

K12 ACADEMICS — A FIELD GUIDE FOR FAMILIES

The Complete Guide to Test Prep

The tests students face — SAT, ACT, AP, GRE, licensure & more —
format, scoring & how to prepare.



Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT K12 ACADEMICS

The world's largest education resource.

Online since 2004, K12 Academics has helped millions of families, students and educators **find the right school, college, camp, business and program in their community** — a search engine, a community, and a resource in one.

21+

Years online, since 2004

200+

Directories, national & global

30M+

People reached each year

185

Countries reached monthly

TRUSTED & REFERENCED NATIONWIDE

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College Admissions

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The SAT

WHAT IT IS

The SAT is a standardized college-admissions test from the College Board, accepted by virtually every U.S. college and many international universities. Since March 2024 it is fully digital for U.S. test-takers — taken on a laptop or tablet through the Bluebook app at a test center. It measures reading, writing, and math skills built up...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

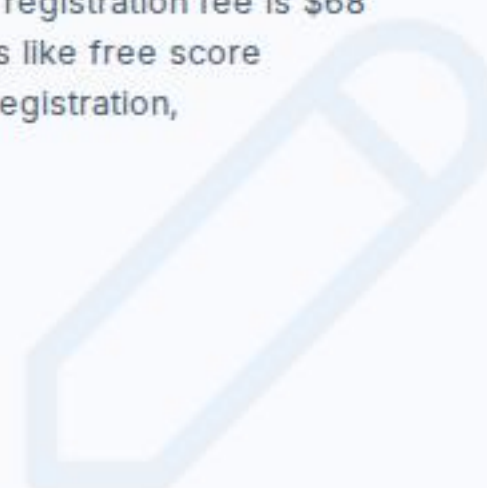
- ✓ **Reading & Writing** — 54 questions, 64 minutes — short passages testing information & ideas, craft & structure, expression of ideas, and standard English conventions
- ✓ **Math** — 44 questions, 70 minutes — algebra, advanced math, problem-solving & data analysis, and geometry & trigonometry; a built-in Desmos graphing...

HOW IT'S SCORED

The SAT is scored on the familiar 400–1600 scale — Reading & Writing 200–800 plus Math 200–800, added together. There is no passing score; a "good" score depends entirely on the colleges, scholarships, and programs you're targeting (compare your score to each college's published middle-50% range). Because the test is module-adaptive...

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through your free College Board account at satsuite.collegeboard.org. The U.S. registration fee is \$68 for the 2025–26 cycle; fee waivers cover the cost for eligible students (and add benefits like free score sends). International testing carries an added surcharge. Watch for extra line items: late registration, date/center...



AT A GLANCE

Type	College admissions
Format	Digital, adaptive
Length	2 hr 14 min
Sections	Reading & Writing · Math
Score range	400–1600
Cost (US)	\$68 (fee waivers)

TEST DATES & TIMING

The SAT is offered on seven U.S. dates a year — typically August, October, November, December, March, May, and June (Saturdays), plus separate school-day administrations some schools run. Registration usually opens a couple of months ahead and closes about 4–5 weeks before the date (late registration costs extra). Timing tip: most...

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Bluebook practice tests** — Full-length, official adaptive practice in the real app — the closest thing to test day
- ✓ **Khan Academy · Official SAT Practice** — Free, personalized practice keyed to your weak areas (a College Board partnership)
- ✓ **A diagnostic first** — Take one full practice test early to set a baseline and a target
- ✓ **A realistic plan** — Steady practice over 1–3 months beats last-minute cramming; focus on your lowest-scoring skills

HOW SCORES ARE USED

Colleges use the SAT alongside GPA, coursework rigor, essays, and activities. Many schools are now test-optional (you choose whether to submit) — but a strong score can still help admission, placement, and merit scholarships, and some public systems and programs still expect it. Most colleges superscore (combine your

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The ACT

WHAT IT IS

The ACT is a standardized college-admissions test accepted by every U.S. college, on the same footing as the SAT. In 2025 it was overhauled into the "Enhanced ACT" — the biggest change in its history: shorter, with more time per question, and with the Science section now optional . Unlike the digital SAT, the ACT is linear (not adaptive)...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **English** — 50 questions, 35 minutes — grammar, usage, and rhetoric with shorter passages
- ✓ **Math** — 45 questions, ~50 minutes — algebra through some precalculus; now four answer choices instead of five
- ✓ **Reading** — 36 questions, 40 minutes — comprehension across shorter passages
- ✓ **Science (optional)** — 40 questions, 40 minutes — data interpretation and scientific reasoning; scored separately
- ✓ **Writing (optional)** — One essay — scored separately, unchanged

HOW IT'S SCORED

Every section is scored 1–36 . The key 2025 change: the Composite score (1–36) is now the average of English, Math, and Reading only . If you take Science , you get a separate Science score plus a STEM score (average of Math and Science); Writing is also reported separately. Scores typically arrive in 2–8 weeks . As with the SAT, there's...



AT A GLANCE

Type	College admissions
Format	Digital or paper, linear
Core length	~2 hours
Core sections	English · Math · Reading
Optional	Science · Writing
Score range	1–36

REGISTRATION & COST

Register at act.org with a free MyACT account. The fee varies with the options you choose — a lower price for the core test, more if you add Science and/or Writing (ACT lowered the base cost as part of the overhaul; verify the current fee). Fee waivers are available for eligible U.S. students. Choose your format (digital or paper), test...

TEST DATES & TIMING

The ACT is offered on seven national dates a year (typically September, October, December, February, April, June, and July), plus state and district school-day administrations (which moved to the Enhanced format in spring 2026). Registration deadlines fall about 4–5 weeks before each date, with late registration for an added fee. Timing...

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **ACT's official practice** — Free official questions and full practice tests in the Enhanced format (older materials use the retired 215-question test — use updated ones)
- ✓ **Diagnostic with and without Science** — Take a full practice test both ways to see whether adding Science helps or hurts your day
- ✓ **Target the shorter timing** — Practice at the new, faster pace so test day feels familiar
- ✓ **Focus your weakest core section** — The Composite rides on English, Math, and Reading — shore those up first

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PSAT/NMSQT

WHAT IT IS

The PSAT/NMSQT (Preliminary SAT / National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test) is a digital practice run for the SAT that doubles as the entry point to the National Merit Scholarship Program . It's usually taken in October of junior year through your school. It doesn't count for college admission — instead it gives you a realistic SAT...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **Reading & Writing** — Two adaptive modules — the same skills as the SAT
- ✓ **Math** — Two adaptive modules with the built-in Desmos calculator

HOW IT'S SCORED

The PSAT/NMSQT is scored on a 320–1520 scale (slightly below the SAT's 1600 because it's a bit easier), with each section 160–760. Juniors' scores also produce a Selection Index used for National Merit. You get a detailed report showing exactly which skills to work on before the real SAT.

REGISTRATION & COST

You generally don't register yourself — your high school administers the PSAT/NMSQT and handles sign-up, usually in the fall. The fee is modest (around \$18) and many schools cover it ; ask your counselor about your school's test date and any cost. (PSAT 8/9 and PSAT 10 are likewise school-administered.)



AT A GLANCE

Type	Practice + scholarship
Format	Digital, adaptive
Length	~2 hr 14 min
Sections	Reading & Writing · Math
Score range	320–1520
When	October (mostly grade 11)

TEST DATES & TIMING

The PSAT/NMSQT is given on a set of dates in October (a primary and alternate window) chosen by each school. If you want to qualify for National Merit, you must take it in 11th grade — taking it earlier (10th grade) is great practice but doesn't enter you for the scholarship.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Khan Academy Official SAT Practice** — Free, personalized — preps you for both the PSAT and SAT
- ✓ **Bluebook practice** — Rehearse the exact digital app and adaptive experience
- ✓ **Treat it as a real preview** — Even a little practice beforehand makes the report — and your first SAT — far more useful

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Take it seriously as a junior** — Your 11th-grade score is what counts for National Merit
- ✓ **Use the score report** — It pinpoints the exact skills to target before the SAT
- ✓ **Practice the digital tools** — Get comfortable with Bluebook and Desmos ahead of time
- ✓ **Guess on everything** — No penalty for wrong answers

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College Credit & Advanced

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AP Exams

WHAT IT IS

Advanced Placement (AP) is a College Board program of college-level courses and exams taken in high school. Score well on the May AP Exam and you can earn college credit or advanced placement — potentially skipping intro courses and saving tuition. There are 38+ AP subjects , from Calculus and Biology to U.S. History, English, Computer...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

