

The PSAT and College Admissions Tests

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What is the PSAT?

- The “preliminary” SAT
- College Board’s PSAT suite now includes PSAT 8, PSAT 9, PSAT 10, and PSAT/NMSQT
- PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 are the same test, but PSAT 10 may be given in the spring.
- ONLY PSAT/NMSQT will be considered for National Merit scholarships.

Score Ranges on the PSAT

	Section Min	Section Max	Test Total	
SAT	200	800	1600	
PSAT/NMSQT	160	760	1520	} Identical structure
PSAT 10	160	760	1520	
PSAT 9	120	720	1440	} Identical structure
PSAT 8	120	720	1440	

PSAT Structure and Timing



Section			
Reading	60	47	77
Writing	35	44	48
No Calculator Math	25	17	88
Calculator Math	45	31	84
Total	2:45	139	71

Relatively generous timing solves timing issues for many students

Interpreting your PSAT score report

School Name: John F. Kennedy High School, School Code: 123456
2015, Grade 10
Student I.D. #24068907
Optional Code: #00
Access Code: A02670146P

CollegeBoard / NATIONAL MERIT
SCHOLARSHIP CORPORATION

PSAT/NMSQT®

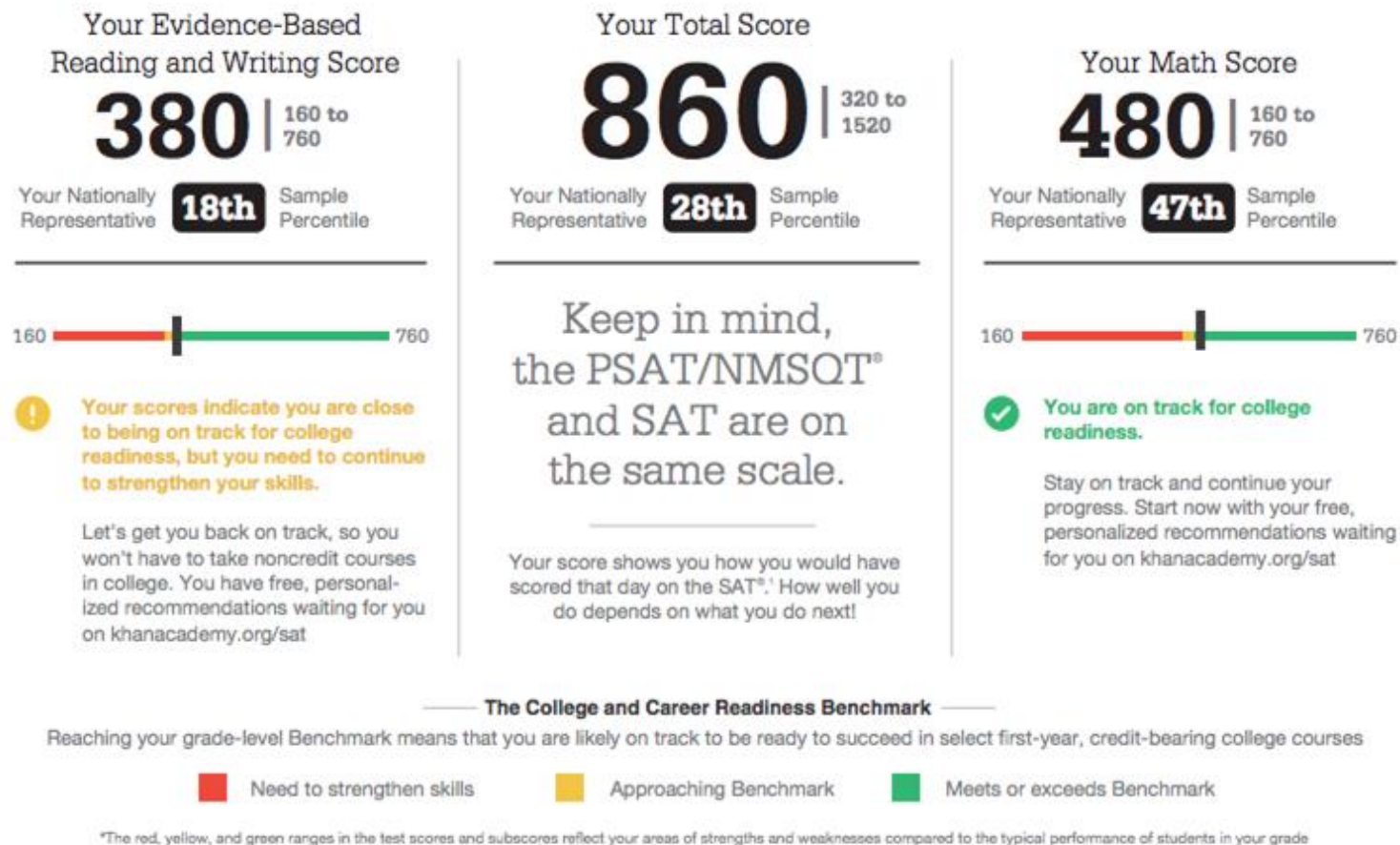
Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test

