

# Preparing for College

© 2014, Monit Cheung, PhD, LCSW, and Patrick Leung, PhD, Professors of Social Work  
Child Welfare Education Project, University of Houston

Update: [http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New\\_research/cwep/prospective-students/](http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New_research/cwep/prospective-students/)

Preparing for college is a **four-year process** that typically begins when a student enters the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Below you will find a step-by-step guide to applying to colleges in the State of Texas. Please check with your school counselor for details.

## Freshman Year (Grade 9)

- Begin to explore careers and colleges. Start by visiting college websites and develop a relationship with your school counselor and teachers. Talk with people in your field of interest.
- When looking at prospective colleges, consider a variety of factors including the cost, location, types of programs, admissions criteria, student body composition, and support network.
- Talk with your school counselor and sign up for courses that will prepare you for college. Make sure you select a curriculum that will both challenge and interest you.
- Try to take honors or advanced classes in your interest areas.
- Get involved in community and school activities. Select activities that will eventually provide you with leadership experience.
- Talk with your parents about the cost of college and develop a financial plan.

## Sophomore Year (Grade 10)

- Attend college fairs and consult with current students and alumni about their experiences.
- Take the PSAT for the first time in October.
- Continue to participate in a variety of extracurricular activities
- Make campus visits with your parents to get a feel for the school.
- Speak with your school counselor and develop an academic plan for your junior and senior years.
- Use your summer to prepare for the SAT or ACT.

## Junior Year (Grade 11)

- Continue to visit prospective schools and attend information sessions.
- Develop a short list of your target colleges and research their specific admissions criteria. Try to have a good balance of dream schools, safety schools, and good matches in between.
- Look for opportunities to assume leadership positions in your extracurricular activities.
- Begin researching scholarships (and start applying)
- Brainstorm ideas for essay topics for your college applications.
- Start talking about your college interest with teachers whom you will invite to write your reference letters.
- Start writing essays and seek editorial and guidance support from teachers and other professionals in your field of interest.
- Take the SAT or ACT for the first time.
- When registering for SAT or ACT, make sure to put your target colleges as recipients of the Score Report Request (for the free score reports).
- Take any SAT Subject Tests required by your finalist schools.
- Use your summer to study for the ACT or SAT tests if you plan to re-take them.

## Senior Year (Grade 12)

- Request reference letters at least 3 weeks in advance. Talk in person and then email your reference person with an attachment that includes your résumé and an example letter (including the college address and a paragraph for the reference person to write about you).
- If applying to schools through the ApplyTexas Application, be sure to research their requirements and deadlines.
- Take or retake the ACT, SAT, or SAT Subject Tests if required.
- Apply to several schools and send in your applications as early as possible. Make note of all application deadlines early!
- Send in any required forms if you're applying for financial aid (either the FAFSA or the TASFA). Submit them early for best consideration.
- After you've decided which college you'll be attending, notify the other colleges that you've been admitted to.
- Make sure to write thank you notes to those who helped you in this process!

# Academic Achievement Tests for Higher Education

## Undergraduate Admissions

### **SAT Reasoning Test (Scholastic Assessment Test)**

Required by many four-year colleges, especially private schools. Usually taken once or twice starting in the Junior Spring. ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com))

### **SAT Subject Tests**

Required or recommended by some four-year colleges (the specific subjects vary). Usually taken once or twice, starting between the Junior and Senior year. ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com))

### **ACT (American College Testing)**

Accepted in place of the SAT by many four-year colleges, often preferred by state schools. Usually taken once or twice, starting in the Junior Spring. ([www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org))

### **AP Tests (Advanced Placement)**

Accepted as college credit at most four-year colleges if a high school is achieved. Can sometimes be taken regardless of whether student has taken an AP class. Taken in the junior and senior years of high school. ([www.apcentral.collegeboard.com](http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com))

## Graduate/Professional Schools

### **GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)**

Test in mathematics usually required for graduate business studies. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. ([www.mba.com](http://www.mba.com))

### **GRE (Graduate Record Examination) (Scores: 130-170 Verbal or Quantitative)**

Similar to the SAT, the GRE is required for many graduate programs, particularly those in the social sciences. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. ([www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre))

### **LSAT (Law School Admission Test)**

Required for entrance into law school. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. ([www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org))

### **MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)**

Required for entrance into medical school. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. ([www.aamc.com/mcat](http://www.aamc.com/mcat))