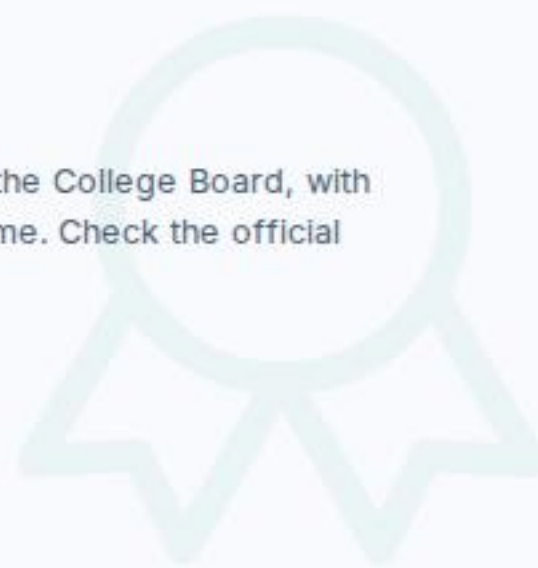
- ✓ **Multiple choice** — Tests content knowledge across the course
- ✓ **Free response** — Essays, problem sets, document-based questions, or performance tasks, depending on the subject

HOW IT'S SCORED

- ✓ **5** — Extremely well qualified
- ✓ **4** — Well qualified
- ✓ **3** — Qualified — the common threshold for credit
- ✓ **2** — Possibly qualified
- ✓ **1** — No recommendation

TEST DATES & TIMING

AP Exams are given over about two weeks in May , on a fixed national schedule set by the College Board, with a late-testing window for conflicts or emergencies. Each subject has its own date and time. Check the official AP calendar each year.



AT A GLANCE

Type	College credit
Provider	College Board
When	May (2 weeks)
Score range	1–5
Length	2–3 hours each
Cost (US)	~\$99 per exam

REGISTRATION & COST

You usually register through your school (via your AP class and the College Board's My AP), with a fall deadline. The U.S. exam fee is about \$99 per exam (higher for some, different outside the U.S.); fee reductions are available for eligible students, and many schools or states subsidize the cost. Homeschooled and self-studying...

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **AP Classroom** — Official practice questions, progress checks, and topic videos through My AP
- ✓ **Released free-response questions** — Past prompts and scoring guidelines on the College Board site — excellent practice
- ✓ **Review books & the textbook** — For targeted review in the weeks before May
- ✓ **Practice the format** — Time yourself on full sections, especially free-response

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Know each college's AP credit policy** — Aim for the score your target schools actually award credit for (often 3, sometimes 4–5)
- ✓ **Master the free-response** — It's where many points — and score differences — live; study the rubrics
- ✓ **Pace multiple choice** — Answer everything; there's no guessing penalty

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CLEP

WHAT IT IS

CLEP (the College-Level Examination Program, from the College Board) lets you earn college credit by passing an exam — no course required. There are 34 CLEP exams across subjects like College Composition, College Algebra, Biology, U.S. History, Psychology, and Spanish. It's a fast, low-cost way to skip intro courses and shorten time to a...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

Each CLEP exam is computer-based, about 90–120 minutes , mostly multiple choice (a few, like College Composition, include an essay). You take it at a test center or via remote proctoring. Each exam maps to a common introductory college course.

HOW IT'S SCORED

CLEP scores range 20–80 . The American Council on Education recommends a score of 50 for credit, but each college sets its own policy — the score it requires, which exams it accepts, and how many credits it awards. Always check your target college's CLEP policy first.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through the College Board CLEP site. The exam fee is about \$95 , plus a possible test-center administration fee; military members and veterans can often take CLEP free through DANTES. Have your scores sent to your college.



AT A GLANCE

Type	College credit by exam
Provider	College Board
Exams	34 subjects
Length	~90–120 min each
Score	20–80 (50 = credit, typical)
Cost (US)	~\$95 per exam

TEST DATES & TIMING

CLEP exams are offered year-round , on demand, at test centers and via remote proctoring. Take one whenever you're ready — there's a waiting period before retaking the same exam.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Know your college's policy first** — Confirm the exam is accepted and the score/credits it grants before you study
- ✓ **Official CLEP study guides** — The College Board publishes exam descriptions and practice questions
- ✓ **Free and low-cost prep** — Modern States' free courses can even cover the exam fee for some learners
- ✓ **Self-study the course content** — Each CLEP mirrors an intro college course

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Target exams your college accepts** — Don't pay for credit your school won't take
- ✓ **Aim above the minimum** — Some schools require more than 50
- ✓ **No wrong-answer penalty** — Answer every question
- ✓ **Stack credits strategically** — A few well-chosen CLEPs can knock out a semester

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IB Programme

WHAT IT IS

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is a globally recognized curriculum offered at IB World Schools . It runs across four programmes by age, and its famous Diploma Programme (DP) — a rigorous two-year course for grades 11–12 — is respected by universities worldwide. It emphasizes depth, critical thinking, writing, and...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

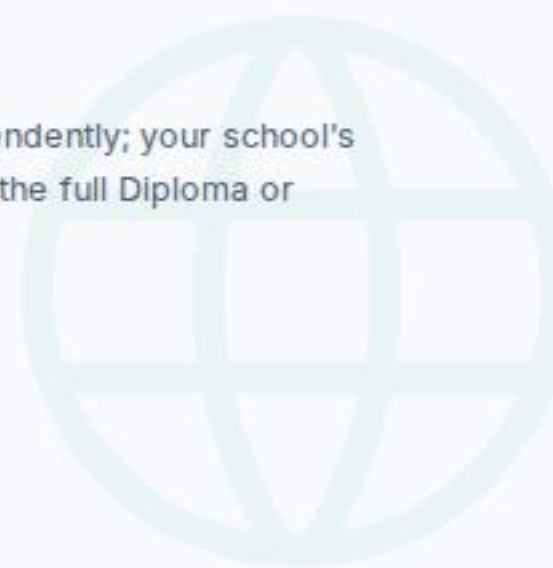
- ✓ **Primary Years Programme (PYP)** — Ages 3–12 — inquiry-based learning
- ✓ **Middle Years Programme (MYP)** — Ages 11–16 — a broad, connected curriculum
- ✓ **Diploma Programme (DP)** — Ages 16–19 — the two-year, exam-based diploma: six subjects (one from each group — language & literature, language acquisition, individuals &...)
- ✓ **Career-related Programme (CP)** — Ages 16–19 — DP courses combined with career-focused study

HOW IT'S SCORED

In the Diploma Programme , each of the six subjects is graded 1–7 (7 highest), for up to 42 points. The core (TOK + Extended Essay) adds up to 3 bonus points via a matrix, for a maximum total of 45 . To earn the full IB Diploma, a student needs at least 24 points plus other conditions (completing CAS, meeting minimums across HL/SL, and...

REGISTRATION & COST

Students take the IB through an authorized IB World School — you don't register independently; your school's DP coordinator handles exam registration and fees. Check whether your school offers the full Diploma or individual courses.



AT A GLANCE

Type	International curriculum & exa...
Provider	IB Organization
Programmes	PYP · MYP · DP · CP
Diploma (DP)	Ages 16–19 (gr 11–12)
Subjects	6 groups + core (TOK, EE, CAS)
Score	Out of 45 (24 to pass)

TEST DATES & TIMING

DP exams are held in two sessions a year — May (mainly Northern Hemisphere schools) and November (mainly Southern Hemisphere). Internal assessments and coursework are completed across the two years.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Lean on your teachers and coordinator** — The DP is coursework-driven — steady work across two years matters most
- ✓ **Start the Extended Essay early** — It's a major independent research paper — don't leave it late
- ✓ **Balance HL and SL load** — Manage the workload across six subjects plus the core
- ✓ **Use official IB resources** — Subject guides and past-paper practice from your school

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Track all the passing conditions** — Not just the 24-point total — CAS, HL/SL minimums, and TOK/EE all matter
- ✓ **Pick HL subjects to your strengths (and university plans)** — Some programs want specific HL subjects
- ✓ **Don't neglect the core** — TOK and the EE can swing up to 3 points — and can fail a diploma
- ✓ **Plan community service (CAS)** — It's required, and in some places tied to scholarships

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Cambridge / AICE

WHAT IT IS

Cambridge (Cambridge Assessment International Education, part of the University of Cambridge) offers an internationally recognized PreK–12 curriculum and exam pathway used at Cambridge and international schools. Its best-known qualifications are the IGCSE (mid-secondary), AS & A Levels (advanced), and the AICE Diploma — a group award...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **Cambridge Primary & Lower Secondary** — With Checkpoint diagnostic tests at the end of each stage
- ✓ **IGCSE** — The International General Certificate of Secondary Education — ages 14–16 (grades 9–10), taken subject by subject
- ✓ **Cambridge International AS & A Levels** — Advanced, college-level courses — ages 16–19 (grades 11–12); AS = one year/credit, A Level = two years/credits
- ✓ **AICE Diploma** — The Advanced International Certificate of Education — a group diploma earned by passing 7 credits across three areas (Math & Science; Languages; Arts...