Your Score Report

Get your full report online
studentscores.collegeboard.org

access code **A02670146P**

PSAT Scores: Total and Section Scores



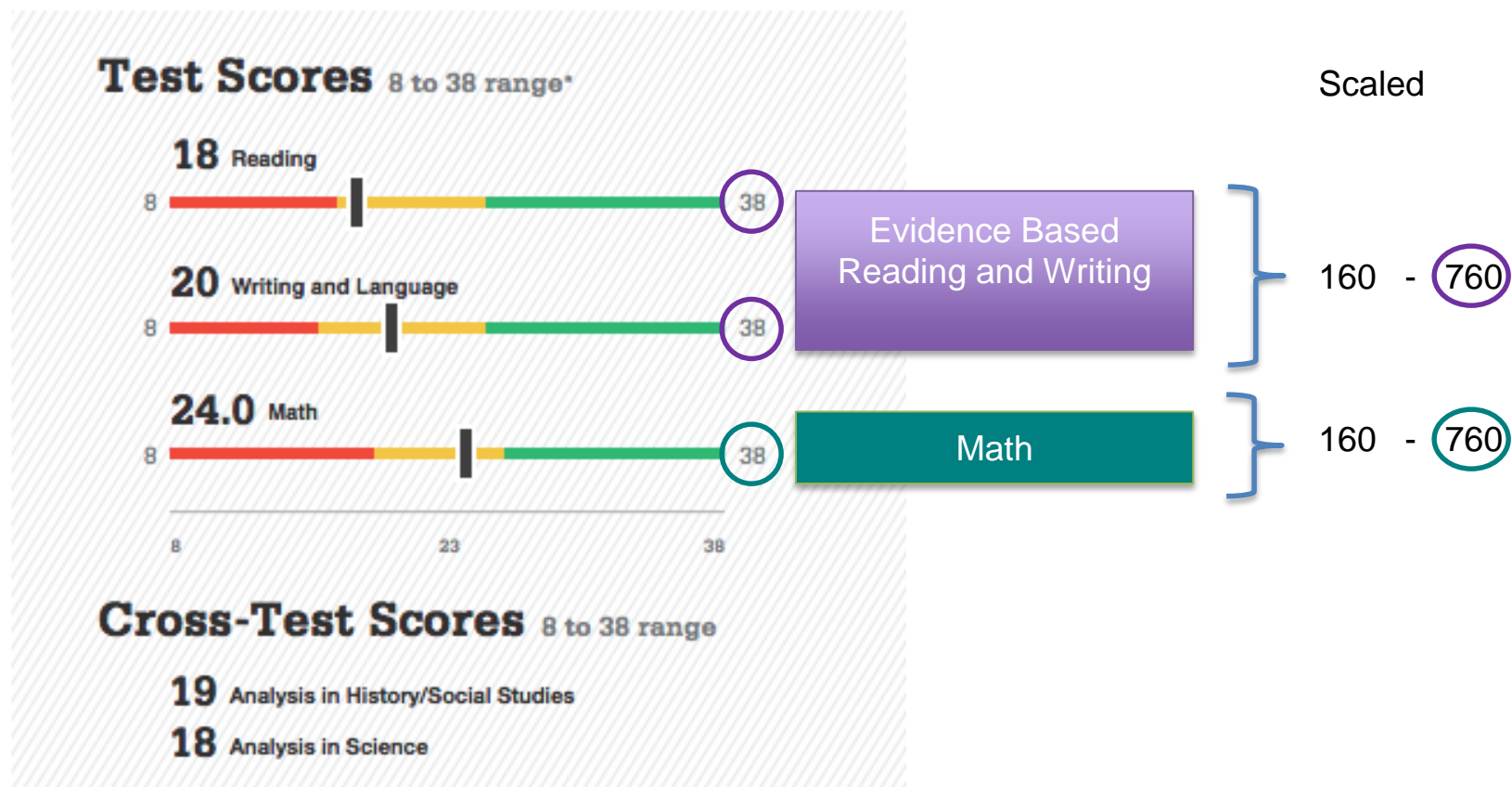
Sample Score Report from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sample-psat-nmsqt-score-report.pdf>

Percentiles



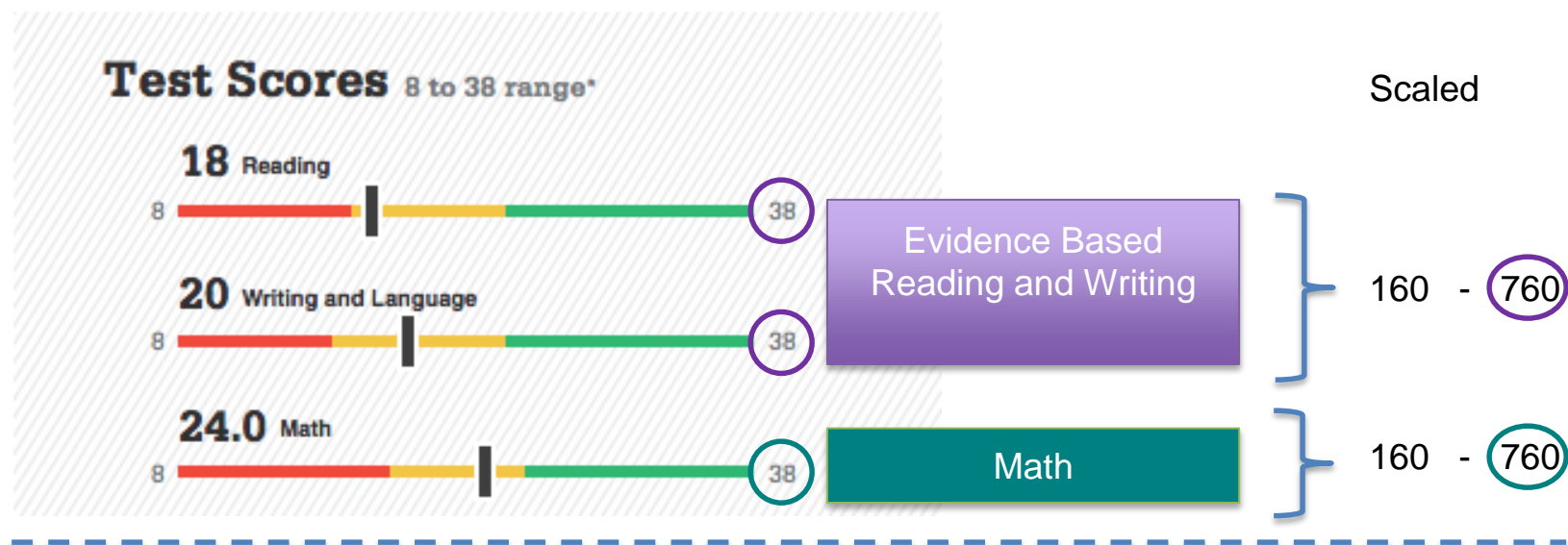
Be mindful of your comparison group. If you are a Junior taking the PSAT/NMSQT, your score will be compared against other juniors'. If you are a freshman taking the PSAT/NMSQT, your performance will also be compared against other juniors'.

