

The SAT - Scholastic Assessment Test

One common method of demonstrating proficiency for admission to a post-secondary institution is a standardized test. The best-known is probably the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test). In the United States, the College Board administers the SAT so that colleges and universities can compare students from different parts of the country with different educational programs. But the SAT has become internationally recognized and is written in dozens of countries around the world.

The SAT I is a skills-based test, not a curriculum-based test. Virtually all American colleges and universities use them. Some Canadian institutions do not use them, but students who are not successful with the SAT will not be successful at the post-secondary level. On the other hand, students who do well on the SAT have a good chance of getting into many post-secondary institutions. Some may even be eligible for financial aid.

The objection that the SAT I is an “American test” is invalid because the skills it assesses are not unique to the United States. The College Board reports that SAT scores are recognized by colleges and universities worldwide.

Dr. James Stobaugh, a Christian educator and home education supporter, says that “the SAT I is essentially a critical reading, vocabulary, and arithmetic word problem test.” There are, in fact, three parts to the test: Critical Reading, Mathematics and Writing.

There are also SAT II Subject Tests for specific areas such as history, biology, chemistry, physics, math, etc. However, the SAT I is the most common form of the test and the one most likely to be useful for home educated students. In most cases, home educated students would not need to write SAT IIs.

Preparing for the SAT

Test-taking is a skill that can be developed. Some people are instinctively good at taking tests and are able to succeed in academic fields for this reason. Those who are not naturally good at taking tests can nevertheless improve their test-taking abilities through practice. Also, getting a good night’s sleep before exam day can help a student to perform at his or her best.

The College Board offers free practice SATs for those who are interested in potentially taking the SAT. It is strongly recommended that any home educated student who desires to write the SAT spend a reasonable amount of time in preparation. Preparation involving practice tests will likely improve a student’s performance by making him or her familiar with the test format. Among other benefits, this eliminates the stressful surprise of seeing the test format for the first time on exam day. The free practice test is available at this link: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/practice/sat-practice-test>.

Khan Academy, the free online video learning resource, has partnered with the College Board to provide free SAT preparation videos. You can find these materials here: <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat>. They are highly recommended and certainly among the very best preparation materials.

There are also SAT preparation materials available for sale, but you don’t need to buy any of them. The free online resources from the College Board and Khan Academy should be sufficient for any home educated student.

However, for those who are interested, Dr. James Stobaugh (mentioned above), has produced a specifically Christian SAT preparation book entitled: *SAT & College Preparation Course for the Christian Student*. It is available for purchase from many sources.

SAT scores

A new SAT was introduced in 2016 that generates two test scores. One score is for math skills and the other is for verbal skills (which combines reading and writing test sections). Each of the scores range from 200 to 800, so a perfect score on both would total 1600.

The average score for each section is 500, making the average overall score 1000. Scoring below 1000 will likely result in difficulty getting accepted into a post-secondary institution.

Total scores of 1200 or above put a student in the top 25 per cent of test takers and are likely sufficient for most post-secondary institutions. However, the most elite and exclusive post-secondary institutions require scores over 1500.

Before 2016 there was a compulsory writing component to the SAT. However, since that time it has become optional because some university officials considered it to be unnecessary.

Other details

The SAT can be written at a number of locations in Alberta. Larger centers, like Calgary and Edmonton, have venues that offer the SAT five to six times per year. A few smaller centers also have venues that offer the SAT, but less often than the two big cities. To see when and where the SAT is being written in Alberta, use the Test Center Search tool on the College Board website: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/test-center-code-search>.

It is important to note that writing the SAT costs money. The College Board charges for its services. Payment is in US dollars. You can consult the SAT fee schedule at: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/intl-services-fees>. Expect to pay over \$100.00 in Canadian funds.

Conclusion

If a student already knows which post-secondary institution he or she would like to attend, it should be ascertained whether or not SAT results would be accepted by that institution. If the student does not yet have a particular institution in mind, taking the SAT may nevertheless be worthwhile. This is because students who do well on the SAT have one more useful item to present when seeking admission into post-secondary institutions. Having written the SAT, and having done well on it, is an asset and a confidence builder in approaching post-secondary institutions for admission.