HOW IT'S SCORED

Cambridge grades are subject-by-subject: IGCSE is graded A*–G (some subjects use 9–1); AS Level is graded a–e (one credit) and A Level is graded A*–E (two credits). A passing grade of E or higher can earn college credit at many U.S. universities. The AICE Diploma is awarded for accumulating the required 7 credits across the three areas...

TEST DATES & TIMING

Cambridge exams are offered in two main series a year — June and November . AICE Diploma candidates accumulate results across sessions within a 25-month period , entering for the diploma in the final series.

AT A GLANCE

Type	International curriculum & exam
Provider	Cambridge (CAIE)
Pathway	Primary → IGCSE → AS/A Level
IGCSE	Ages 14–16 (gr 9–10)
AS/A Level	Ages 16–19 (gr 11–12)
AICE Diploma	Group award from AS/A Levels

REGISTRATION & COST

Students take Cambridge through a registered Cambridge International School ; your school handles exam registration and fees. In the U.S., families can send official Cambridge/AICE grade transcripts to colleges through Cambridge's services.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Work steadily through the courses** — Cambridge is course-based — consistent study across the year matters
- ✓ **Use past papers** — Cambridge publishes past papers and mark schemes — the best practice
- ✓ **Plan the AICE credit mix early** — Map your subjects across the three areas plus the core to reach 7 credits in time
- ✓ **Lean on your school's Cambridge coordinator** — They manage entries and timelines

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Choose subjects strategically** — Balance the three AICE areas and your university plans; A Levels count double
- ✓ **Aim above the passing grade** — Higher grades earn more credit and stronger applications
- ✓ **Watch the 25-month AICE window** — Sequence your exam series so all credits count

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The CLT

WHAT IT IS

The CLT (Classic Learning Test, launched 2015) is a college-admissions exam positioned as an alternative to the SAT and ACT, grounded in classical, liberal-arts education — its reading passages draw on classic authors and thinkers. It's accepted by 300+ colleges (many private, liberal-arts, and faith-based), and in 2023 Florida became...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

The CLT has three sections — Verbal Reasoning, Grammar & Writing, and Quantitative Reasoning — and runs about two hours . Verbal is passage-based; Grammar/Writing tests editing; Quantitative covers algebra and geometry. You can take it at home (with online proctoring) or at a test site. There's also a family of tests: CLT10 (a PSAT-like...

HOW IT'S SCORED

The CLT is scored on a 0–120 scale (combining the three sections). There's no universal passing score — colleges set their own expectations, and CLT provides concordance to SAT/ACT. In Florida, specific CLT scores satisfy college-readiness, dual-enrollment, and graduation options and factor into Bright Futures .

REGISTRATION & COST

Register at cltexam.com . The fee is about \$59 (comparable to the SAT/ACT), and you send scores directly to colleges electronically through your CLT account.



AT A GLANCE

Type	College admissions (SAT/ACT al...
Provider	Classic Learning Initiatives
Sections	Verbal · Grammar/Writing · Qua...
Score	0–120
Length	~2 hours
Cost	~\$59

TEST DATES & TIMING

The CLT is offered on multiple dates through the year , at home or at test sites. Register with enough lead time before your application deadlines (score delivery to colleges can take a couple of weeks).

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Use official CLT practice** — CLT offers free practice tests matching the real format
- ✓ **Read widely, including classics** — The verbal section rewards strong reading of rich texts
- ✓ **Brush up algebra and geometry** — The quantitative section is core high-school math
- ✓ **Check your colleges accept it** — Especially outside faith-based/classical schools

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Confirm CLT acceptance first** — 300+ colleges accept it, but not all — verify each school
- ✓ **Play to a classical-education strength** — If your schooling emphasized classic texts, the CLT may suit you
- ✓ **Use the concordance** — Compare your CLT score to SAT/ACT ranges for target schools
- ✓ **Consider CLT10 for practice** — Like the PSAT, it's a lower-stakes warm-up

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Graduate & Professional

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The GRE

WHAT IT IS

The GRE General Test (from ETS) is the most widely used graduate-admissions test — accepted by master's and PhD programs across fields, by most MBA programs , and by many law schools . In late 2023 it was shortened to under two hours (from about four), making it far more manageable. It measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

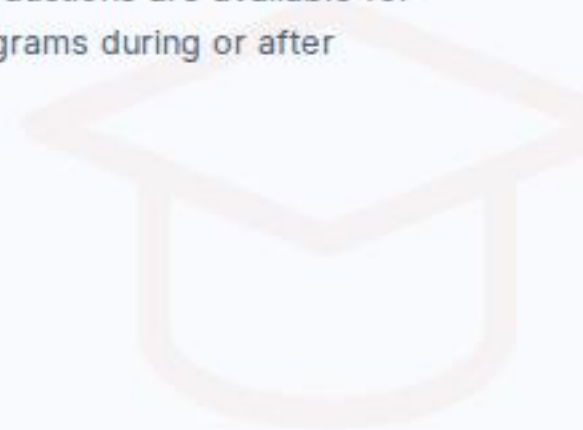
- ✓ **Analytical Writing** — One "Analyze an Issue" essay (the old Argument essay was removed)
- ✓ **Verbal Reasoning** — Two sections — reading comprehension, text completion, and sentence equivalence
- ✓ **Quantitative Reasoning** — Two sections — arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and data analysis (an on-screen calculator is provided; no personal calculator)

HOW IT'S SCORED

The GRE reports Verbal 130–170 and Quantitative 130–170 (a combined 260–340), plus Analytical Writing 0–6 . There's no passing score — a good score depends on your target programs (compare to their admitted-student ranges). Scores are valid for 5 years .

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through your ETS account at ets.org/gre. The U.S. fee is about \$220 ; fee reductions are available for eligible test-takers. You get a set of free score reports (you can send scores to programs during or after testing) and can use ScoreSelect to choose which scores to send.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Graduate admissions
Provider	ETS
Length	~1 hr 58 min
Sections	Verbal · Quant · Writing
Score	260–340 (+ Writing 0–6)
Cost (US)	~\$220

TEST DATES & TIMING

The GRE is offered year-round — nearly any day at test centers, and frequently for the at-home version. You can retake it once every 21 days, up to five times a year. Register with enough lead time before your application deadlines, and leave room for a possible retake.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Official ETS prep** — POWERPREP practice tests (including free ones) mirror the real shortened test — the best rehearsal
- ✓ **Diagnose first** — Take a full practice test to set a baseline and target
- ✓ **Balance Verbal & Quant** — Most programs look at both; strengthen your weaker side
- ✓ **Practice the writing task** — One well-structured "Analyze an Issue" essay is all that's left — practice it

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Use skip & review** — Within a section, answer easy questions first, then return to hard ones
- ✓ **Learn the on-screen calculator** — It's provided on Quant — get fast with it
- ✓ **No wrong-answer penalty** — Answer every question
- ✓ **Know your programs' priorities** — Some care more about Quant (STEM) or Verbal (humanities)
- ✓ **Consider GRE vs. GMAT for MBA** — Most business schools now accept both — pick your stronger test

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The GMAT

WHAT IT IS

The GMAT (from GMAC) is the traditional business-school admissions test. In early 2024 the "Focus Edition" replaced the classic GMAT — shorter, with a new Data Insights section and no essay. It's a strong signal of commitment to an MBA, though most programs now also accept the GRE.