Redesigned PSAT Scores: Test and Cross-Test Scores



Sample Score Report from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sample-psat-nmsqt-score-report.pdf>

Scaling Test scores



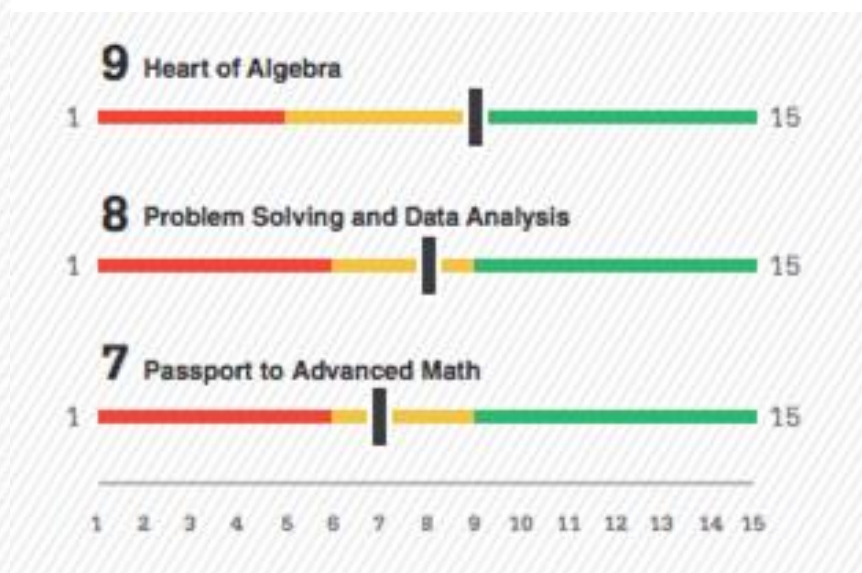
EBRW

$$\begin{matrix} R & W \\ 38 & + & 38 \end{matrix} = 76 * 10 = 760$$

Math

$$\begin{matrix} M \\ 38 \end{matrix} * 2 = 76 * 10 = 760$$

Redesigned PSAT Scores: Subscores



Sample Score Report from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sample-psat-nmsqt-score-report.pdf>

Next Step suggestions



Sample Score Report from <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sample-psat-nmsqt-score-report.pdf>



OVERVIEW OF NATIONAL MERIT

NMSQT

National Merit Overview

- Of the 1.5M+ juniors who take the PSAT/NMSQT in a given year, approximately 50,000 (3.3%) will be identified for National Merit recognition.
- Approximately 16,000 students will be selected as Semifinalists; from those, 15,000 will be selected as Finalists. This represents top 1% of all test-takers nationally.
- The number of Semifinalists from GA is determined based on the percentage of total US High School graduates coming from GA.

National Merit Scholarship Selection Index:

$$\underbrace{(CR}_{38} + \underbrace{W}_{38} + \underbrace{M}_{38}) \times 2$$

The highest index score for the redesigned PSAT is 228: $(38+38+38)*2$

The cutoff score for Georgia last year was 220.



Available at <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/sample-psat-nmsqt-score-report.pdf>

NACAC Admissions Trends Survey 2008: Factors Influencing Admissions decisions

Importance	Considerable	Moderate	Limited	None
Grades in college prep	79.9%	14.4%	2.9%	2.7%
Strength of curriculum	63.8	23.9	8.0	4.3
Admission test scores	58.5	30.9	8.0	2.7
Grades in all courses	51.6	40.1	6.1	2.1
Essay or writing sample	25.8	37.9	19.9	16.4
Class rank	23.4	43.8	23.4	9.4
Demonstrated interest	22.0	30.3	23.9	23.9
Counselor recommendation	21.1	40.4	28.1	10.4
Teacher recommendation	20.8	40.0	28.6	10.5
Interview	10.8	23.7	35.8	29.8
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	6.8	32.2	34.9	26.2
Extracurricular activities	6.5	45.7	32.8	15.1
SAT II scores	6.2	13.8	28.2	51.8
State graduation exam scores	4.4	13.7	28.7	53.3
Work	1.9	24.2	46.8	27.2

Grades and Schedule Strength Come first!

94.3% Schools Assign Considerable to Moderate Importance to Grades

87.7% Schools Assign Considerable to Moderate Importance to Schedule Strength

- Take a challenging course load that will allow you to achieve a strong GPA.
- Don't reach so far that GPA suffers
- Take a challenging curriculum in the context of your school.
- Did you “max out” **your** school's curriculum?

College Essay

63.7% Schools Assign Considerable to Moderate Importance to the Essay

- Single most important essay most students will write in high school
- For students on the margin, essay can be a deciding factor in admissions
- Essay offers the student a chance to come alive as a human being
- A well-crafted essay can turn an admissions reader into a vocal advocate in committee.

Activities

52.2% Schools assign Considerable to Moderate Importance to Extra-Curriculars

- What you do outside of class matters too

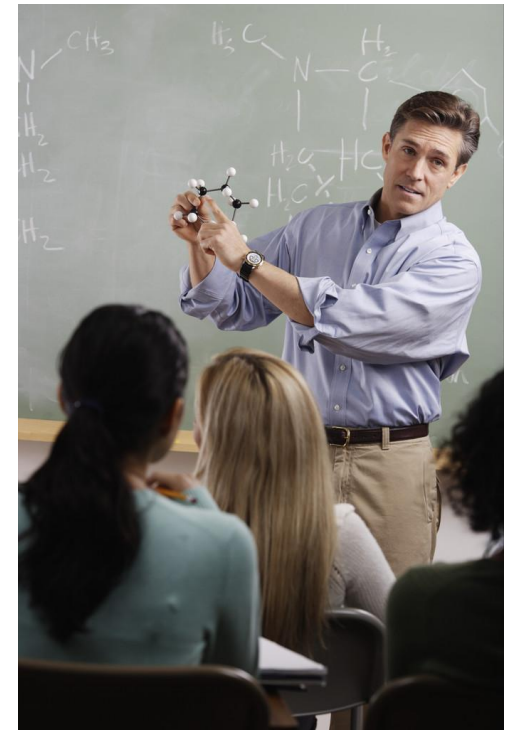


Counselor and Teacher Recs

61.5% Schools assign Considerable to Moderate Importance to Counselor Recs

60.8% Schools assign Considerable to Moderate Importance to Teacher Recs

- Forge those relationships early: personal connection
- Choose teachers who will have your best interest at heart, want to see you succeed, and write well
- Teachers with whom you have a strong relationship- several years can be better



Building your school list

Out of State Schools

Community Colleges

Small Schools



In-State Schools

Colleges that Change
Lives

Ivy League

Large Schools

Applications to the “name” schools have gone nuts

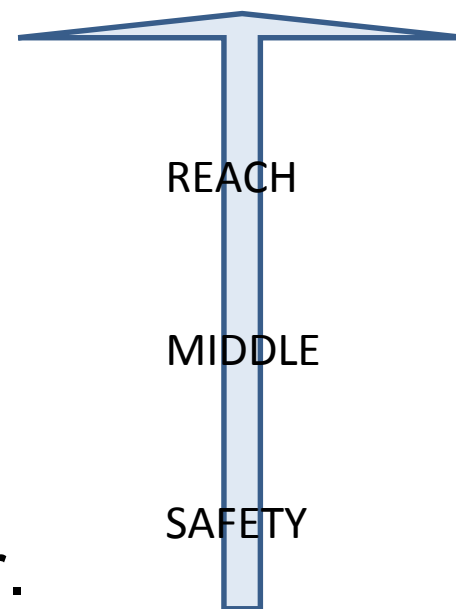
- Class of 2013
- Harvard: 29,112 applications for 2,046 admits (7.0%)
- Princeton: 21,964 apps for 2150 admits (9.8%)
- Yale: 26,000 apps for 1951 admits at (7.5%)



