

UNDERSTANDING TEST SCORES



Time Required: 30-45 minutes

Principles:

- Students will acquire attitudes, knowledge, and skills that contribute to effective learning in school and across the lifespan.

Objectives (Students will...):

- Analyze the most recent standardized test results to identify strengths and challenges.

GOAL: Students will understand how to read and interpret test scores.

Activity Statement:

Students will discuss standardized tests and understand test scores.

Materials:

1. Copy of student Map, and or Explore scores.
(These reports can be obtained from the high school guidance office.)
2. Pen/pencil
3. Handout 1 – “Interpretation of Test Scores”
4. Testing schedule of all tests for sophomore year. Available from the counseling office.
5. Handout 2 – “PSAT: Why Take the Test”

Procedures:

1. Write the words *standardized tests* and *non-standardized tests* on the chalkboard.
2. Ask students to identify the difference between these two tests.
3. Ask students to name examples of standardized tests (ACT, SAT, PSAT, PLAN, Proficiency Exams).
4. Post range of scores on the board or provide handout.
5. Have students examine their own standardized score reports.
6. Distribute and discuss Handout 1.
7. Distribute and discuss Handout 2.
8. Distribute sophomore testing schedule. Available from the counseling office. Discuss dates and procedures for upcoming tests.

UNDERSTANDING TEST SCORES – Handout 2

Discussion:



1. What types of scores are given for each test?
2. What is a percentile score?
3. What is a national percentile score?
4. What types of tests are needed for four year college admission, community/technical college?
5. What is a grade equivalent score?
6. Where do you fall in the score range? What would you need to do to move to the next level?

Integrative Closing Statement:

Analyzing test results can help students understand their test performance and develop better test-taking strategies.

Please inform your parents they can call me (advisor) or your counselor for help understanding your scores.

Use the following information to assist with interpretation of test scores.

Interpretation of Test Scores

Percentile Score (Percentile Rank) (PR)

A percentile score or more appropriately a percentile rank shows a student's rank relative to a large, representative sample of students within the same grade. Percentile ranks range from a low of 1 to a high of 99. The number is the percent of students in the standardized sample that earned lower scores on a test. A percentile rank of 35 means that a student performed higher than 35 percent of the students within his or her grade.

National Percentile Score

A national percentile rank (score) describes how well a student performed in comparison with a nationwide sample of students in the same grade.

Stanine Scores

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Stanines are single-digit scores ranging from a low of 1 to a high of 9, with an average of 5. Since stanines are single-digit scores, they are easy to record and to use in studies a school may wish to conduct. There is a relationship of stanines to percentile ranks.



Stanines 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9

Percentile Ranks

96 and up
89-95
77-88
60-76
40-59
23-39
11-22
4-10
Below 4

Grade Equivalent Score

A grade equivalent score is a decimal number that describes performance in terms of grade levels-and months. For example, if a ninth grade student obtains a grade equivalent of 10.4 on the vocabulary test, he or she is performing like a typical student at the end of the fourth month of tenth grade.

Standardized Tests

A standardized test is one, which has directions, time limits, materials and scoring procedures designed to remain constant each time the test is given. Standardized tests often provide scores based on a norm group.

Non-Standardized Tests

An informal test usually designed to give an approximate index of an individual's level of ability or learning style; often teacher-constructed.

Department of Student assessment, Office of Accountability, Chicago Public Schools

PSAT/NMSQT

Why Take the Test?

The Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT) is an early practice test for the SAT I. More than 2 million students take the PSAT each year. The types of questions that appear on this test are identical to the ones you will see on the SAT I. The format of the two tests is also the same. The test is given in October, and you will have your results by December, which allows you plenty of time to set up a study schedule for taking the SAT I in May or June. In 1998, for those who had taken the PSAT/ NMSQT, the mean SAT I score was 129 points higher than those who had not taken the earlier test.

The PSAT reports what are called silent scores. Only you and your guidance counselor see your scores. They are not reported to colleges. This allows you to practice without penalty in a timed setting similar to the testing circumstances you will find for the SAT I. The test results, which are provided in a detailed, easy-to-read form, are an excellent tool to help you determine those areas where you need extra help and study.

Depending on your score on the PSAT, you may be able to enter the national scholarship competition run by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. Finally, the PSAT provides schools with the information that you are interested in attending college, which means that colleges and universities will put you on their mailing lists.

What to Bring

UNDERSTANDING TEST SCORES – Handout 2

- ❖ PSAT entry card or your name on the guidance list for entry.
- ❖ Several sharpened #2 pencils.
- ❖ Identification, preferably with a picture, such as a driver's license or school ID. You could also bring a copy of your transcript or a note from the guidance department on school letterhead attesting to your identity. ID will be checked at the test!
- ❖ Calculator. Any four-function scientific or graphing calculator will do. Do not bring a calculator with the memory the size of a computer or one with a noisy typewriter-like keyboard. Do not bring a laptop, an electronic writing pad, or a pocket organizer. If you bring a calculator with a display screen so big that it can be seen by others, the test supervisor may decide not to seat you. Also, your calculator cannot speak to you, have paper tape, or require an electrical outlet.
- ❖ Leave the following at home: loud watches, CD players, tape recorders, cell phones, pagers, and school supplies. You will not need scratch paper, notes, books, dictionaries, compasses, protractors, rulers, highlighters, or colored pens or pencils. You might want to bring some fruit juice, tea, or water and a healthy snack for the breaks.

Timing

Traditionally, students have taken the PSAT in October of their junior year so that they can use the score for the National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. The NMQST compares the scores of juniors across the country. Above a certain cutoff, students are able to enter the competition for National Merit scholarships.

In recent years, it has become more common for students to take the PSAT in October of their sophomore year. About 33 percent of test takers choose this route. Taking the PSAT this early allows students and counselors more time to plan schedules to meet students' academic needs and better prepare them for their career choices. However, taking the test in October of your sophomore year does not enter you into the National Merit Scholarship competition.

Strategies

- ❖ Know the format and timing of the test. The best way to do this is to practice, practice, and then practice some more. Purchase review books and take the practice tests in them and in the Student Bulletin. Make a schedule and set aside a regular time to practice. Isolate yourself and try to simulate a testing environment when you practice.
- ❖ Know the directions for each section and type of question. The directions are the same on the PSAT as they are on the SAT I. It will save you time during the real test if you do not have to read the directions.
- ❖ Learn how to make educated guesses. All but ten questions on the PSAT are multiple-choice. You need to be able to eliminate at least one answer as wrong, however, before making your best guess.
- ❖ Build a vocabulary bank. Read, read, and read some more. No amount of drills, flash cards, or memorizing words out of context is going to help you own these words. Pick up a Sunday newspaper and read the editorial section every week. Read it with a dictionary next to you. Then do the crossword. These two activities alone will grow your vocabulary about 800 words a year.