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

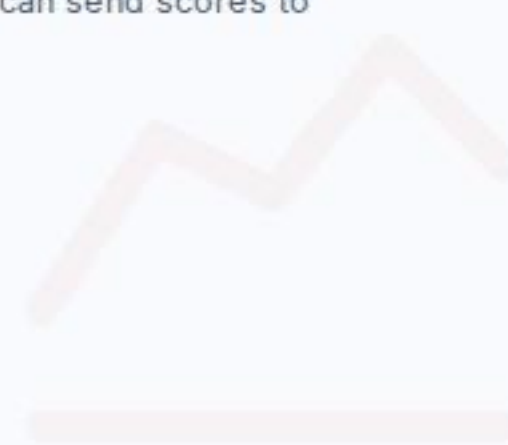
- ✓ **Quantitative Reasoning** — Problem-solving; no calculator allowed
- ✓ **Verbal Reasoning** — Reading comprehension and critical reasoning
- ✓ **Data Insights** — Interpreting data from tables, graphics, and multiple sources (with an on-screen calculator)

HOW IT'S SCORED

The Focus Edition scores 205–805 (in 10-point steps), with each section on a 60–90 scale. Note the old 200–800 scale is retired — a Focus Edition score is not comparable to a classic-GMAT number. There's no passing score; compare to your target programs' ranges.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register at mba.com with a GMAC account. The U.S. fee is about \$275 at a test center (a bit more or less for the online version); check current pricing. You choose test-center or online delivery and can send scores to programs.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Business-school admissions
Provider	GMAC
Length	2 hr 15 min
Sections	Quant · Verbal · Data Insights
Score	205–805
Cost (US)	~\$275+ (center)

TEST DATES & TIMING

The GMAT is offered year-round at test centers and online, nearly on demand. You can retake it (with waiting-period and annual limits). Register ahead of your application deadlines and leave room for a retake.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Official GMAC prep** — The Official Guide and official practice exams for the Focus Edition are the most accurate rehearsal
- ✓ **Master Data Insights** — The newest section — practice interpreting multi-source data and graphics
- ✓ **No calculator on Quant** — Sharpen mental math and estimation
- ✓ **Diagnose and target** — Take a full practice test to set a baseline

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Choose your section order** — Start with your strongest section to build confidence, or your weakest while fresh — practice both ways
- ✓ **Use bookmarking wisely** — You can review a limited number of questions — spend it on ones you can actually improve
- ✓ **Pace at ~2 min/question** — 64 questions in 135 minutes
- ✓ **GMAT vs. GRE** — Only business programs take the GMAT; if you might apply elsewhere too, the GRE is more flexible

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The LSAT

WHAT IT IS

The LSAT (Law School Admission Test, from LSAC) is the traditional law-school admissions test . In 2024 it was overhauled : the famous "Logic Games" (Analytical Reasoning) section was removed after 40+ years and replaced with a second Logical Reasoning section. It has no math — it tests reading, reasoning, and argument analysis. (Many...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **Logical Reasoning (×2, scored)** — Analyzing and evaluating arguments — now two scored sections
- ✓ **Reading Comprehension (scored)** — Dense passages with complex reasoning
- ✓ **Variable / unscored section** — An extra Logical Reasoning or Reading section used for research
- ✓ **LSAT Writing** — A separate argumentative writing task — 15 minutes to read positions, 35 to write; historically unscored (LSAC has indicated it may be scored)

HOW IT'S SCORED

The LSAT is scored 120–180 (from the scored Logical Reasoning and Reading sections). There's no passing score — a good score depends on your target law schools (compare to their admitted-student medians; the LSAT is heavily weighted in law admissions). You also receive a percentile rank.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through your LSAC account at lsac.org. The U.S. fee is about \$238 ; fee waivers are available for eligible applicants (and can cover other application costs). LSAC also runs the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) that most law schools require.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Law-school admissions
Provider	LSAC
Length	~2 hours (+ Writing)
Sections	2× Logical Reasoning · Reading
2024 change	Logic Games removed
Score	120–180

TEST DATES & TIMING

The LSAT is offered many times a year (roughly monthly across the cycle). Register early — popular dates and slots fill up. Plan to test with enough time before your law-school deadlines, and leave room for a possible retake (there are limits on how often you can test).

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Official LSAC prep** — LSAC's official prep (including free practice through its LawHub and a Khan Academy partnership) is the best rehearsal
- ✓ **Master Logical Reasoning** — With two scored LR sections now, it's more than half the test — prioritize it
- ✓ **Build reading stamina** — Practice dense passages under time
- ✓ **Full timed practice** — Simulate the real four-section format repeatedly

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Prioritize Logical Reasoning** — It carries the most weight post-2024
- ✓ **Don't leave blanks** — There's no wrong-answer penalty — always answer
- ✓ **Pace per section** — 35 minutes each — practice your timing
- ✓ **Consider LSAT vs. GRE** — Many law schools accept the GRE, but the LSAT is still the standard and often expected

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The MCAT

WHAT IT IS

The MCAT (Medical College Admission Test, from the AAMC) is the medical-school admissions test for U.S. and Canadian MD programs (and most DO programs). It's a long, demanding, computer-based exam that tests science knowledge plus critical reasoning — a central part of a med-school application.

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **Chemical & Physical Foundations of Biological Systems** — Physics, general and organic chemistry, and biochemistry in a biological context
- ✓ **Critical Analysis & Reasoning Skills (CARS)** — Reading and reasoning over humanities and social-science passages — no outside knowledge
- ✓ **Biological & Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems** — Biology, biochemistry, and chemistry
- ✓ **Psychological, Social & Biological Foundations of Behavior** — Psychology, sociology, and biology

HOW IT'S SCORED

Each section is scored 118–132, combined into a total of 472–528 (midpoint 500). There's no passing score — a good score depends on the medical schools you're targeting (compare to their matriculant ranges; the MCAT is weighted heavily). You also receive percentile ranks.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through your AAMC account at aamc.org. The U.S. fee is about \$345; the AAMC's Fee Assistance Program significantly reduces the cost and provides free prep for eligible students. Register early — seats and dates fill up.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Medical-school admissions
Provider	AAMC
Length	~7.5 hours
Sections	4 (Incl. CARS)
Questions	230
Score	472–528

TEST DATES & TIMING

The MCAT is offered on many dates from January through September . Because it takes months to prepare and scores take about a month to release, plan backward from your application timeline (most applicants test in the spring or summer before applying).

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Official AAMC materials** — AAMC practice exams and question packs are the gold standard — closest to the real test
- ✓ **Plan for months** — Most students study 3–6 months (often 300+ hours) — it's a marathon
- ✓ **Don't neglect CARS** — It's pure reasoning and hard to cram — practice it steadily
- ✓ **Full-length practice under real conditions** — Build the stamina for a 7.5-hour day

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Build test-day stamina** — Practice full-length exams to handle the length
- ✓ **Master CARS technique** — It rewards reasoning, not memorization
- ✓ **Balance content and practice** — Know the science, but do lots of AAMC practice questions
- ✓ **Time each section** — Pacing matters across 230 questions
- ✓ **Plan your one (or few) attempts** — There are limits on lifetime attempts — prepare thoroughly before

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Licensure Exams

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NCLEX (Nursing)

WHAT IT IS

The NCLEX (National Council Licensure Examination, from NCSBN) is the exam you must pass to become a licensed nurse after graduating from an approved nursing program. There are two versions — NCLEX-RN (registered nurse) and NCLEX-PN (practical/vocational nurse). Since April 2023 it's the "Next Generation NCLEX" (NGN) , which added case...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

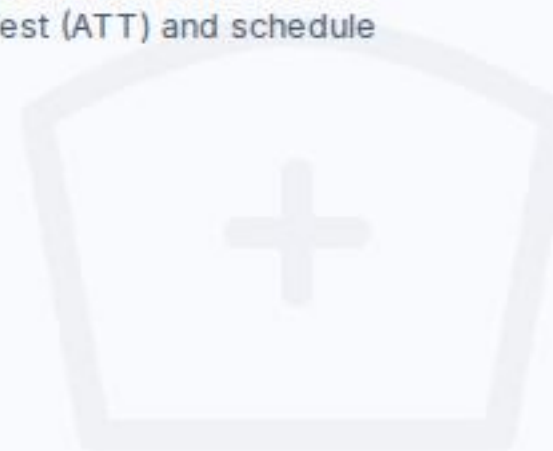
The NCLEX is computer-adaptive — it adjusts question difficulty to your ability and is variable length (the NCLEX-RN runs roughly 85 to 150 items). The NGN adds case studies and new item types (extended multiple response, drag-and-drop, cloze, etc.) built around the Clinical Judgment Measurement Model . Content follows NCSBN's test plan...

HOW IT'S SCORED

The NCLEX is Pass/Fail — there's no numeric score. The adaptive engine determines, with statistical confidence, whether your ability is above the passing standard. You find out you've met (or not met) the standard; unofficial results may be available quickly, official ones through your board.

