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## SESSION 2: STANDARDIZED TESTING

## ACTIVITY #1: UNDERSTANDING THE TESTS

### *Opening Discussion:*

The majority of colleges require one of the two admission tests, the SAT or the ACT. Many colleges and universities give applicants the option of reporting scores from either of the two testing programs. Students should weigh the advantages of taking both or either test. Retakes may be needed in the senior year, since students do not always receive their highest score from their first testing. Some institutions may have a stated preference for one test or the other. Bulletins describing the programs and practice tests should be available in high school guidance offices. For students who meet low income standards, test fee waivers are available.

Students should develop the strongest testing profile possible. The first step is to have taken the a preliminary test. If the students have taken or will take the PSAT /NMSQT or PLAN, talk to them about reviewing the results as they prepare to take the SAT or ACT, respectively. The best way to get ready for the SAT is to take challenging courses, study hard, and read and write in and outside of the classroom. Students should be strongly encouraged to continue in math, science and English for all four years of high school. While grades and coursework are more important in the admission process than testing, colleges that require the SAT or ACT do want to see strong scores.

Some colleges may waive the ACT and or SAT tests for admission purposes but may require test scores for placement purposes. Students should consult the website of the schools in which they are interested to learn about their admission and placement policies.

### *Activity/Handouts:*

#### **Understanding Standardized Tests for Junior and Seniors**

### *Instructions:*

1. Ask students what test(s) they have already taken and plan to take.
2. Give students a copy of the handout.
3. Walk the students through the handout, emphasizing the differences between the two tests.  
Answer questions about which test(s) might be appropriate.

## UNDERSTANDING STANDARDIZED TESTING FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS

**PSAT/NMSQT and PLAN Tests.** You may have already taken the PLAN (offered by the ACT) and/or the PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT offered by the College Board/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) as a sophomore. Ideally, all students should take the PSAT/NMSQT and/or PLAN in the fall of junior year. Taking the test as a junior may qualify you for some scholarship consideration and identify you to colleges as a potential applicant. Reviewing the results of the PLAN and PSAT/NMSQT will help you to prepare for the ACT and SAT respectively. The results of these tests are not reported to colleges. They are for your benefit only.

	<i>SAT</i>	<i>ACT</i>
<b>When is it administered?</b>	<b>Seven times</b> per year	<b>Six times</b> per year
<b>What is the test structure?</b>	<b>Ten-section exam:</b> Three Critical Reading, three Math, three Writing, and one unscored subsection. The unscored subsection is masked to look like a regular section.	<b>Four-section exam:</b> English, Math, Reading, and Science Reasoning. An unscored subsection is added to tests on certain dates only, and is clearly experimental.
<b>What is the test content?</b>	<b>Math:</b> numbers, operations, Algebra, geometry, data analysis, statistics, and probability. <b>Reading:</b> extended reasoning, literal comprehension, vocabulary in context, and sentence completions. <b>Writing:</b> an essay, improving sentences, identifying sentence errors, and improving paragraphs.	<b>Math:</b> up to trigonometry. <b>Science:</b> charts, experiments. <b>Reading:</b> four passages, one each of prose fiction, social science, humanities, and natural science. <b>English:</b> stresses grammar.
<b>Is there a penalty for wrong answers?</b>	<b>Yes</b> ¼ point off for incorrect answers	<b>No</b>
<b>How is the test scored?</b>	200-800 per section. A 2400 is the highest total score.	1-36 for each subject, averaged for a composite score. A 36 is the highest possible composite score.
<b>Are all scores sent to schools?</b>	No. There is a “Score Choice” option. Students can choose which scores to send (by test date) to colleges in accordance with an institution’s stated score-use practice.	No. There is a “Score Choice” option. Students can choose which schools will receive their scores AND which scores the schools will see.
<b>Are there other uses for the exams?</b>	Scholarship purposes. Some colleges may use scores for placement	Scholarship purposes. Certain statewide testing programs. Some colleges use scores for placement
<b>Best time to register?</b>	At least <b>six weeks</b> before the test date The earlier the better	At least <b>six weeks</b> before the test date The earlier the better
<b>How to contact?</b>	<b>SAT Customer Service: 866/756-7346 or <a href="http://sat.collegeboard.org/contact">sat.collegeboard.org/contact</a></b>	<b>ACT, Inc. <a href="http://www.actstudent.org">www.actstudent.org</a></b>



### *Additional Tests:*

**SAT Subject Tests:** The SAT Subject Tests are hour-long tests based on high school course work offered across five subject areas: Mathematics, Science, English, History and Languages. The tests allow students to demonstrate knowledge and showcase achievements in specific subjects. Students should check the websites of colleges they are considering for more information on SAT Subject Test requirements.

**Advanced Placement Exams:** AP exams are three-hour exams in specific subject areas and are designed to be taken upon the completion of an AP course or the equivalent. They are rigorous exams that include both multiple choice and essay sections. More than 1,400 colleges and universities accept AP credits. To learn more about AP exams go to <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/takingtheexam>. AP exams are scored on a scale of 1–5.

**TOEFL** (Test of English as a Foreign Language) tests a student’s ability in English and is a test for students for whom English is not the first language. The test measures skills in reading, listening, speaking, and writing in English and requires the student to combine two or more of these skills to respond to a question. It is usually an internet based exam given by appointment designated test centers. Paper-based tests are offered only in remote areas. For more information go to [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org).

