

For students and parents

Testing for College Admission

Though a few institutions have downplayed the importance of test scores and others have eliminated test requirements entirely, they are in the minority. Standardized testing remains an important factor in admission decisions, especially at most highly selective colleges and universities. It is essential for you, therefore, to understand the purpose of testing in the admission process while keeping its role in perspective. Here are descriptions of the different tests, along with guidelines for registering and reporting scores and some comments on test preparation.

Test Descriptions

1. PSAT/NMSQT – PRELIMINARY SAT/NATIONAL MERIT QUALIFYING TEST

You will take this test twice, once in your sophomore year and then again earlier in the junior year. It has the same format as the SAT Reasoning Test and is intended to be used for practice and as a predictor of your possible SAT scores. Your PSAT scores are not sent to colleges, but you may receive mail from colleges as a result of your taking the PSAT. A very small number of high-scoring juniors may be named National Merit Scholarship finalists, semi-finalists, or commended scholar. Finalists, very few in number nationally, may be awarded scholarships by some colleges.

2. SAT REASONING TEST (FORMERLY SAT-I; REFERRED TO HERE AS “THE SAT”)

Given by the College Board (www.collegeboard.com), the SAT is a three-hour, forty-five minute test in three sections: critical reading, mathematics, and writing; this test is designed to measure the verbal and mathematical reasoning ability you have developed through your years of school. Most colleges, with notable exceptions, require the SAT (or the ACT, a similar test described below) as part of the application process. Most students take the SAT at least twice: once in the junior year and again in the fall of the senior year. When you send SAT score reports to colleges, each report includes *all* your SAT scores, not just the most recent testing. Most colleges, but not all, consider your highest score from each section, even if earned on different test dates. *Lawrence Academy requires all juniors to take the SAT and/or the ACT with writing.*

3. SAT SUBJECT TESTS

Subject Tests, as the name implies, are one-hour tests measuring your knowledge of specific subject areas. Testing dates are the same as for the SAT, though not all subjects are available on every date. Subject Tests are given in the following areas:

Biology E/M (ecological or molecular sections by choice)
Chemistry
Chinese
French
German
Hebrew (modern)
Italian
Japanese
Korean
Latin
Literature

Math Level 1
Math Level 2
Physics
Spanish
U.S. History
World History

Some foreign language tests have versions with and without a listening section. Consult your teacher.

Colleges' Subject Test requirements vary widely, from none to three; some institutions, and certain majors such as engineering, have very specific subject requirements. While Lawrence Academy does not require students to take Subject Tests, we *strongly suggest* taking the Math Level I at the end of Math 3, plus one or two others in the junior year or early in the senior year—unless you are certain early in the process that none of the colleges to which you plan to apply require Subject Tests. A junior-year conversation with your counselor about which Subject Tests to take is essential!

4. THE ACT (AMERICAN COLLEGE TEST)

Colleges use the ACT, which is basically a competitor of the SAT, the same way they use the SAT and Subject Tests: to help predict a student's chances for success at their institution. Its design, however, is quite different from the SAT, both in structure and in terms of what it measures. In simple terms, the SAT measures reasoning ability, while the ACT assesses what the student has learned in the classroom. The ACT, which lasts three hours, is comprised of four tests: English, mathematics, reading and science. An optional fifth section, writing, adds 30 minutes to the testing time. The ACT is given at Lawrence Academy in December and February, and at other local test centers on several additional dates. Visit www.act.org for more information.

The Lawrence Academy College Counseling Office strongly recommends that every student take the ACT! For several reasons, some students do better on the ACT than on the SAT and Subject Tests. Virtually all colleges will accept either SAT or ACT scores. In most cases, the ACT can substitute for both the SAT and the Subject Tests; some schools, however, require the Subject Tests of students who submit the ACT. Again, talk with your counselor and do some careful research!

5. TOEFL (TEST OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

Used to evaluate English proficiency, the TOEFL is required by most American colleges of students whose native language is not English. Students who did not learn English as a first language or in whose home English is generally not spoken should also take it. Students usually take the TOEFL in addition to the ACT or SAT and Subject Tests; it can be taken at Lawrence Academy. See the International Student article for more information about this test, and access the website at WWW.TOEFL.COM.

Registering for Tests; Testing Center Selection

1. Registering for the SAT, Subject Tests, TOEFL, and/or the ACT is *the student's* responsibility. Lawrence Academy requires **juniors** to take the **SAT in January** and recommends two or three **Subject Tests in June**. Depending on individual situations, some juniors may choose to repeat the SAT in May or, occasionally, take the Subject Tests then. (The June date is recommended because it comes at the end of the school year, when courses are finished and exams are imminent.) **Seniors** usually repeat the SAT in October (if applying ED or EA) or November, and they may take additional Subject Tests in December or January. Most students will take the SAT at least twice and two different Subject Tests. Speak with your college counselor about your testing schedule.