REGISTRATION & COST

After graduating, apply for licensure with your state board of nursing and register for the NCLEX with Pearson VUE (the exam fee is about \$200, plus board fees). You'll receive an Authorization to Test (ATT) and schedule at a Pearson VUE center.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Nursing licensure exam
Provider	NCSBN
Versions	NCLEX-RN · NCLEX-PN
Format	Computer-adaptive (Next Gen)
Length	Variable (RN ~85–150 items)
Result	Pass/Fail

TEST DATES & TIMING

Offered year-round by appointment at Pearson VUE centers. There are limits and waiting periods on retakes if you don't pass; check NCSBN's retake policy.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Use NGN-aligned prep** — Make sure materials match the 2023+ Next Generation format and current test plan
- ✓ **Practice clinical judgment** — The case studies reward reasoning through patient scenarios, not just recall
- ✓ **Do lots of practice questions with rationales** — Learning why answers are right/wrong is the core method
- ✓ **Time it right** — Most students prep intensively in their final months of school or just after

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Trust the adaptive model** — Hard questions mean you're doing well — don't panic
- ✓ **Prioritize safety and management of care** — Heavily weighted categories
- ✓ **Answer with the nursing process** — Assess before acting; safety first
- ✓ **Pace steadily** — Length varies — keep a consistent rhythm

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Praxis (Teaching)

WHAT IT IS

The Praxis tests (from ETS) are used by many states to certify and license teachers . There are a few types: Praxis Core (basic academic skills, often required to enter a teacher-prep program), Praxis Subject Assessments (your content area, like Elementary Education or Mathematics), and the Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT)

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators** — Reading, Writing, and Mathematics — a basic-skills gateway, often required before or early in teacher preparation
- ✓ **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content-knowledge tests for your teaching field and grade band (e.g., Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects, Secondary math/science/English)
- ✓ **Principles of Learning and Teaching (PLT)** — Pedagogy and teaching practice, by grade band

HOW IT'S SCORED

Praxis tests are scored on scaled ranges, and each state sets its own passing scores and which tests it requires. There's no single national cutoff — check your state's certification requirements (and your prep program's) for the exact tests and scores you need.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through your ETS Praxis account . Fees vary by test (often around \$60–\$170 each). You choose which tests to take based on your state and teaching area, and send scores to your state and/or institution.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Teacher certification/licensur...
Provider	ETS
Parts	Core · Subject · PLT
Who	Aspiring & current teachers
Format	Computer-based
Passing score	Set by each state

TEST DATES & TIMING

Most Praxis tests are offered year-round (continuously or in windows) at test centers and via at-home proctoring. Register ahead of your program or licensure deadlines.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Confirm your state's required tests and scores** — This determines exactly what to study
- ✓ **Use official ETS prep** — Study companions, practice tests, and interactive materials match the real tests
- ✓ **Master your content area** — Subject assessments go deep into your teaching field
- ✓ **Practice the PLT scenarios** — Pedagogy questions reward applying teaching principles

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Take Core early if required** — It's often a prerequisite to enter teacher prep
- ✓ **Target your subject and grade band** — Take the exact assessment your license requires
- ✓ **Aim above your state's cutoff** — Passing standards vary by state
- ✓ **Retake specific tests as needed** — You retake only the test you didn't pass

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CPA Exam

WHAT IT IS

To become a licensed CPA (Certified Public Accountant), you pass the CPA Exam (from the AICPA and NASBA) plus meet education and experience requirements. Since 2024, the exam follows the "CPA Evolution" model : three Core sections everyone takes, plus one Discipline section you choose to specialize.

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **Core sections (all candidates)** — AUD (Auditing & Attestation), FAR (Financial Accounting & Reporting), and REG (Regulation)
- ✓ **Discipline section (choose one)** — BAR (Business Analysis & Reporting), ISC (Information Systems & Control), or TCP (Tax Compliance & Planning)
- ✓ **Retired** — The old BEC section was discontinued after 2023

HOW IT'S SCORED

Each section is scored 0–99, and you need 75 to pass (it's a scaled score, not a percentage correct). You take the four sections separately and must pass all four within a rolling window set by your state board. Sections combine multiple-choice and task-based simulations.

REGISTRATION & COST

Apply through your state board of accountancy / NASBA , receive a Notice to Schedule, and test at a Prometric center. Fees run several hundred dollars total. You generally need 150 semester credit hours (often a bachelor's plus additional coursework) to be licensed.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Accounting licensure
Provider	AICPA / NASBA
Model	CPA Evolution (since 2024)
Core	AUD · FAR · REG
Discipline	BAR · ISC · or TCP
Score	0–99 (pass = 75)

TEST DATES & TIMING

The CPA Exam is offered on a continuous/near-continuous schedule through the year (score-release dates apply). Plan your four sections around your work and study schedule and your board's time limits.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Use a CPA-review course** — Most candidates use an intensive commercial review program
- ✓ **Sequence your sections** — Many start with FAR or AUD and choose a Discipline matching their strengths/career
- ✓ **Practice simulations** — Task-based simulations are a big part of the exam
- ✓ **Track the passing window** — You must pass all sections within your board's time limit

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Pick a Discipline strategically** — Match BAR/ISC/TCP to your career interest and strengths
- ✓ **Aim comfortably above 75** — Scaled scoring rewards consistent mastery
- ✓ **Plan around score releases** — Timing affects when you can retake
- ✓ **Meet the 150-hour rule** — Confirm your state's exact education requirement

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TEAS / HESI

WHAT IT IS

Most nursing programs require an entrance exam to show you're ready for the coursework. The two main ones are the ATI TEAS 7 (used by roughly 60% of programs) and the HESI A2 (roughly 40%). Programs usually require one, not both — and the program chooses, so check your target school's admissions page first . (These are the entrance...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **ATI TEAS 7** — A fixed blueprint: 170 questions in 209 minutes across four sections — Reading, Mathematics, Science, and English & Language Usage . TEAS 7 added...
- ✓ **HESI A2** — Variable — your program picks which subject exams you sit, from up to about eight sections (Anatomy & Physiology, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Math...

HOW IT'S SCORED

Both report percentage/scaled scores by section and overall. There's no universal passing score — each program sets its own minimum (and may weight sections differently, especially science). Research shows TEAS scores correlate with later NCLEX success, which is why programs use them. Check your school's required score.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through ATI (TEAS) or Elevate/Evolve (HESI) , or sometimes directly through your prospective school. Fees vary (often around \$70–\$120). You can usually send scores to programs; note retake waiting periods.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Nursing/allied-health program...
Tests	ATI TEAS 7 · HESI A2
Who	Nursing-program applicants
TEAS 7	170 Q · 209 min · 4 sections
HESI A2	Variable (up to ~8 sections)
Which one?	The program chooses

TEST DATES & TIMING

Offered year-round at testing centers and (for some) online with proctoring. Test with enough lead time before your application deadline, and leave room for a retake if needed.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Confirm which exam your school requires** — Don't study the wrong test — check the admissions page
- ✓ **Use official prep** — ATI's and HESI's own study guides and practice tests match the real format best
- ✓ **Prioritize your weak sections** — Especially science on the HESI, and math/science on the TEAS
- ✓ **Practice timed** — The TEAS is a fixed, timed blueprint — pacing matters

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Aim above the program's minimum** — Competitive programs admit well above the floor
- ✓ **If a school takes both, pick your strength** — TEAS is more balanced; HESI is science-heavy
- ✓ **Answer every question** — No penalty for wrong answers
- ✓ **Retake strategically** — Programs may take your highest or most recent — check the policy

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USMLE / COMLEX

WHAT IT IS

To become a licensed physician, medical students take a multi-step licensing exam sequence during and after medical school. MD students take the USMLE (from the NBME and FSMB); DO students take COMLEX-USA (from the NBOME), and many DO students also take the USMLE. These are among the highest-stakes exams in any profession, taken across...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **USMLE (MD path)** — Step 1 (foundational sciences — now Pass/Fail), Step 2 CK (clinical knowledge), and Step 3 (patient management, taken during residency)
- ✓ **COMLEX-USA (DO path)** — Level 1 (now Pass/Fail), Level 2-CE , and Level 3 — parallel to the USMLE, with osteopathic principles included
- ✓ **When they're taken** — Across medical school and into residency, in sequence

HOW IT'S SCORED

USMLE Step 1 and COMLEX Level 1 are now Pass/Fail (Step 1 changed in 2022) — a shift meant to reduce score pressure early on. Step 2 CK and Step 3 (and COMLEX Levels 2–3) still report numeric scores , which residency programs weigh heavily. Passing all steps is required for licensure.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register through the official bodies — the USMLE (via the NBME/ECFMG) or the NBOME for COMLEX — as directed by your medical school. Fees are substantial (hundreds of dollars per step). Your school guides you through eligibility and scheduling.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Medical licensure exams
USMLE (MD)	Step 1 · Step 2 CK · Step 3
COMLEX (DO)	Level 1 · Level 2-CE · Level 3
Step 1	Pass/Fail (since 2022)
Providers	NBME/FSMB · NBOME
Who	Medical students & physicians

