that require Subject Tests, you should plan to take them by the end of your junior year or after you have completed the appropriate course. (See the recommended testing schedule for more information.)

The most common Subject Tests taken by Potomac students are the following:

Math Level 2 (after Honors, Extended, or regular Precalculus)

Literature (after English 11 or AP English)

US History (after US History or AP US History)

Additional notes on Subject Tests:

Students who are taking Algebra 2 in 11th grade should take the Math Level 1 test. While 9th and 10th graders in Algebra 2 can consider taking Math Level 1, we recommend that they wait until they complete Precalculus and take the Math Level 2.

Students with measurable strengths in languages can consider sitting for these Subject Tests after the third year of language study, or the language with listening tests that are offered in November, but because scoring on all tests is scaled, there are often more difficult for those who are not highly proficient or fluent.

In all cases, students should consult with both the College Counseling Office and their individual teachers to determine which tests they should consider taking. Additionally, doing some preparation for the tests beyond the coursework at Potomac is recommended.

AP (Advanced Placement) Examinations

These examinations are given in May of each year, and students who are taking AP-designated courses at Potomac are required to take the corresponding exams. These tests are designed by the College Board and used for placement and credit by many colleges and universities once students are enrolled. (AP scores are not a required part of the application process!) Scores range from 1 to 5, and students can earn credit at many institutions for a score of 4 or 5. Students are not required to submit their AP scores during the college application process, but those who earn scores of 3, 4, or 5 are advised to self-report their scores on their college applications.

Test Prep

Some students do improve their SAT or ACT scores with coaching, some don't, and most stay within a standard deviation of their first set of scores. College entrance exams have become increasingly curriculum-based; **therefore the best preparation for all of the standardized tests is to focus intently on coursework and to perform well in school.** Again, standardized test scores are not as important to college admission officers as are courses and grades. Students who do undertake formal test preparation **should be careful to not let it interfere with academic progress.** Summer is the ideal time to engage in dedicated test prep and some students begin in the summer prior to 10th grade, but we generally do not recommend taking standardized testing earlier than December of the junior year. Students are not permitted to leave school to attend test prep, nor does Potomac allow outside tutors to come onto the grounds.

In the DC area there are a myriad of choices for test prep, ranging from individual tutors to large classroom settings, and the schedules for and pricing of these programs vary widely. Students should choose the program that fits their family's budget and schedule. The College Counseling Office does not maintain a list of test-prep tutors or companies, but a web search will yield the array of options available in the area. Free resources are available through Khan Academy (www.khanacademy.org/sat) to prepare for the SAT. Potomac's College Counseling Office has purchased a site license for Method Test Prep, which is available at no charge to all students from the time of their enrollment at Potomac. MTP provides

both online SAT and ACT prep, including a 20-week program of individual lessons, quizzes, and full-length practice tests. Students can sign up here: <https://app.methodtestprep.com/ThePotomacSchool/signup>. Please include the access code when signing in: **tkn.49533582**

Fee Waivers

Both the ACT and SAT will grant waivers of the test registration fees. Students who meet the low-income criteria established by The College Board and ACT can be eligible for fee waivers to defray the cost of test registration. Students who think they may qualify should see their college counselor at least one month before the registration deadline for the desired test date. Students may also be eligible for fee waivers for their college applications.

Special Information for Students with Learning Differences

The ACT and the College Board (sponsor of the PSAT, SAT, and Advanced Placement Examinations) provide nonstandard testing for students with documented learning accommodations. The required documentation is essentially the same for both testing organizations, although the registration procedure is different. Students who have documentation and are seeking accommodations for any of the standardized tests should see Dr. Durham or Mr. Wolff at least two months prior to the registration deadline for a test.

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