### **PCAT (Pharmacy College Admission Test)**

Required for entrance into pharmacy school. Usually taken in the junior or senior year of college. ([www.pcatweb.info](http://www.pcatweb.info))

## Language Proficiency Tests

### **IELTS (International English Language Testing System)**

Accepted by over 2,000 academic institutions in the US ([www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org))

### **TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)**

Usually a college admission requirement for non-native English speakers. Taken the senior year of high school. ([www.ets.org/toefl](http://www.ets.org/toefl))

## The SAT Test

Test	Total No. of Questions	Test Descriptions	Skills
Critical Reading	19 48	Sentence Completions Passage-based Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Main and supporting ideas</li> <li>• Meaning of words in context</li> <li>• Authors' purposes</li> <li>• Structure and function of sentences</li> </ul>
Math	44 10	Standard multiple-choice Student-produced response questions that provide no answer choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numbers and operations</li> <li>• Algebra and functions</li> <li>• Geometry and measurement</li> <li>• Data analysis, statistics, and probability</li> </ul>
Writing (Multiple-Choice)	25 18 6	Improving sentences Identifying sentence errors Improving paragraphs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence errors</li> <li>• Best version of a piece of writing</li> <li>• Improving paragraphs</li> </ul>
Writing (Essay) (25 mins)	Essay	Suggested structure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Introduction with a point of view on the issue presented in the topic</li> <li>2. Body with reasoning and examples to support the point of view</li> <li>3. Conclusion</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a point of view on an issue presented in an excerpt</li> <li>• Support your point of view using reasoning and examples from your reading, studies, experience, or observations</li> <li>• Follow the conventions of standard written English</li> </ul>
Variable Section (25 mins)	To be determined	Not scored	For future test use to test the difficult level of each test question

Source: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/sat-reasoning/about>

## ACT Tests

Test	Total No. of Questions	Time	Test Descriptions
English	75	45 mins	Standard written English and rhetorical skills
Math	60	60 mins	Math skills typically acquired in courses taken up to the beginning of Grade 12
Reading	40	35 mins	Reading comprehension
Science	40	35 mins	Interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences
<b>ACT Plus Writing</b>	4 M-C question and a writing test	30 mins	Writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses

Source: <http://www.act.org/products/k-12-act-test/>

## SAT and ACT Score Conversion

SAT	ACT
2400	36
2340	35
2260	34
2190	33
2130	32
2040	31
1980	30
1920	29
1860	28
1820	27
1760	26
1700	25
1650	24
1590	23
1530	22
1500	21
1410	20
1350	19
1290	18
1210	17
1140	16
1060	15
1000	14
900	13
780	12
750	11

Source: <http://www.act.org/products/k-12-act-test/>

For more information about the Child Welfare Education Project, please email Dr. Monit Cheung at [mcheung@uh.edu](mailto:mcheung@uh.edu).

SAT Scores (visit <https://sat.collegeboard.org/home> to get free sample SAT questions)

1. SAT: Learn about this test from a free copy of “Getting Ready for the SAT”: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/SAT/public/pdf/getting-ready-for-the-sat.pdf>
2. There are three main parts in an SAT test: Reading, Math and Writing
3. Total testing time: 3 hours and 45 mins
4. Total timed sections: 10 (ranged from 10 to 25 mins each grouped with questions from one of the three main parts). The first section is always the essay and the last section is also a writing section. In between the content areas may be arranged in any order.

Timed Sections	Time in Minutes	Total Time
1. Writing (essay)	25	Writing: 60 mins
2. Writing (multiple-choice)	25	
3. Writing (M-C)	10	
4. Critical reading (M-C)	25	Critical Reading: 70 mins
5. Critical reading (M-C)	25	
6. Critical reading (M-C)	20	
7. Math (M-C and Student-produced response)	25	Math: 70 mins
8. Math (M-C)	25	
9. Math (M-C)	20	
10. Variable (unscored, M-C)	25	Variable: 25 mins

Source: College Board at <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/sat-reasoning/about/sections>