TEST DATES & TIMING

Each step is scheduled at a Prometric center (and some have specific windows). Steps are taken in sequence over years — typically Step/Level 1 after preclinical years, Step/Level 2 in clinical years, and Step/Level 3 during residency.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Plan months per step** — Students devote dedicated study blocks (often 6+ weeks) using question banks and review resources
- ✓ **Practice-question heavy** — Large question banks with rationales are the standard method
- ✓ **Integrate across systems** — These reward applying knowledge to clinical scenarios
- ✓ **Use your school's guidance** — Med schools structure prep and timing

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Since Step 1 is Pass/Fail, focus Step 2 CK** — Programs now weigh Step 2 CK numeric scores more heavily
- ✓ **Build clinical reasoning** — All steps test application, not just recall
- ✓ **Manage the marathon** — These are long exams — build stamina with full practice
- ✓ **Sequence carefully** — Timing each step around rotations and residency matters

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Equivalency & English

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GED / HiSET

WHAT IT IS

If you didn't finish high school, a high-school equivalency (HSE) credential shows the same academic skills a diploma does — accepted for college, job training, and many employers. The two main tests are the GED (GED Testing Service) and the HiSET (ETS). Which one you take depends on your state — some offer one, some both. Both cover the...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

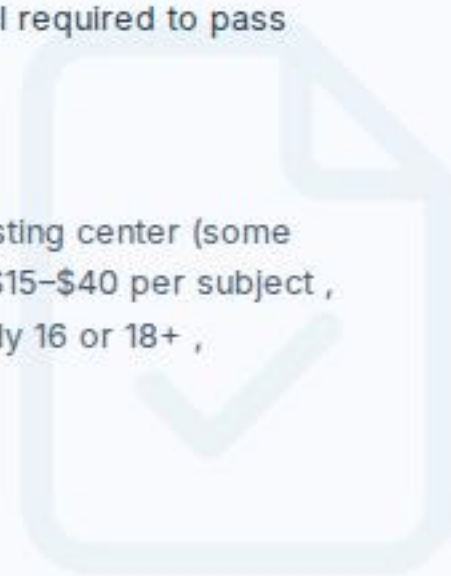
- ✓ **GED** — Four subject tests, computer-based: Mathematical Reasoning, Reasoning Through Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies . You can take them one at a...
- ✓ **HiSET** — Five subtests: Math, Language Arts–Reading, Language Arts–Writing, Science, and Social Studies . Offered on computer or paper, depending on the site.
- ✓ **Take them in pieces** — For both, you don't have to test all subjects at once — schedule them as you're ready.

HOW IT'S SCORED

- ✓ **GED** — Each subject is scored 100–200 ; 145+ passes (equivalency). Higher tiers signal College Ready (165+) and College Ready + Credit (175+) .
- ✓ **HiSET** — Each subtest is scored 1–20 , with a minimum per subtest and an overall total required to pass (your state sets the exact bar).

REGISTRATION & COST

Register on the official site — GED.com for the GED or the ETS HiSET site — and pick a testing center (some offer online proctoring for the GED). Costs are modest and vary by state — often around \$15–\$40 per subject , and some states subsidize or offer vouchers. Age and residency rules also vary (commonly 16 or 18+ , sometimes with an...



AT A GLANCE

Type	HS equivalency
Tests	GED · HISET
Subjects	Math, RLA, Science, Social Stu...
Format	Computer (paper for HISET too)
Age	Usually 16+ (varies)
Cost	~\$15–\$40 per subject

TEST DATES & TIMING

Both tests are offered year-round at testing centers, scheduled when you're ready — subject by subject. You can retake individual subjects you don't pass (waiting periods and retake fees apply).

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Free official practice** — GED Ready and HISET official practice tests predict whether you're ready to pass
- ✓ **Adult-education classes** — Free local classes and online prep help you brush up subject by subject
- ✓ **Focus on your weak subjects** — You test one subject at a time — start with your strongest to build momentum, or your weakest to tackle it first

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Take one subject at a time** — No need to do all four/five at once — pass them as you're ready
- ✓ **Use the official practice test** — It tells you if you're likely to pass before you pay for the real thing
- ✓ **Answer everything** — There's no penalty for wrong answers
- ✓ **Know your state** — Which test is offered, the cost, and the passing bar all vary by state

ACCOMMODATIONS & SUPPORT

Both programs offer accommodations for documented disabilities (extended time and more) — request them

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TOEFL / IELTS

WHAT IT IS

If English isn't your first language, universities usually require an English proficiency test to show you can study in English. The three main options are the TOEFL iBT , IELTS , and the Duolingo English Test . All test reading, listening, speaking, and writing — but they differ in format, price, and where they're accepted, so check...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **TOEFL iBT (ETS)** — Four sections — Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing — computer-based; shortened in 2023 to under 2 hours . Widely accepted, especially in the U.S.
- ✓ **IELTS (British Council / IDP / Cambridge)** — Four sections — Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking (a live speaking interview); Academic (for university) or General Training ; on computer or...
- ✓ **Duolingo English Test (DET)** — A ~1-hour, online, adaptive test you take from home with your webcam — the cheapest and fastest, and increasingly accepted.

HOW IT'S SCORED

- ✓ **TOEFL iBT** — 0–120 total (each of the four sections 0–30)
- ✓ **IELTS** — Band 0–9 overall and per skill (e.g., many universities want 6.5–7.0+)
- ✓ **Duolingo** — 10–160 overall, with subscores

REGISTRATION & COST

Register on the official site for your test — ETS (TOEFL), British Council / IDP (IELTS), or Duolingo English Test . Costs vary widely: the Duolingo test is cheapest (around \$65) , while TOEFL and IELTS run roughly \$200–\$260 depending on country. Send scores to your universities.

AT A GLANCE

Type	English proficiency
Tests	TOEFL iBT · IELTS · Duolingo
Skills	Reading · Listening · Speaking...
Used for	University admission (non-natl...)
TOEFL score	0–120
IELTS band	0–9

TEST DATES & TIMING

TOEFL and the Duolingo test are offered very frequently (Duolingo on demand from home; TOEFL many dates including home editions). IELTS has frequent test dates at centers (and computer-delivered options with faster results). Book early enough to get scores before your application deadlines.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Use official prep** — Each test's maker offers official practice — TOEFL practice sets, IELTS practice materials, and the free Duolingo practice test
- ✓ **Practice all four skills** — Speaking and writing often need the most work for non-native speakers
- ✓ **Match the test to your strengths** — Some students do better with IELTS's live speaking interview; others prefer TOEFL's recorded format or Duolingo's speed
- ✓ **Check accepted scores** — Prepare to hit each target university's required score

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Pick the test your schools accept** — Confirm acceptance and the minimum score first
- ✓ **Consider cost and speed** — Duolingo is cheapest and fastest; TOEFL/IELTS are the traditional standards
- ✓ **Practice under timed conditions** — Especially speaking and writing
- ✓ **Send scores strategically** — Know how many free score sends you get

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Private School & Military

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SSAT / ISEE

WHAT IT IS

Many private and independent schools require an entrance test as part of admissions. The two main ones are the SSAT (Secondary School Admission Test, from EMA) and the ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam, from ERB). Both are given at different levels by grade , and both test verbal, quantitative, and reading skills plus a writing...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

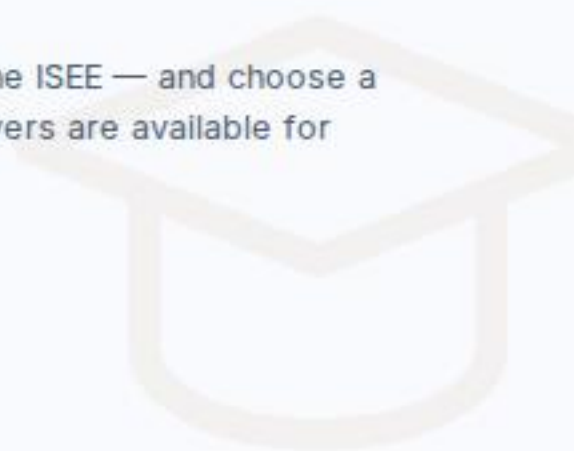
- ✓ **SSAT levels** — Elementary (grades 3–4), Middle (grades 5–7), and Upper (grades 8–11). Sections: Verbal, Quantitative (Math), and Reading, plus an unscored writing...
- ✓ **ISEE levels** — Primary (grades 2–4), Lower (grades 5–6), Middle (grades 7–8), and Upper (grades 9–12). Sections: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Reading...
- ✓ **Format** — Both are offered on paper or computer / at home depending on level and provider.

HOW IT'S SCORED

- ✓ **SSAT** — Scaled scores by section plus an SSAT percentile comparing you to other same-grade, same-gender test-takers over three years (percentiles matter most...
- ✓ **ISEE** — Scaled scores plus a stanine (1–9) for each section — the stanine is what schools focus on.