Develop a robust list of schools

Things to consider:

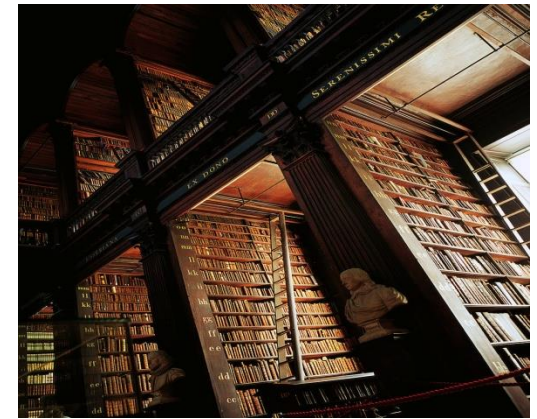
- likelihood of admission
- location
- class size
- student body
- Fit is first. Finance is also a factor.



Be sure to have back-ups.
The name schools are very competitive!

College visits are essential

- Enhances motivation: nothing gets students more invested in the process
- Informs the application (why Tufts?)
- Narrows the list
- Chance for an on-campus interview



How to Apply

- **Early decision**—a binding agreement due Oct/Nov.
- **Early action**—a non-binding agreement. The benefits of early decision with none of the binding obligations.
- **Early admission**—student applies earlier in the year than usual, thus receives his or her results early as well.
- **Rolling admission**— school keeps accepting applications until all slots are filled.
- **Regular decision**— no restrictions
- **Wait list**—to protect schools from not having enough students enroll. If you are accepted from the wait list, schools have to notify you by August 1st.

Jed Said: The Ins and Outs of Early Admissions

Latest test dates that will be counted for applications

- Rolling Admissions (most recent scores)
- Early Decision 1 (October, sometimes November)
- Early Decision 2 (December)
- Regular admissions (December and often January)

Some schools will wait on results
if you let the office of admissions know new
scores are coming.

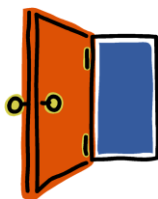
Testing



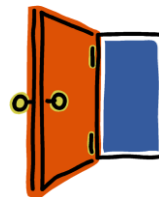
Putting the SAT/ACT in Context

**Greatest return on investment of
time and resources**

H.S. Grades in the
Context of
Schedule
Strength and
Academic
Strength of
School



**SAT
ACT**



Teacher
Recommendations

SAT Subject Tests

Admissions Essay

Activities
(Leadership, Depth)

You walk through these doors one at a time. A super high SAT score cannot make up for a 1.5 GPA. A beautifully written essay will rarely trump an SAT score below a school's minimum range.

Why are these tests so important to admissions?

- Standardized- easy to compare across geographic and demographic lines
- Efficient way to make big cuts
- Moderately useful predictor of success in college



