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## SESSION 3: GOING TO COLLEGE STARTS NOW: CURRICULUM AND TESTING

## ACTIVITY # 2: STANDARDIZED TESTING

### *Opening Discussion:*

Since standardized testing is required for admission to many colleges and is used to qualify for many scholarships, all students should be sure to take the SAT and/or ACT at least once. Preparation is recommended for both tests and both companies offer free materials to help with that preparation (online information is available through [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) and [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) or through bulletins available in the counseling office). The more a student reads and the more s/he is familiar with the test, the better the results will be. Many students will have the ability to take the PLAN and/or PSAT through their schools and should take advantage of that opportunity. The ACT also offers Explore, a college readiness test aimed at eighth and ninth grade students.

### *Activity/Handout:*

#### **Standardized Tests**

### *Instructions:*

1. Ask the students to look over the Standardized Tests handout and write down any questions they might have.
2. Once they have each had an opportunity to read and think about the handout, ask them to share their questions.
3. If there is a computer available, show the students the College Board and ACT sites and particularly the site for registering for the SAT and ACT.
4. If you don't have computer access, then try to print out the College Board and ACT "homepages" to show students what they look like.

## STANDARDIZED TESTS

Their names can sometimes sound like alphabet soup, but the standardized tests you will take in high school are important for college. Some schools require different tests, so you want to make sure to check with each one about their requirements. Here are the four main tests you may have to take if you want to apply to most colleges:

### ACT TESTS

#### EXPLORE

The Explore helps students in eighth and ninth grades to plan their high school careers. The test will help to discover appropriate high school courses, prepare for the ACT or find a career direction.

##### ***When do I take the test?***

The EXPLORE is taken in eighth and ninth grades.

##### ***How do I register?***

The EXPLORE is usually administered by your school district. See your school counselor for more information or go to [www.actstudent.org/explore](http://www.actstudent.org/explore).

##### ***What is the test's structure?***

The EXPLORE consists of four 30-minute sections of English, math, reading, and science.

#### PLAN

The PLAN is the pre-ACT test taken to help students estimate how well they will do on the ACT and, in some cases, can have bearing on scholarship. It is a comprehensive guidance resource that helps students measure their current academic development, explore career/training options, and make plans for the remaining years of high school and post-graduation years.

##### ***When do I take the test?***

The PLAN is taken during the 10th grade.

##### ***How do I register?***

The PLAN is usually administered by high schools. See your school counselor for more information or go to [www.actstudent.org/plan](http://www.actstudent.org/plan).

##### ***What is the test's structure?***

PLAN is a four part multiple-choice test structured very similarly to the ACT with sections covering English, mathematics, reading and science.

For more information about Aspire—ACT's new test to be launched in 2016—talk to your high school counselor or visit [www.discoveractaspire.org](http://www.discoveractaspire.org).



## **ACT**

This standardized test is designed to assess high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work. It often is used for college admission decisions, and all US colleges and universities accept ACT results. The ACT can also be used to determine NCAA eligibility.

### ***When do I take the test?***

The ACT is offered usually six times during a given school year. Students generally take the test first during the spring of their junior year. It is usually best to take it junior year, as you may want to take the test again to get your best score possible.

### ***When and how do I register?***

Register online at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) or pick up a registration packet at your high school. Be mindful of the registration deadlines for each test, as they are generally one month in advance, but it is suggested that you register at least six weeks prior to the test. Fee waivers are available for students who qualify for financial assistance, so inquire with your high school counselor.

### ***What is the test's structure?***

The ACT consists of four multiple-choice tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science, as well as an optional writing test.

### ***How is it scored?***

Each subject is scored 1-36 for a composite score, the highest being a 36 overall. The writing test is scored 2-6 with two different readers, resulting in a highest potential score of 12.

All pertinent ACT testing date information, fee information, registration information and all other questions can be answered by visiting [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org).

## *College Board/SAT Tests*

## **PSAT**

The PSAT (Preliminary SAT) is a two-part, exam that is very similar to the SAT. Not to be taken lightly, the PSAT is generally the first indicator colleges and universities use for scholarship purposes and placement.

### ***When do I take the test?***

Most people take the PSAT in the fall of their junior year in high school. In addition, some students choose to take it during their sophomore year, which is strongly encouraged. However, scores on the PSAT during your junior year are used to determine National Merit Scholars who qualify for merit-based scholarships distributed throughout the United States

### ***How do I register?***

You must sign up for the PSAT at your high school. The PSAT is administered during October of every school year. There is a fee associated with taking the PSAT, but there are fee waiver opportunities for certain students and some schools pay for their students to take the test.

### ***What is the test's structure?***

The PSAT consists of two 25-minute verbal sections, two 25-minute math sections, and one 30-minute writing skills section.



## SAT

The SAT is one of two standardized tests used by colleges as part of their admission requirements. The SAT I measures verbal, written, and math reasoning skills and is used for admission at most colleges. The SAT is often used to determine eligibility for scholarships and is required by the NCAA for those athletes who hope to compete in college.

The SAT Subject Tests (formerly SAT II) consist of more than 20 subject areas and are achievement tests designed to measure subject-area knowledge. Many colleges use the Subject Tests for admission, for course placement, and to advise students about course selection, but only some require them.

### ***When do I take the test?***

The SAT and Subject Tests are administered every October, November, December, February, March, May and June of each school year. Most students take the SAT during the second semester of their junior year and/or the first semester of the senior year. The best rule of thumb with the SAT is the earlier and more often the better.

### ***When and how do I register?***

A registration packet should be available at your high school, but you may also register online at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org). Keep in mind the registration deadlines for each test, as they are generally one month in advance, but it is suggested that you register at least six weeks prior to the test. While there are costs associated with taking the test, students who require financial assistance may qualify for fee waivers. (<http://collegeboard.org/register/sat-fee-waivers>)

### ***What's the test's structure?***

The SAT is three hour and 45 minute test with ten sections consisting of critical reading, math, writing, and one experimental section which is masked to look like a regular section. Extended time and other accommodations are available for students who qualify. For more information, see your school counselor.

### ***How is it scored?***

Scores on each section range from 200-800 points. The scores from each section are combined, and the highest possible combined score is 2400.

All pertinent SAT testing date information, fee information, registration information and all other questions can be answered by visiting [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org).

### ***Other tests***

The Test of English As a Second Language (TOEFL) tests your ability to communicate in English and is a test for students for whom English is not a first language. The test measures skills in reading, listening, speaking and writing in English and requires you to combine two or more of these skills to respond to a question. It is usually an internet based exam given in designated test centers by appointment. Paper based tests are only offered in remote areas. For more information, see your school counselor or go to [www.ets.org/toefl](http://www.ets.org/toefl).

**SPECIAL NOTE:** Not all colleges require standardized testing although they often do require additional essays and or recommendations. For a list of those colleges, go to [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org).