REGISTRATION & COST

Register on the official site — EMA (ssat.org) for the SSAT or ERB (erblearn.org) for the ISEE — and choose a test date/location (including at-home options). Fees vary by level and format; fee waivers are available for eligible families. Send scores to the schools you're applying to.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Private/Independent school adm...
Tests	SSAT · ISEE
Levels	Elementary → Upper (by grade)
Sections	Verbal, Quant, Reading + essay
Used for	Admission to Independent/priva...
SSAT by	EMA

TEST DATES & TIMING

Both tests are offered on many dates through the admissions season (fall through winter, aligned to application deadlines). Note retake rules: the ISEE can generally be taken once per testing season/level, while the SSAT allows more flexibility — check current policies and book early.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Official practice** — EMA and ERB publish official practice tests and guides for each level — the best rehearsal
- ✓ **Match the level** — Prepare for the correct level for your grade
- ✓ **Build vocabulary and reading** — Verbal and reading sections reward strong vocabulary and careful reading
- ✓ **Practice the essay** — Both include a writing sample schools read

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Know each school's test** — Some want the SSAT, some the ISEE, some either
- ✓ **Focus on percentile/stanine** — That's what schools compare
- ✓ **Note the guessing rules** — The SSAT has a small wrong-answer penalty on some levels; the ISEE does not — know your test's rule

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SHSAT

WHAT IT IS

The SHSAT (Specialized High Schools Admissions Test) is the exam for admission to eight of New York City's nine Specialized High Schools — including Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, and Brooklyn Tech. For those eight schools, the SHSAT score is the sole admissions criterion (grades, essays, and interviews play no role). It's highly competitive...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

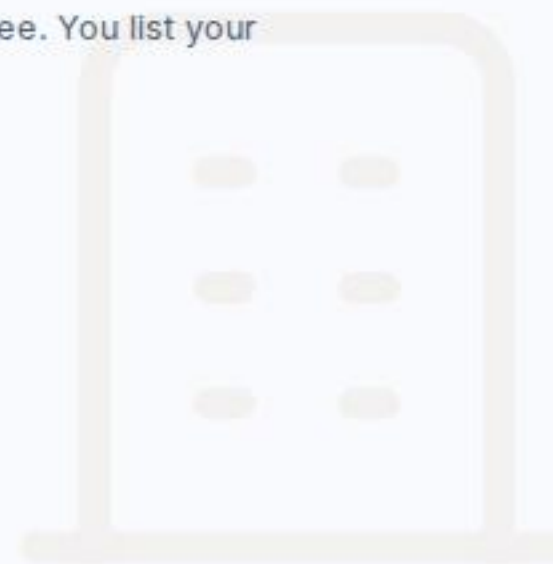
The SHSAT tests English Language Arts and Mathematics over about three hours . It went digital in 2025 and is moving to a computer-adaptive format in 2026 (questions adjust to performance). It's taken by current 8th graders and first-time 9th graders who are NYC residents (public, private, or parochial).

HOW IT'S SCORED

There's no perfect or passing score — students are ranked by score , and offers go to the top scorers according to each school's cutoff and available seats (cutoffs vary by year and school). Students rank their school preferences; the highest scorers get their top choices. A Discovery program offers additional seats to eligible...

REGISTRATION & COST

Students register through their school counselor / the NYC DOE in the fall. There's no fee. You list your specialized-school choices in order of preference as part of registration.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Specialized public HS admissions
Provider	NYC DOE (Pearson)
Who	NYC 8th & first-time 9th graders
Covers	ELA & Math
Length	~3 hours
When	October–November

TEST DATES & TIMING

The SHSAT is given in October and November for admission the following September, with results in March. Eighth graders can take it once (and again as a first-time 9th grader for a smaller pool of 10th-grade seats).

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Practice the ELA and Math format** — The NYC DOE publishes free practice tests — use them, especially for the new digital/adaptive format
- ✓ **Build speed and accuracy** — Three hours, high stakes — timing and precision matter
- ✓ **Target the ranking, not a passing bar** — You're competing for a cutoff, so aim as high as possible
- ✓ **Know the school cutoffs** — Cutoffs differ by school and year

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Rank your schools thoughtfully** — Higher scores get earlier choices — list your true preferences in order
- ✓ **No wrong-answer penalty** — Answer every question
- ✓ **Prepare for computer-adaptive** — From 2026 the test adjusts to you — practice in the digital format
- ✓ **Consider a summer or prep program** — Many families prepare well in advance given the stakes

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Catholic HS Entrance

WHAT IT IS

Most Catholic high schools require an entrance exam for 8th graders applying to 9th grade. There are three main ones — the HSPT, TACHS, and COOP — and which you take depends on your region/diocese . They test similar academic skills, and schools use the results for admission, scholarships, and course placement .

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

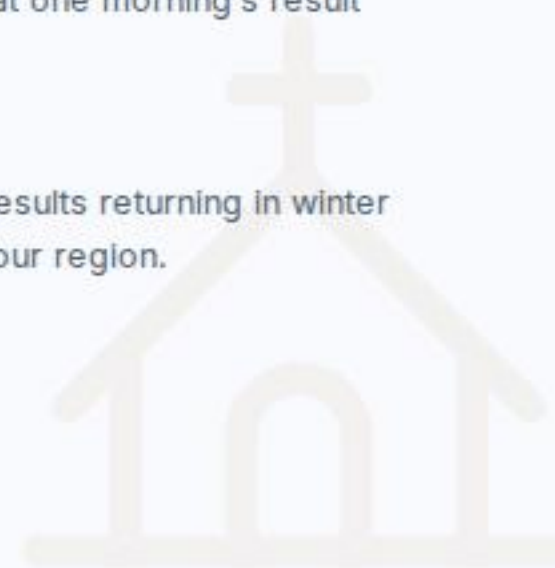
- ✓ **HSPT (High School Placement Test)** — From Scholastic Testing Service — the most widely used nationally. Five sections: Verbal Skills, Quantitative Skills, Reading, Mathematics, and...
- ✓ **TACHS (Test for Admission into Catholic High Schools)** — From Riverside Insights — used in the New York City area (Archdiocese of New York, Diocese of Brooklyn/Queens, and Diocese of Rockville Centre)....
- ✓ **COOP (Cooperative Admissions Examination Program)** — Used in parts of New Jersey (e.g., Archdiocese of Newark, Diocese of Paterson).

HOW IT'S SCORED

Each exam reports scaled scores and percentiles comparing the student to other test-takers (the HSPT gives national and local percentiles; the TACHS reports section scores plus an ability estimate). There's no universal passing score — each high school sets its own admission and scholarship cutoffs. Treat one morning's result as one data...

TEST DATES & TIMING

These exams are given in the fall — most commonly November — of 8th grade, with results returning in winter (often January–February) ahead of high-school decisions. Confirm the exact date for your region.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Catholic high-school admission
Tests	HSPT · TACHS · COOP
Who	8th graders → grade 9
Covers	Verbal, Quant, Reading, Math...
When	Fall (usually November)
Which one?	Depends on the diocese/region

REGISTRATION & COST

Registration is regional : HSPT is often registered through the diocese or the individual school; TACHS and COOP register through their official program sites and let you send scores to a set number of schools (e.g., TACHS allows up to three). Check the exact process with your diocese or target schools, and note fees and deadlines.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Confirm which exam you need** — Ask each target school — HSPT, TACHS, or COOP
- ✓ **Use official/quality prep** — Prep books cover all three (Kaplan, Barron's) with full-length practice for each
- ✓ **Practice under time** — The HSPT especially is fast-paced — timing matters
- ✓ **Review core skills** — Verbal reasoning, reading, math, and language mechanics

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Know your test's pacing** — The HSPT gives less time per question than the TACHS
- ✓ **Answer strategically** — Know each exam's guessing rules
- ✓ **Send scores to the right schools** — You're often limited to a few — choose carefully
- ✓ **Aim for scholarship cutoffs** — Strong scores can earn merit aid, not just admission

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The ASVAB

WHAT IT IS

The ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) is a free aptitude test used by the U.S. military for enlistment eligibility and job (MOS) placement . It's also given in many high schools through the Career Exploration Program as a career-interest and aptitude tool — with no obligation to enlist. It measures skills across math...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

The ASVAB has 10 subtests — including Arithmetic Reasoning, Word Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension, Mathematics Knowledge, plus technical areas like Electronics, Auto & Shop, Mechanical Comprehension, and General Science. It's given as a computer-adaptive test (CAT-ASVAB) at military processing stations, or on paper in schools.