Quick Intro to the Assessments

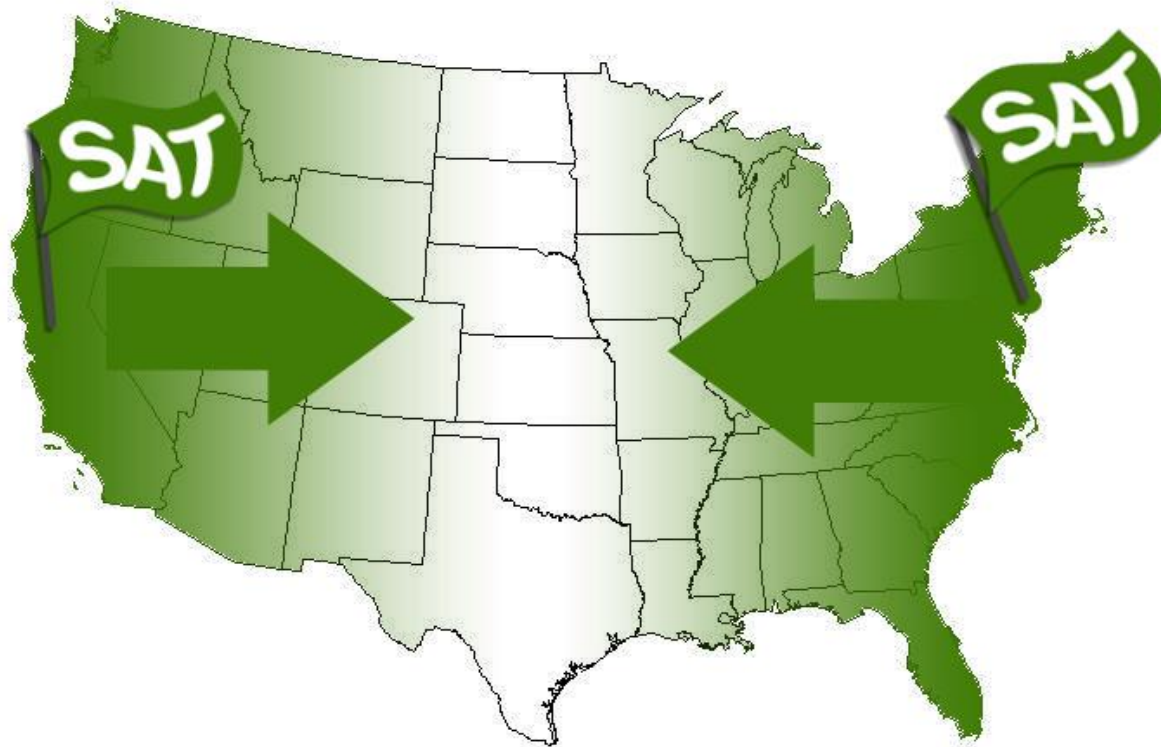


Jed Said: SAT vs. ACT

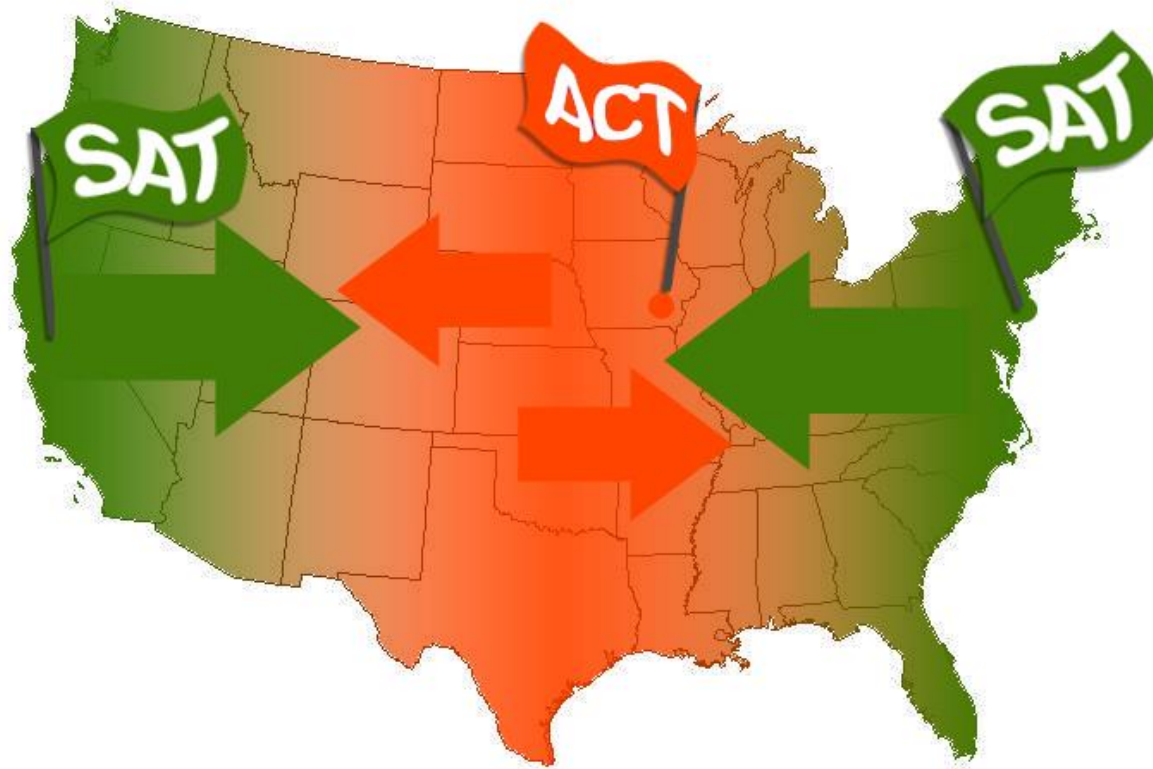
SAT/ACT Geographic Origins

The SAT was first on the scene

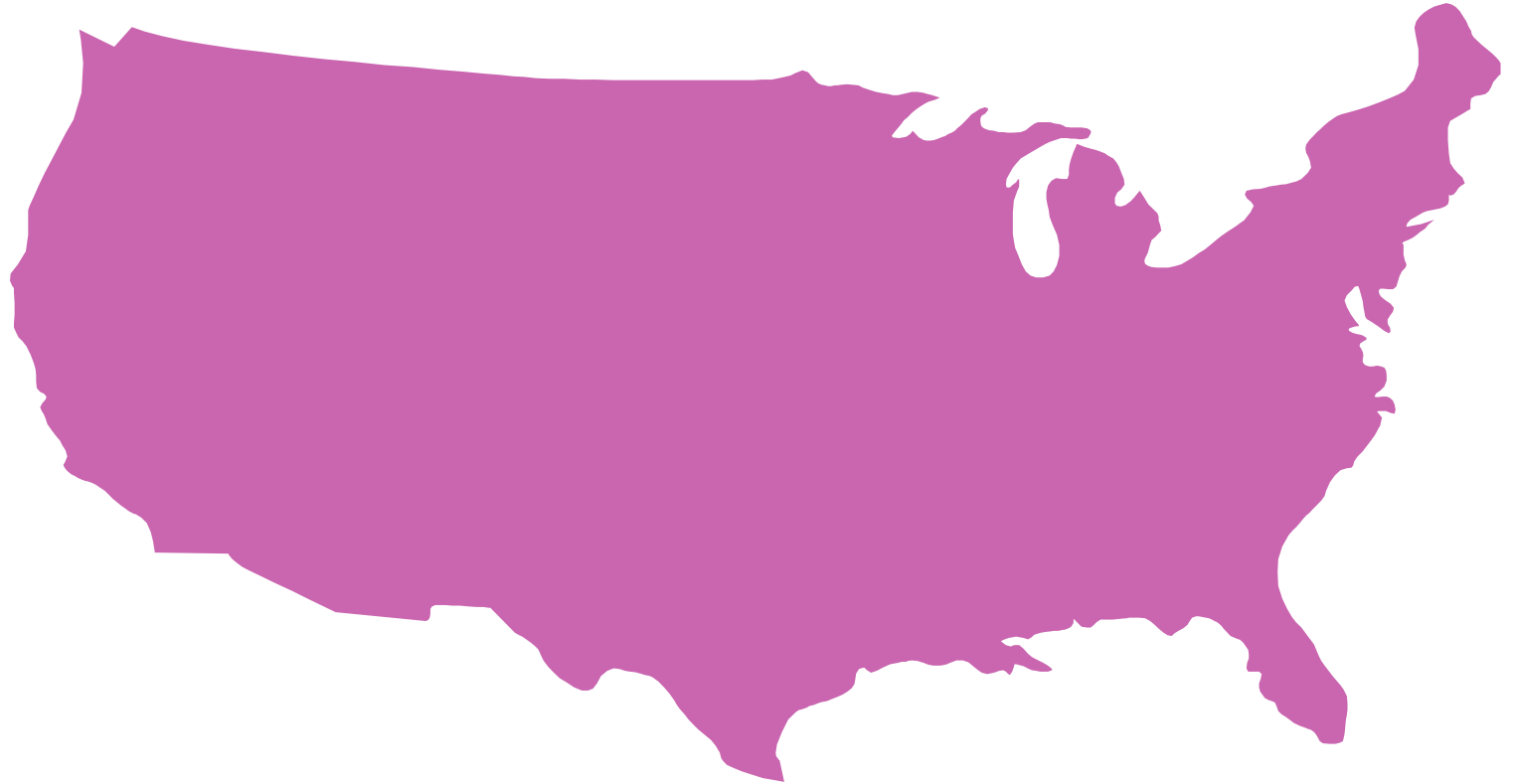
And took over the coasts



The ACT took the heartland



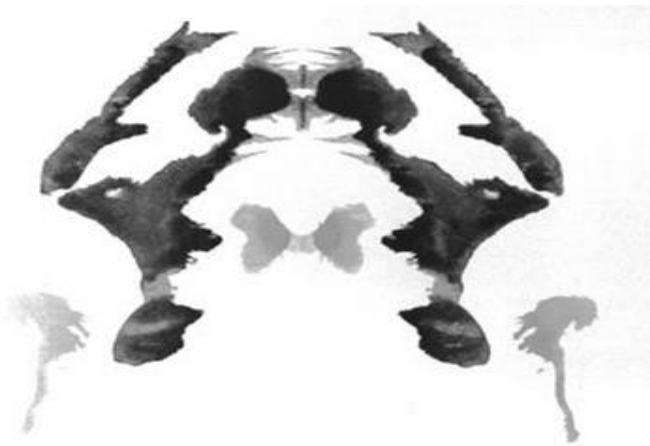
Today the SAT and ACT are universally accepted



Any college will take either the SAT or ACT without prejudice

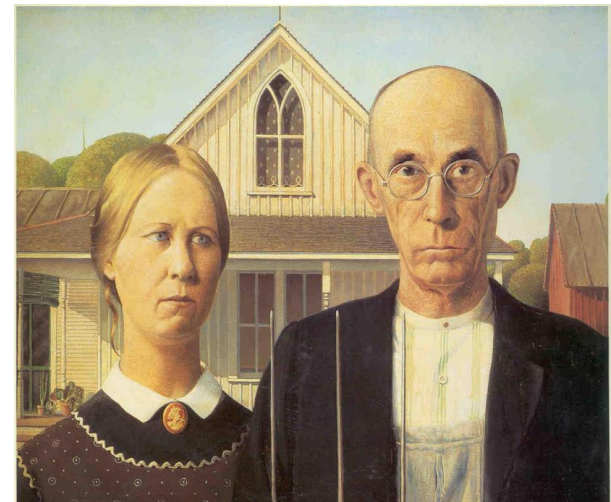
A Quick Anatomy of the Tests

SAT



- More generous with timing
- Science scattered through all sections
- Emphasis on algebra

ACT



- Faster paced
- Separate science section
- Greater spread of math topics, more geometry

Deeper Comparison: Reading

SAT

- Long passages
- Literature, Social Science, Politics/History, Natural Science
- Interpret graphs for 2 science passages
- 2 questions per passage: use textual evidence to support your previous answer

ACT

- Long passages
- Literature, History/Social Studies, Humanities, Natural Science
- Hunt for specific detail: “Where did I read that?”

Deeper Comparison: Math