5. Scores for each section range from 200 to 800 (with additional subscores for the essay ranging from 2 to 12)
6. Writing Section Subscores (25 mins essay test): The College Board describes that each essay subscore is reported on a 2-12 scale. Each essay is independently scored by two readers, each of who will assign a score from 1 to 6. If the two readers’ scores differ by more than one point, a third reader will then score the essay. The essay score will represent 30% of the Writing score (200-800) while additional multiple-choice questions on writing and grammar will count for 70%.
7. The essay scoring guide is attached in the “Getting Ready for the SAT” booklet (see website above). Mainly, an essay is graded based on clarity of the point of view provided, critical thinking with appropriate examples and reasons, variety in sentence structure and vocabulary use, focus and organization, and correct use of English grammar.
8. SAT Subject Test Subscores are reported on a 20-80 scale. Students can take language such as Chinese as a subject test.
9. SAT raw scores: 1) 1 point gained on a correct answer; 2) -1/4 point (subtracted) for incorrect multiple-choice answer and 0 points subtracted for incorrect student-produced response in the Math section; 3) 0 points subtracted for not giving an answer.
10. SAT subject tests scores: 1) 1 point gained on a correct answer; 2) -1/4 point (subtracted) for incorrect five-choice answer and -1/3 point (subtracted) for incorrect four-choice answer, and -1/2 point (subtracted) for incorrect three-choice answer ; 3) 0 points subtracted for not giving an answer.

For more information about the Child Welfare Education Project, please email Dr. Monit Cheung at [mcheung@uh.edu](mailto:mcheung@uh.edu).

## The Do's and Don'ts for College Applications

<b>DO'S</b>	<b>DON'TS</b>
Start early and prepare your resume	Don't participate in too many extracurricular activities at the last minute just to crowd them in your resume – join your activities and community services that focus on your interest since grade 9
Keep a calendar with important dates	Don't forget to keep track of all admissions requirements
Practice and take college admission tests early	Don't forget to practice your test (and get free tests available at the College Board and ACT websites)
Ask for external advice on your essay writing and preparation	Don't wait until the last minutes to seek counselor's or teacher's recommendation letters – prepare a summary of your achievements for them
Consider and apply to more than one university	Don't forget to proofread all your admissions materials
Participate in community services to show your leadership	Don't forget to volunteer your time to help others
Visit colleges before making a final decision	Don't' forget to have fun during your high school years

# Preparing for College: Time Line

© 2014, Child Welfare Education Project, University of Houston

Update at: [http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New\\_research/cwep/prospective-students/](http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New_research/cwep/prospective-students/)

	<b>Freshman (Grade 9)</b>	<b>Sophomore (Grade 10)</b>	<b>Junior (Grade 11)</b>	<b>Senior (Grade 12)</b>
<b>September</b>	Talk with your guidance counselors Sign up for courses that will prepare you for college Take honors or advanced classes in your interest areas	Begin to attend college fairs  Consult with current students & alumni about their experiences	Continue to visit prospective schools & attend college fairs	Ask your references to write letters (3 weeks in advance)  Begin your applications, making note of all deadlines & requirements Take the ACT (if desired)
<b>October</b>	Research prospective colleges	Take the PSAT	Look for opportunities to assume leadership positions in your extracurricular activities	Retake the ACT, SAT or SAT Subject tests (if desired)
<b>November</b>	Get involved in community & extracurricular activities that interest you	Continue to participate in extracurricular activities	Develop a short list of your target schools  Begin researching scholarships**	Retake the SAT and SAT Subject tests (if desired)
<b>December</b>	Read more and practice writing skills	Make plans for campus visits (if desired)	Visit more college campuses over winter break	Retake the SAT and SAT Subject tests (if desired)
<b>January</b>	Talk with your parents about the cost of college & develop a financial plan		Take the SAT or SAT Subject Tests	Apply for financial aid as early as possible (either FAFSA or the TASFA)
<b>February</b>		Speak with your school counselor and develop an academic plan for your junior & senior years	Take the ACT	Discuss your final college selection with your parents and teachers
<b>March</b>		Make campus visits with your parents	Brainstorm ideas for essay topics (for admissions and scholarship applications)	Continue your scholarship applications
<b>April</b>		Attend college fairs to seek information about college majors	Take the SAT or ACT (if desired)	Pick a school and notify all accepted schools of your final decision
<b>May</b>			Write essays and seek editorial and guidance support	Write thank you notes to everyone who helped you with this process
<b>June, July &amp; August</b>	Study for the PSAT	Study for the SAT or ACT	Start applying for scholarships  Take the June SAT or ACT (if desired)	Look through the college's course listing & meet with a university academic counselor to select courses

\*\*For scholarship information, please visit: [http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New\\_research/cwep/current-students/](http://www.uh.edu/socialwork/New_research/cwep/current-students/) (click at Scholarship Opportunities).  
For more information about the MSW degree program in the Child Welfare Education Project, please email Dr. Monit Cheung at [mcheung@uh.edu](mailto:mcheung@uh.edu).