



APPLYING TO COLLEGE

STANDARDIZED TESTS

Before you can apply to college, you must have taken the appropriate standardized tests that most colleges require. These tests may vary by college; here we present an overview of standardized testing.

PSAT/NMSQT POLICY

Sonoran Schools is dedicated to providing a comprehensive college preparatory program that facilitates students' ambitions to pursue higher education at the nation's top universities and colleges. As part of this process, students in grades 9 through 11 are required to take the PSAT test each fall. PSAT/NMSQT stands for Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test, a standardized test that provides firsthand practice for the SAT Reasoning Test.™ It also gives students a chance to enter National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) scholarship programs.

The PSAT/NMSQT measures:

- Critical reading skills;
- Math problem-solving skills; and
- Writing skills

The most common reason for taking the PSAT/NMSQT is to receive feedback on students' strengths and weaknesses on skills necessary for college study. Students can then focus their preparation on those areas that could most benefit from additional study or practice. Sonoran Schools also encourages middle school students to take the test. Students will be charged the price set by College Board (test maker), plus minimal administration fees. Each student is responsible for paying these expenses; however, low income families may qualify for a fee waiver. Parents should contact the school administration to request this fee waiver. Each case will be evaluated on an individual basis utilizing College Board criteria. PSAT testing will be administered at the school campus on the day and time designated by College Board. The date and time of the test will be communicated to the students and parents in advance.

THE SAT I and II

Students planning to attend college after graduation should take the College Board Entrance Examination (aka **SAT**) or the **ACT**. Some students take the PLAN, the practice test for the ACT, or the PSAT, the practice test for the SAT. The PSAT is offered once a year in October. Students should plan to take the **SAT-I: Reasoning Tests** and, if appropriate, the **SAT-II: Subject Tests** in the spring of the junior year and probably again in the fall of their senior year. For students taking any AP course, Sonoran Schools recommends that the SAT Subject Test for that subject is taken at the end of the course of study.

The SAT-I: Reasoning Test is a three hour and forty-five minute exam that measures ability to critically reason and apply mathematical concepts and write. The SAT-I or ACT is required by most four-year colleges and some two-year colleges. Students can register on-line to take the Sat-I.

SAT-II: Subject Tests are required by some private colleges, usually the more competitive institutions. Those colleges that do require the SAT-II often require two and sometimes three. It is the student's responsibility to check with each college and learn the requirements. Subject tests last for one hour, and a student can take a maximum of three on a given test date. Students should confer with their counselors to determine if and when to take a specific test.

SAT score reports are cumulative. They include information provided on the *Student Descriptive Questionnaire* and scores for the SAT I and SAT IIs. Students cannot send only their latest or highest SAT/SAT I scores or separate scores for verbal or math sections.

THE ACT is another standardized college admissions test, is administered by the American College Testing Service located in Iowa City, Iowa. The ACT is composed of four 35 to 50 minute sections in English usage, mathematics usage, social studies reading, and natural science reading. The main difference between the ACT and the SAT is the ACT is a yardstick of both reasoning ability and knowledge of specific subject matter covered in classes. Regarding the ACT, students MAY select which scores to forward to colleges. A score report will also list all the colleges and scholarship programs designated to receive scores, with descriptive and deadline information about each of the colleges listed. (This list of colleges does not appear on reports sent to colleges.)

FEE WAIVERS for the SAT and ACT are available to students who need financial assistance. Students who are granted fee waivers are also eligible for free college applications.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) TESTS allow current high school students to demonstrate college level proficiency achieved in demanding high school course work. A student does not need to be enrolled in a specifically designated AP course to take the exam in that subject, but it is expected that advanced study in a demanding curriculum will be necessary to perform well on Advanced Placement exams. The AP exam is not required as part of the college admissions process, but colleges may give credit for certain AP exams/scores. College policies vary widely in how AP scores are used. Students are advised to check with the college they plan to attend to determine the college's policy on AP scores and whether an AP exam might be of use for a given student. High scores on AP exams may permit students to be exempted from certain college courses, may provide credit for some college course work, or may provide access into honors or other specialized programs.

TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language is a test to evaluate the English proficiency of students whose native language is not English. Any student whose native language is not English should check with her or his Guidance Counselor to see if this test might be necessary.