SAT

- Lots of Algebra I, Algebra II (advanced functions and graphs), Data Analysis
- A bit of Geometry and Trigonometry
- Tests math fluency
- Has no-calculator section
- Wordy real-world analysis problems

ACT

- Lots of Geometry, Algebra I, Algebra II, and Trigonometry
- One-topic questions
- More straightforward question types
- Less time per question

Deeper Comparison: English/Writing

SAT

- Grammar/Rhetoric in the context of a passage
- Similar to the ACT English section with harder passages
- Interpret charts for one or two passages
- More focus on rhetorical elements than ACT

ACT

- Grammar/Rhetoric in the context of a passage
- Similar to SAT Writing with easier passages
- More focus on grammar rules

Deeper Comparison: Timing

SAT

- Much more generous with time, but this allows for deeper-level questions

ACT

- More of a sprint than the SAT
- Rewards fast readers and quick thinkers

Deeper Comparison: Guessing

SAT

- No guess penalty!
Answer every question.

ACT

- No guess penalty!
Answer every question.

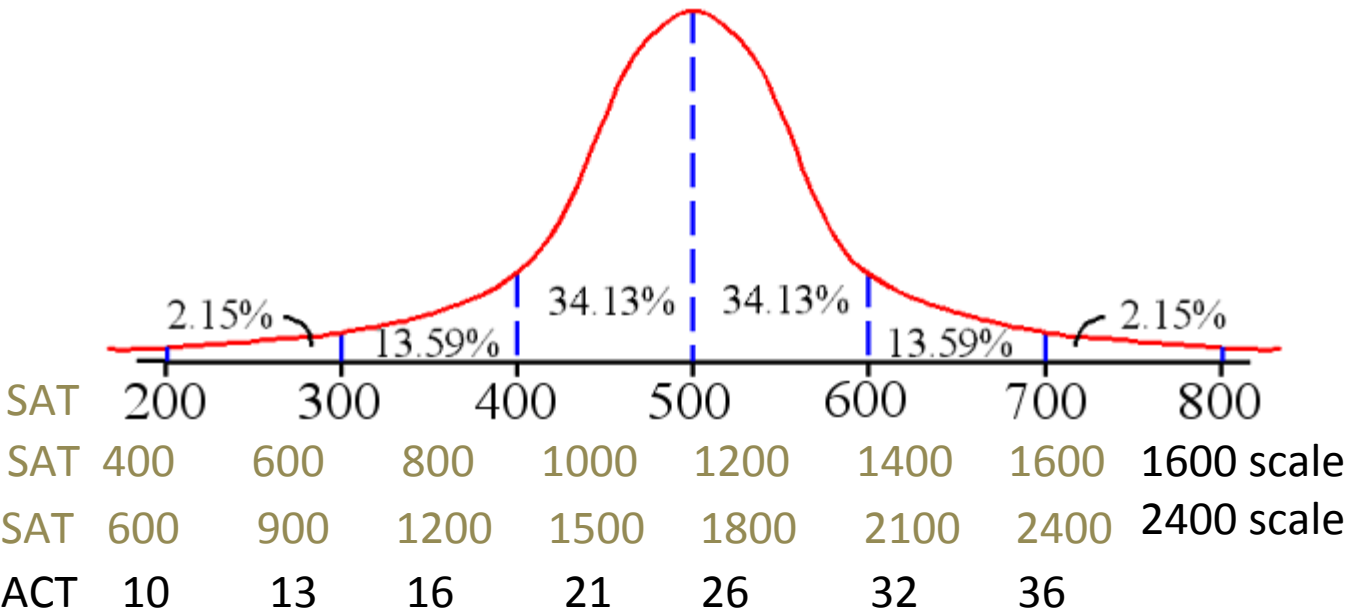
Which Test Should I Try First?

