



Getting ready for college is an exciting time. In the midst of all that excitement, however, there is a lot of tension circulating college placement and entrance exams. While these tests play an important role in determining which colleges and universities will accept an application, with the right resources, there is no need to worry about getting accepted into that dream school.

Colleges and universities use entrance and placement exams, such as the SAT, ACT and PERT, to test students' academic levels in various subjects, including, math, science and writing. The results of these exams help admissions officials decide if the student meets the skill requirement of the school, and, if so, what classes would meet that student's academic level. The results may also qualify some high-ranking students for academic scholarships.

Most universities require students to take the SAT and/or ACT prior to submitting their applications, and some schools will also require that students take the PERT test. Most academic officials highly recommend students take the SAT and ACT to better their chances of getting into a variety of schools and to measure one's understanding of essential academic material. The three main tests are different, but they all share similar characteristics.

The Tribe's Center for Student Success and Services recommends that students use the differentiation between the tests to their advantages. Alphonza Green, the center's assistant director, said the exams provide material students will need in the future and they should prepare to ensure their success.

"Every college institution has a variety of different standards that are required for [admission]," he explained. "So, by [students] allowing themselves the opportunity to prepare, they open themselves up to a variety of institutions."

SAT

College Board, a non-profit education corporation, issues SAT for high school juniors and seniors every year. All U.S. colleges and universities accept the exam, which contains three main sections — reading, writing and language and math. There is also an optional essay section for those applying to colleges which require it.

The test is offered seven times a year and is 3 hours long, with an additional 50 minutes for those writing the optional essay. The reading portion lasts 65 minutes and is 52 questions; the writing and language portion is 35 minutes and 44 questions; and the math portion is 80 minutes and 58 questions. Everyday math formulas are provided with the exam for reference.

In 2016, College Board restructured the exam so that students are more prepared to take it during their junior and senior years. Students now take the PSAT in eighth or ninth grade, as well as in 10th grade, so they are ready for the official test. PSAT scores are not submitted to colleges and/or universities. Free daily practice questions, comprehensive practice tests and downloadable practice tests are available. For more information, visit collegereadiness.collegeboard.org.

Green explained that the SAT and ACT are similar to interviews and that students should consider that when preparing for the exams.

"Just like in any interview, you want to put your best foot forward and always sell yourself," he said. "Admissions counselors are looking at who sells him- or herself the best."

ACT

This exam is issued by a separate organization, also called ACT. The majority of U.S. colleges accept the exam, which contains four sections — reading, English, math and science. There is an optional essay, as well.

The test is offered six times a year and is 2 hours and 55 minutes long, with an additional 40 minutes for those writing the essay. The reading portion lasts 35 minutes and contains 40 questions; the English portion is 45 minutes and has 75 questions; the math portion is 1 hour and 60 questions; and the science portion is 35 minutes and has 40 questions.

While the SAT is more aptitude oriented (i.e. measures students' testing reasoning and verbal abilities), the ACT is curriculum-based. ACT also offers a free downloadable study guide, free daily practice questions and free section practice sessions. For more information, visit act.org.

Sarah-Joy Somarriba, higher education academic and career adviser, advised that students start taking the SAT and ACT in their junior year of high school. She said the best plan is to spend the summer before junior year studying and preparing and take the exams two to three times throughout the academic year. Then, the summer before senior year, students can start applying to college. She also recommended that students take the optional writing portions of the exams because it makes them stand out in college applications.

"When a school says it's 'optional,' it means they want you to do it," she said. "It's just showing that you're willing to put forth the extra effort."

PERT

The Postsecondary Education Readiness Test (PERT) is the most common placement test, particularly in Florida. The exam measures academic skills and college readiness to determine what courses students are prepared for. The test consists of three subjects — math, reading and writing. Florida students who take the FCAT may not need to take all sections of the PERT exam, depending on FCAT, ACT and SAT scores.

Testing dates are administered by individual schools and are generally conducted anytime between November and March. The exam is required for all high school juniors in Florida and students should contact their schools for specific test dates. Each subject contains 30 questions and is untimed, but students usually finish the entire exam in approximately 45 minutes.

The test creators offer a free practice exam. For more information, visit perttest.com. Tracey Walton, K-12 program manager, said students should start preparing their freshman year of high school. She explained that standardized testing is a great way for students to get exposed to college writing and fundamentals. Additionally, taking placement exams like PERT, can help students take part in dual enrollment during high school and receive early college credits.

"It's not one of those tests where you get an A, B or C," she said. "I used to see students' confidence levels go up and the test results become a motivator to do better next time."

When preparing for taking the next step on the way to adulthood, it is always best to plan ahead. College testing can be stressful, but with a little background information and preparation, the process can be a smooth transition on the way to a dream school.

To learn more about taking these exams, find out about local tutoring or test-prep classes or seek

educational guidance, contact 954-989-6840 or email highered@semtribe.com.

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