REGISTERING FOR A TEST:

- For the SAT-I, SAT-II, and AP tests: www.collegeboard.com
- For the ACT: www.act.org
- For the TOEFL: www.ets.org/toefl

APPLYING TO COLLEGE

Many traditional four-year colleges make admission decisions based on a specific dimension of success, such as test scores and grades. Other colleges create a blueprint of the incoming class as a whole, expressed in terms of academic qualifications, personal characteristics and geographic and ethnic diversity. Applicants are evaluated against the blueprint to determine what each can contribute to the big picture.

Click on the following link for a checklist you can use to track where you are with your college applications:
http://www.sonoranschools.org/images/SSA_Tucson/College_Counseling/Application_Checklist_Form.pdf

BASIC STEPS

1. Complete online admission application. Thanks to your Naviance "Family Connection" account, the application process for all your colleges can be initiated with just a couple of clicks. Most colleges accept the Common Application (www.commonapp.org); some colleges may require an additional supplemental application.
2. Submit the application fee.
3. Have your ACT or SAT scores sent **directly** to the college(s) you are applying to. ACT or SAT scores are required for merit scholarship consideration and for college course placement. They are also required for some majors, and can be helpful in the general admission process. For colleges that require Subject tests, make sure those scores are sent, too.
4. Applicants must request transcripts from each educational institution attended. Official transcripts must be mailed or sent electronically directly to Undergraduate Admissions by the records office of the issuing institution(s). Colleges do

not accept transcripts sent or carried by hand by applicants themselves or transmitted by fax. High school transcripts must show GPA and date of graduation.

TRANSCRIPT PACKAGE

In addition to the student's portion of the application and standardized test scores, colleges and universities require a number of supplemental pieces of information which, taken together, form a student's "transcript package". A student's transcript package can include:

- A transcript of high school courses
- A counselor recommendation
- A character reference from someone who knows the student outside of school such as a coach, activity advisor, or employer
- A personal statement
- Senior year first quarter grades
- Secondary School Report and Teacher Evaluation Forms from the college's application
- A descriptive profile of our school
- Teacher recommendations
- Other information, such as copies of student's Individual Education Plan, and special education testing, if appropriate.

TEACHER RECOMMENDATIONS AND FORMS

Although college requirements vary with respect to teacher recommendations, it is suggested that students get at least two academic teacher references. Colleges prefer recommendations from teachers of courses taken in the junior or senior years. Because teacher recommendations take a great deal of time to write, students should not ask more than two academic teachers to write them a reference. If a student feels that she or he may need more than two references, talk to the guidance counselor. Once a student identifies those teachers she/he wishes to ask, she/he should do the following:

- Provide each teacher with information such as a written summary of your activities (a resumé), names of colleges to which you are applying, and your personal goals in order to assist the teacher in writing the recommendation.
- Be sure you allow your teachers two to four weeks to complete your recommendation.
- Ask your teacher to return it directly to the College's Admissions Office. Provide the teacher with a business size envelope, address it to the college, place a stamp on it, and jot the school's deadline on the inside flap of the envelope.
- If a college application you are completing contains its own Teacher Recommendation Form(s), we suggest the following:
 - Complete the steps as outlined above.
 - Fill out the personal information section on the college's teacher form, then give it to the teacher with the materials listed. If you request the letter before you are sure of which colleges you are applying to, provide those materials to the teacher as soon as possible.

SECONDARY SCHOOL REPORT FORMS

If a college application contains a Secondary School Report Form, complete the personal information section on the form and submit it to the Guidance Office. Request that it be sent along with your transcript and the other materials you are releasing.

CHARACTER REFERENCE

Obtaining one character reference from someone who knows you outside the classroom such as a coach, activity advisor, or employer can be helpful in presenting you from a different point of view. A character reference can be written on the person's own stationery or on that of his or her company.

ACTIVITIES RECORD OR RESUMÉ

This form, which outlines your extra-curricular activities, may be included in your transcript package. You need not include this form in your transcript package if you expect to write this information directly on the college application.

MID-YEAR REPORT AND FINAL REPORT

The Guidance Office will send mid-year assessments to all schools for which an application has been sent. At the end of the fourth quarter, in June, your final transcript will be sent to the school that you indicate to us that you will be attending.

RELEASES

Your written consent must be given to the Guidance Office to have any documents released. No less than two weeks before each college application deadline, you need to fill out a **Student Record Consent Form**. On the form you are required to indicate where you wish to have your information sent and which information needs to be sent.