- Both, ideally, to establish dual baselines
- Three-Step Analysis:
 1. Start with your STRENGTH. If none,
 2. Prep to your PREFERENCE. If still none,
 3. Choose the more STABLE test: the ACT.
- Given the uncertainty with the new SAT, you may want to consider taking at least one official SAT and one official ACT as an insurance policy. This does **NOT** mean you should do “test prep” for both tests.

SAT-ACT concordance table

1600 scale

ACT	SAT	ACT	SAT
36	1600	27	1220
35	1580	26	1180
34	1520	25	1140
33	1470	24	1110
32	1420	23	1070
31	1380	22	1030
30	1340	21	990
29	1300	20	950
28	1260	19	910



Key Components of Effective Prep

- Practice
- Adequate time
- Momentum before tests
- Motivation
- Relationship/Alliance (if you choose the tutoring route)

Mock tests: You've got to Practice

Mock tests reveal

- Wrong answer patterns (carelessness)
- Time management
- Mental fatigue
- Guessing efficacy



It's not just about
the content!
The process is 50%.

Allow enough time to Prep

- This is a process!!!!
Not a one-shot deal
- Cram jobs almost never work
- Plan on taking the test 3 times. Ideally twice junior year

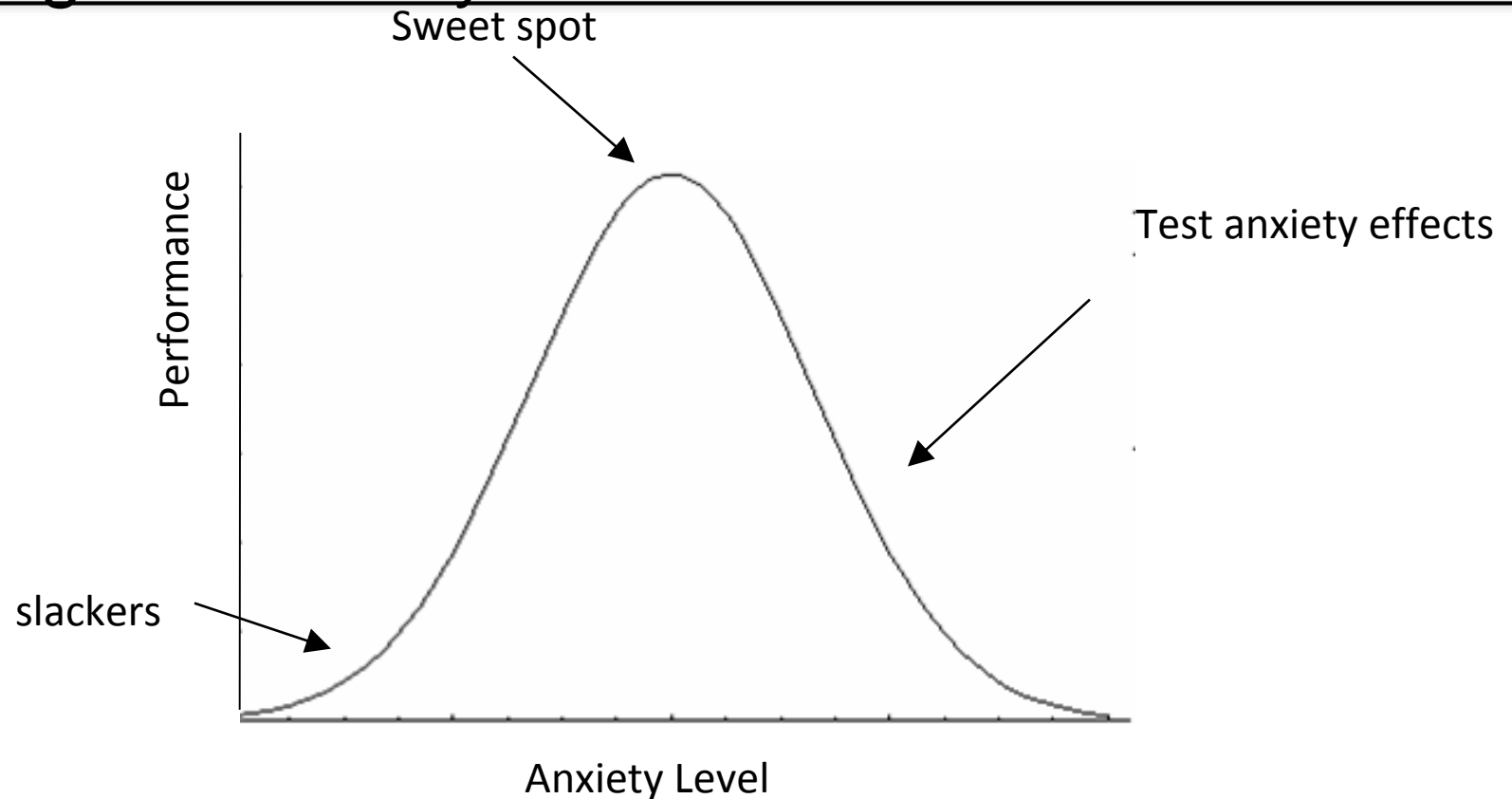


Momentum: Going in strong

- Don't spread this out evenly over the year; kids can and do burn out on testing
- Go hard before the actual tests
- Take a mock test within a month of every real SAT
- Give students breaks and time away from prep



Testing and anxiety



As a tutor, sometimes its my job to generate anxiety in the student, sometime my job is to decrease anxiety.

Motivation

- The SAT needs to be relevant
- College provides the context- makes it real
- Students have to understand how this serves their values



College visits are fundamental for getting students in the mindset of prepping for the SAT. Having a target school, a concrete goal, is often the only thing that creates the motivation needed to prep for the tests. (Especially for guys.)

Create a goal, a number

The screenshot shows the College Board website in a Mozilla Firefox browser. The page displays the profile for the University of Pennsylvania, including its location (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) and College Board code (2926). The 'Test Scores' section provides a comparison of the university's scores against the middle 50% of first-year students and the percentage of students who submitted scores.

	Middle 50% of First-Year Students	Percent Who Submitted Scores
SAT Critical Reading:	650 - 740	97%
SAT Math:	680 - 770	97%
SAT Writing:	650 - 740	97%
ACT Composite:	29 - 33	26%

The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows the Windows Start button, several open applications (Firefox, iTunes, Microsoft Office Word, SAT lecture, Palm Desktop, Parents - Wi...), and the system clock indicating 6:18 PM on Thursday.

Use the College Board.com site to see what the average applicant's scores are and how you measure up.