HOW IT'S SCORED

Four subtests (Arithmetic Reasoning, Math Knowledge, Word Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension) combine into the AFQT score — a percentile (1–99) that determines enlistment eligibility (each branch sets a minimum). The other subtests feed composite scores that qualify you for specific military jobs. In the school program, results come with...

REGISTRATION & COST

You don't register the usual way: for enlistment , a military recruiter arranges the ASVAB at a testing site (free). For the school program , your high school schedules it. There's no cost either way.



AT A GLANCE

Type	Military aptitude / careers
Full name	Armed Services Vocational Aptl...
Subtests	10
Key score	AFQT (enlistment eligibility)
Also	Career exploration in schools
Cost	Free

TEST DATES & TIMING

Enlistment ASVABs are scheduled through a recruiter as needed; the school version is given on dates your school sets. Scores are typically available quickly (immediately for the computer version).

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Official ASVAB prep** — The official ASVAB and March2Success sites offer free practice
- ✓ **Focus on the AFQT four** — Arithmetic Reasoning, Math Knowledge, Word Knowledge, and Paragraph Comprehension drive enlistment eligibility
- ✓ **Brush up math and vocabulary** — These carry the most weight for the AFQT
- ✓ **Explore the technical subtests** — Strong scores there open more job options

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Prioritize the AFQT subtests** — They decide whether you can enlist
- ✓ **Answer everything on the CAT** — The computer version is adaptive — pace yourself
- ✓ **Target jobs you want** — Composite scores gate specific military roles — know which subtests matter for your goal
- ✓ **Take the school ASVAB seriously** — Even without enlisting, it's a useful, free career-aptitude snapshot

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Career, Technical & Gifted

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Gifted & Talented Testing

WHAT IT IS

To identify students for gifted & talented (G&T) programs , many districts and schools give an ability/reasoning test — most often the CogAT, NNAT, or OLSAT . Unlike state or interim tests, these measure reasoning ability (how a child thinks and solves novel problems), not what they've been taught. Your district chooses which one, and...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **CogAT (Cognitive Abilities Test)** — From Riverside — three batteries: Verbal, Quantitative, and Nonverbal reasoning. Grades K-12, group-administered.
- ✓ **NNAT (Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test)** — From Pearson — nonverbal only (shapes and patterns, no reading required), which makes it useful across languages and for multilingual learners.
- ✓ **OLSAT (Otis-Lennon School Ability Test)** — From Pearson — measures verbal and nonverbal reasoning ("school ability").

HOW IT'S SCORED

These report a standard score and a percentile (the CogAT uses a Standard Age Score, or SAS) showing how a child compares to same-age peers. Programs often use a high percentile cutoff (commonly the top few percent), but each district sets its own. It's not pass/fail , and a single screening percentile isn't a definitive statement of a...

REGISTRATION & COST

Families usually don't register — the school or district administers the screening (sometimes universally to a whole grade). For private-school or talent-search testing, a psychologist or program may arrange it. Ask your school how G&T screening and identification work.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Gifted-program identification
Tests	CogAT · NNAT · OLSAT
Measures	Reasoning / ability (not achievement)
Grades	K–12 (often K–3 entry)
Format	Group-administered
Score	Percentile / SAS (not pass/fail)

TEST DATES & TIMING

Screening is typically scheduled by the district, often in a particular grade (frequently around K–3 for entry, with later windows too). Ask your school about its timeline and re-testing policy.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Keep it low-pressure** — These measure reasoning — the healthiest prep is a rested, relaxed child who does their best
- ✓ **Familiarity, not cramming** — A little exposure to the question format (e.g., pattern puzzles) can reduce surprise
- ✓ **Everyday thinking games** — Puzzles, patterns, and reasoning play support the skills naturally
- ✓ **Ask about the process** — Know which test your district uses and its cutoffs

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Reduce test-day stress** — Reasoning tests reward a calm, focused child
- ✓ **Understand it's one factor** — Districts usually combine the score with grades, teacher input, and other measures
- ✓ **Know the cutoff and appeals** — If your child is close, ask about re-screening or portfolio options

ACCOMMODATIONS & SUPPORT

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CTE Certifications

WHAT IT IS

Career & technical education (CTE) certifications are industry-recognized credentials that prove you have the skills for a specific job or trade. Many CTE and career-academy programs build toward them, and they're valued by employers (and sometimes required to work). Different fields have different credentials — here are the major ones...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

- ✓ **ASE (Automotive Service Excellence)** — Certifications for auto technicians — a series of exams (engine repair, brakes, electrical, and more) that validate specialties
- ✓ **ServSafe (National Restaurant Association)** — Food-safety credentials — ServSafe Manager and Food Handler — common in culinary and hospitality
- ✓ **NCCER credentials** — National Center for Construction Education & Research — craft credentials across construction trades
- ✓ **CompTIA (A+, Network+, Security+)** — Foundational IT certifications for tech and cybersecurity careers (alongside Microsoft, Cisco/CCNA, AWS, and others)
- ✓ **Trade & cosmetology licensure** — Fields like cosmetology, barbering, HVAC, and electrical require a state license — usually a written exam plus a practical (hands-on) exam after...

HOW IT'S SCORED

Each credential has its own scoring — many use a pass/score threshold (e.g., ServSafe and CompTIA have set passing scores; ASE uses a passing standard per test). State licensure exams (cosmetology, trades) typically require passing both a written and a practical portion. Check the certifying body or state board for the exact standard.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Career & technical credentials
Examples	ASE · ServSafe · NCCER · CompT...
Also	Cosmetology/trade state licens...
Who	CTE students & career changers
Value	Industry-recognized job skills
Format	Varies by credential

REGISTRATION & COST

You register through the certifying organization (ASE, ServSafe/NRA, NCCER, CompTIA) or, for licensure, your state licensing board . Fees vary widely (from modest food-handler cards to a few hundred dollars for IT certs). Many CTE programs bundle the exam with the course.

TEST DATES & TIMING

Most are offered year-round at testing centers or online; state practical exams are scheduled through the board. Timing usually lines up with finishing your training program.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Learn through your CTE program** — These credentials map to hands-on coursework — the program is the prep
- ✓ **Use official study materials** — Each body publishes exam objectives and practice tests
- ✓ **Log required hours where needed** — Licensed trades require documented training/apprenticeship hours
- ✓ **Stack credentials** — Earning several related certs strengthens your résumé

ACCOMMODATIONS & SUPPORT

Accommodations for documented disabilities are available through most certifying bodies and state boards — request them ahead of your test date.

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FAA Knowledge Tests

WHAT IT IS

To earn most FAA certificates and ratings, you pass an Airman Knowledge Test — the "written" exam — as one step toward certification. There are knowledge tests for pilots (private, instrument, commercial, ATP), aircraft mechanics (Airframe & Powerplant), and aircraft dispatchers , among others. The knowledge test is paired with training...

FORMAT & STRUCTURE

Knowledge tests are computer-based, multiple-choice , administered at FAA-approved testing centers (through PSI) . The number of questions and topics depends on the certificate — for example, private-pilot topics include regulations, weather, navigation, aerodynamics, and aircraft systems. You typically need instructor endorsement or...

HOW IT'S SCORED

Most FAA knowledge tests require about 70% to pass . You receive an Airman Knowledge Test Report listing the areas you missed, which your instructor reviews with you before the practical test. The knowledge-test result is valid for a set period (commonly 24 calendar months) in which you must complete the practical test.

REGISTRATION & COST

Schedule through PSI (the FAA's testing contractor) at an approved center; fees are typically around \$150–\$175 per test. You'll need proper ID and, usually, an instructor endorsement confirming you're ready.

AT A GLANCE

Type	Aviation certification
Provider	FAA (tests via PSI)
For	Pilots, mechanics, dispatchers
Format	Computer-based multiple choice
Passing	Typically 70%
Plus	Flight/practical test (checkrl...

TEST DATES & TIMING

Offered year-round by appointment at testing centers. Plan to take the knowledge test during your training so the result stays valid through your practical test.

HOW TO PREPARE

- ✓ **Train through a flight/A&P school or CFI** — Ground school and instruction are the core preparation
- ✓ **Use FAA handbooks** — The FAA publishes free official handbooks and the test's knowledge areas
- ✓ **Practice with test-prep software** — Question banks mirror the real topics and format
- ✓ **Get your endorsement** — Your instructor confirms you're ready to test

STRATEGIES & TIPS

- ✓ **Aim well above 70%** — A higher score means fewer areas to review before the checkride
- ✓ **Know the missed areas** — The report guides your practical-test prep
- ✓ **Mind the validity window** — Complete the practical test before the knowledge result expires
- ✓ **Study the regulations and weather** — Consistently heavy topics

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