THE COLLEGE ESSAY

The college essay is one part of the application process that gives students the opportunity to inform admissions officials about their special abilities, interests, and qualities, or about any significant factors that might set them apart from a large number of qualified applicants. As many colleges begin to doubt the usefulness of standardized test scores, college essays are being given more weight than ever in the admissions process. While a superb essay will not cancel out a poor high school record, a well written essay can make a student with a good record stand out from the other applicants.

Colleges that ask students to write essays really do want to know the person behind the numbers. A good essay can present the student as an interesting and valuable person who is worth knowing, who is genuine, thoughtful, engaging, and able to handle what he or she has set out to do. An essay can also comment on any setbacks the student has suffered or explain any gaps in the academic record. In general, essays are evaluated on three basic criteria:

- **The student's ability to use standard written English** that is correctly written, punctuated, and contains correct grammar, usage, and syntax.
- **The content, substance, and depth of insight** which reflects the student's ability to think about him/her self and to convey authentic feelings or opinions about a topic.
- **Creativity and originality** which shows an individual who would bring qualities such as intellect, initiative, energy, and a fresh viewpoint to the college community.

Students writing college essays would do well to **avoid the following**:

- Inflating experiences, trying too hard to impress, or adopting a pompous or overly intellectual tone.
- Expressions of anger or hostility toward others.
- Mere repetition of information that is available elsewhere in the application.
- Undue influence by parents or other adults in the writing of the essay. The voice of an adult can easily come through an essay too strongly and drown out the authentic voice of the student writer.
- General statements and clichés that make the essay unremarkable from hundreds of similar essays which admissions officials read. Telling details and specifics make the essay "live."

- Being overcautious or too eager to please the admissions committee. A mediocre essay won't hurt the applicant much, but a truly good one can help immensely.

EXAMPLES OF COLLEGE ESSAY QUESTIONS

The questions below are typical examples of those which frequently appear in college applications:

- Describe your most significant personal experience. Why was it significant and how has it influenced you?
- Identify and discuss a significant problem facing your generation.
- What have you read that has a special significance for you? Explain why.
- Describe a person or experience of particular importance to you.
- Please describe the reasons that influenced you in selecting your intended field of study.
- If you could travel through time and interview a prominent figure in the arts, politics, religion, or science, for example, whom would you choose and why?
- Describe your experience in living in a racially, culturally, or ethnically diverse environment; what do you expect to need to know to live successfully in the multicultural society in the future?
- Make up a question, state it clearly, and answer it. Feel free to use your imagination, recognizing that those who read it will not mind being entertained.
- Please use the space provided to indicate what you consider your best qualities to be, and describe how your college education will be of assistance to you in sharing these qualities and accomplishments with others.

GRADES MATTER

From the day you step into high school, always remember that your high school grades are the #1 factor in the college admission decision. Other factors count, but the body of work you develop in high school is what matters most—as it should.

Yet colleges do not choose students by the numbers only—they don't simply take the students with the highest grades and test scores. Colleges use many other factors to add depth to the numbers, and to compare applicants with each other to build a class that fits the college's mission. Students who meet or exceed the threshold for admission are, at selective colleges, evaluated based on all of the attributes they bring to campus, including special talents, academic interests, and personal characteristics. Here's a breakdown of what colleges take into account:

Percentage of colleges attributing different levels of importance to factors in the admission decision: 2011

Factor	Considerable importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No importance
Grades in college prep courses	84.3%	11.9%	2.3%	1.5%
Strength of curriculum	67.7	20.4	5.8	6.2
Admission test scores (SAT, ACT).	59.2	29.6	6.9	4.2
Grades in all courses	51.9	39.2	6.9	1.9
Essay or writing sample	24.9	37.5	17.2	20.3
Student's demonstrated interest	20.5	29.7	24.7	25.1
Counselor recommendation	19.2	39.8	27.2	13.8
Class Rank	18.8	31.0	31.4	18.8
Teacher recommendation	16.5	41.9	26.5	15.0
Subject test scores (AP, IB)	6.9	31.2	31.5	30.4
Portfolio	6.6	12.8	30.2	50.4

Interview	6.2	25.4	25.8	42.7
SAT II scores	5.4	9.7	22.6	62.3
Extracurricular activities	5.0	43.1	38.1	13.8
State graduation exam	4.2	14.9	23.8	57.1
Work	2.3	17.0	43.2	37.5

SOURCE: NACAC Admission Trends Survey, 2011