GA and Regional Schools

25-75% Ranges	CR Range		Math Range		Writing Range		ACT Range	
GA Southern	510	590	510	600			21	24
GSU	490	590	490	590			21	25
UGA	560	660	570	660	560	660	24	29
GA tech	590	690	650	730	580	670	27	31
Emory	640	740	670	760	650	740	30	33
Charleston	570	650	570	650			23	26
Furman	590	690	590	680	590	680	26	30
Clemson	550	640	590	680			25	30
Wake Forest	610	690	630	710			27	31
Duke	660	750	680	790	680	780	29	34

Prep for the SAT Subject Tests

- 3,000 + US colleges, roughly 100 use Subject Tests for admissions
- How many to take: 2. Harvard, Georgetown, Princeton: 3
- Timing: May and June are ideal, aligned with APs
- Some schools accept the ACT as a replacement for the SAT+ SAT subject tests: Yale, Brown, Penn, and Duke
- Math 1: easier questions, harder curve.
Math 2: harder questions, easier curve, ideal post Pre-Cal.
- UC Systems dropped Subject Tests for class of 2012 and beyond.

Score Reporting

- Score Choice: changes nothing
- Cherry Picking scores: rewards multiple iterations
- No prejudice against multiple sittings

What matters is **that** you get the score,
not **how** you get the score

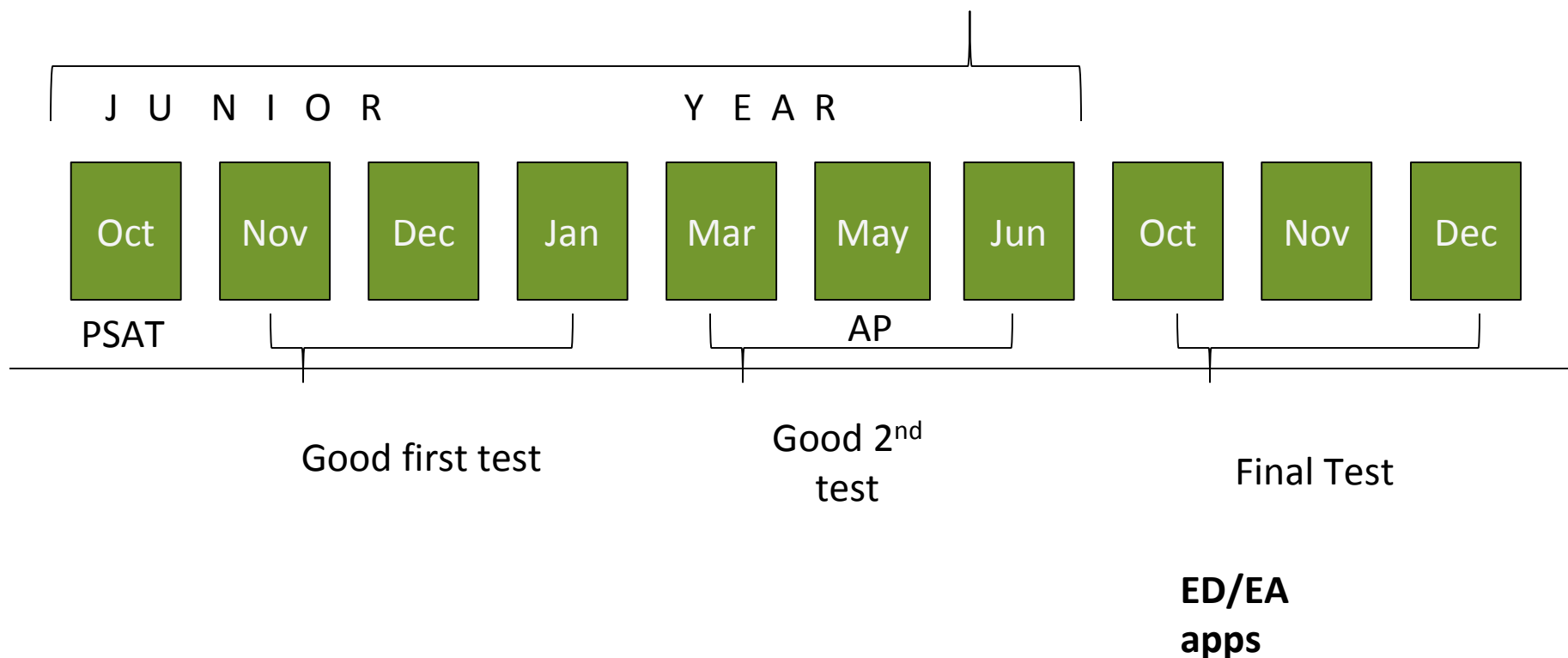
Suggested Timelines

- Doing the right thing at the right time



The ideal time to prep

- Junior Year is the absolute best time to start this process. The earlier the better



JR Year Timeline

- **Summer:** stay involved in extracurricular activities. Show consistency and depth.
- **August:** Take a challenging schedule. Add as many APs as you can realistically handle. Jr. year grades must be solid.
- **October:** PSAT. PSAT prep course if you are a potential National Merit Scholar or want to jumpstart SAT prep.
- **November – January:** Take first SAT or ACT. Prepare 8 to 12 weeks prior to scheduled test date.

JR Year Timeline continued

- **January - February:** Register for spring AP exams.
- **December - May:** Explore financial aid/ scholarships/ grants for college.
- **May – June:** APs, SAT subject tests, ACT, SAT: prep courses as needed.
- **June - August**
 - ☐ Make a college list and collect applications
 - ☐ Begin applications/essays
 - ☐ Set up interviews and college visits

Senior Year Timeline

- **Summer:** Stay involved in extracurricular activities.
- **August:** Strong academic schedule. APs are ideal. Keep grades solid.
- **September-November**
 - ☐ SAT/ACT final push if needed
 - ☐ Meet with your guidance counselor for application advice
 - ☐ Finish early applications

October: ED deadlines

SR Year Timeline continued

- **November - December:** Complete remaining applications.
- **December:** ED responses arrive
- **March- April:** Responses from colleges
- **May:** Deposits due
- **June:** Graduate and send final transcript to your school of choice!

Our Services

- SAT & ACT prep (online, private, group)
- SAT Subject and AP prep
- HS subject assistance
- Study Skills
- Essay Writing support/coaching



applerouth

Additional Resources

Websites

- AdmissionsAdvice.com
- CollegeConfidential.com

Educational Consultants

- provide personalized attention and support with the college selection and application process

Books to read

- The Thinking Parent's Guide To College Admissions: Ostrum
- The Gatekeepers: Steinberg

www.applerouth.com



Questions?