2. *Online registration is the preferred method*, especially if you want to be reasonably sure of taking the tests at Lawrence (important for boarders!). Go to www.collegeboard.com or www.ACT.org and sign up, listing **Lawrence Academy** as your first choice test center and **Groton School** as your second for the SAT. Second choice for the ACT should be **Fitchburg High School**. You will need a valid, major credit card to register. Essential code numbers are found below. **The earlier you register, the better**. Juniors should register for the January and June dates in the early fall, though it can be done even earlier, over the summer; seniors should sign up for October, November, and December dates shortly after school is over in June of the junior year.

Lawrence Academy CEEB (school) code: 220-940

ACT school code: 220-940

Lawrence Academy SAT test center code: 22-404

Lawrence Academy ACT test center code: 199-460

Groton School SAT test center code: 22-400

(The ACT is not given at Groton School)

3. *Always use exactly the same name and address when signing up for any tests!* If you sign up once as Jane P. Sherman and as Janie Sherman another time, the computer will treat you as two different people. Be just as precise with your address, birth date, Social Security number, and testing codes!

4. *Concerning the Subject Tests:* Tests in “ongoing” subjects like literature or mathematics can be taken on any available date. Math Level I, however, should be taken in the junior year, or at the end of Math 3. Tests in a “terminal” subject such as Honors Chemistry should be taken in June, immediately after the course has ended and the material is still fresh in your mind. Consult your counselor and teacher.

5. *Extended-time testing:* Students eligible for extended-time testing must have on file in the Studies Office an educational evaluation done in the last three years, with a specific recommen-

dation from the learning specialist for extended time. The student must have been receiving the recommended classroom accommodations for four months prior to the first test date. **Candidates who need extended-time testing must apply for it by mail;** they must notify the Director of Academic Support (Ms. Kimberly Poulin) at least *seven weeks in advance of the test date* so that all necessary forms can be completed and sent on time. Registration for extended-time testing may then be done online once the student has received the appropriate “SSD code.” Please note that while obtaining extended time for the SAT is relatively easy, it is extremely difficult to do so for the ACT. See your counselor for details.

6. If you register for any test online, as most do, you will be issued an **admission ticket**, which you should print out and bring to the test with you. Those who register by mail will receive their admission ticket by mail. Check the information on the ticket for accuracy. Corrections can be made on the ticket itself or online. Make sure, too, that you are assigned to the correct test center (usually Lawrence Academy). If you are not, or if you have other questions, see Ms. Cheryl Zapolski, the Director of Testing, well ahead of the test date. Keep your admission tickets and score reports you receive in a specific file. You will need registration numbers and test dates later in the application process.

Reporting Test Scores

The only way for colleges to see your SAT or ACT scores is for you to send them. They are not on Lawrence Academy’s transcript, nor is it the Academy’s responsibility to send scores.

Here are facts and instructions:

- Almost all colleges require official score reports sent directly to them from the testing agency. As a rule, they will not accept a copy of your report (the one the agency has sent to you). When in doubt, have an official report sent!
- Score Choice allows you to decide which SAT score sets to send to colleges. If your junior-year SAT scores are better than your October ones from senior year, for example, you may send just those. However, if your scores are “split,” that is, if your math is better in June and your critical reading is higher in October, you should simply opt to have a cumulative report sent and allow the colleges to pick the best ones, which they almost always will.
- For the ACT, you must send reports for each testing date separately.
- Every college and other organization that might want to see your scores has a four-digit code listed in the back of the registration booklet or online. Obtain these numbers for your colleges early in the senior year, write them down, and keep them in your workbook.
- SAT and ACT registration forms have spaces in which to put these codes when you register; a certain number of official reports are sent “free” - part of the price of registration. **Do not list any colleges in this space when you take the test as a junior!** Do, however, use the spaces for senior test dates, at least for colleges to which you are fairly certain to apply.

- You can always send scores after the fact. However, it costs money and takes time —up to six weeks —so order score reports early in the senior year. A “rush” reporting service is available for a significant fee if you really must send scores at the last minute.
- When should colleges have your scores? While there is no standard deadline, you should try to order test reports early enough that they will arrive at the college about the same time as your application—certainly no more than two or three weeks after that.

Test Preparation

Familiarity with the organization, structure, and types of questions on any standardized test can be helpful, as it will allow you, on test day, to focus on the content of the questions without having to spend extra time during the test to figure out directions and the like. Some basic, common-sense strategies can be useful in preventing extra stress and unnecessarily wasted time.

Many types of test preparation for the SAT Reasoning and Subject Tests and the ACT are available, including books, computer software, online practice, and commercial courses that require a significant investment of time and money. At the very least, you should familiarize yourself with the format and structure of the exams by using the booklets The College Board provides for both the SAT and the Subject Tests. These are obtainable in the Studies Office, and online through the testing agencies. A similar booklet is available for the ACT. All contain practice test questions, as do many of the test-preparation books on the market. Some students are motivated to prepare on their own, while others may believe that they will not do the necessary preparation unless they have the external motivation that comes from a formal course. There is debate as to whether or not coaching can have a significant impact on a student’s scores, but some sort of preparation is definitely beneficial; you and your family can decide which is best for you. If you do opt to take one of the commercial courses, you are strongly advised to do so *during the summer*. Students are far too busy during the school year to take on the additional burden of a prep course, which may require six or more hours of homework per week.