

What Is the ISEE?

The Independent School Entrance Exam (ISEE) is an admission test developed by the Educational Records Bureau (ERB) for its member schools as part of their admission process. The ISEE was created by Measurement Incorporated, Durham, NC, and ERB, with assistance from faculty of ERB member schools.

The current edition has been updated to include educational assessment best practices and to align with national standards in English and mathematics as articulated in standards adopted by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). Nearly two-thirds of the questions on the ISEE were developed by ERB-member faculty and administrators from a cross section of independent schools across the United States under the direction of test development specialists at Measurement Incorporated.

The ISEE is the admission test of choice for many independent schools throughout the country and abroad. Test sites are available in numerous cities during the admission testing season. The ISEE consists of five sections at three levels designed to measure the verbal and quantitative reasoning and achievement of students. Students seeking admission to grades 9–12 take the Upper Level.

Students may register to take the ISEE up to three times in a 12-month admission cycle, once in any or all of the three testing seasons. The seasons are Fall (August–November), Winter (December–March), and Spring/Summer (April–July). ISEE does not encourage multiple testing, but does offer students and families that option.

The five sections that make up the ISEE are (in order of testing): **Verbal Reasoning**, **Quantitative Reasoning**, **Reading Comprehension**, **Mathematics Achievement**, and an **Essay** which is written by the student in his or her own handwriting in response to a given writing prompt. Each section is designed to tap into a unique aspect of a student's preparation for academic work.

The first four sections consist entirely of multiple-choice questions. Results are reported in percentile ranks; that is, each student's performance is measured against a norm group made up of students applying to independent schools in the same grade who have tested over the past three years. The essay is not scored but sent directly to the school(s) to which the student has applied, along with the score report.

What Types of Questions Are on the ISEE?

The first four sections are composed of multiple-choice questions. The fifth section, the essay, is not scored but requires the student to respond in his or her own handwriting to a preselected writing prompt.

The first two sections, **Verbal Reasoning** and **Quantitative Reasoning**, measure the applicant's reasoning ability.

The Upper Level **Verbal Reasoning** section consists of two types of items: vocabulary and sentence completion. Each vocabulary item consists of an abstract, grade-level appropriate word followed by four possible answer choices. Each sentence completion item consists of a sentence with one missing word or pair of words followed by four potential answer choices. A student must select the word or pair of words that most appropriately completes the context of the sentence.

At the Upper Level, the **Quantitative Reasoning** section consists of word problems and quantitative comparisons. The word problems differ somewhat from traditional mathematics achievement items in that some of them require either no calculation or simple calculation. The quantitative comparison items present two quantities, (A) and (B), and ask the student to select one of four answer choices:

- (A) The quantity in Column A is greater.
- (B) The quantity in Column B is greater.
- (C) The two quantities are equal.
- (D) The relationship cannot be determined from the information given.

The next two sections, **Reading Comprehension** and **Mathematics Achievement**, measure the applicant's ability to correctly answer curriculum-based concepts that are appropriate at that grade level according to curriculum standards adopted by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM).

In order to determine a student's reading comprehension skills, in the **Reading Comprehension** section, the student is asked to read a passage and then answer items specific to that passage.

The six passages in this section are age-appropriate and length-appropriate. Each passage is especially written to contain contemporary information and to be of high interest to students testing for grades 9 through 12. The passages cover a variety of subject areas including arts, contemporary life, history, and science.

Mathematics Achievement items conform to national mathematics standards and ask the student to identify the problem and find a solution to a problem. The items require one or more steps in calculating the answer.

The **Essay** is written by the student in response to a writing “prompt” or topic that is grade-level appropriate. The prompts rotate throughout the testing season. They are designed to prompt a student to write an informed essay on a particular topic. As is true of the passages in the **Reading Comprehension** section, these prompts have been written for a contemporary feel and a high level of interest to current students. Each prompt is free of bias, global in scope, and representative of a wide variety of subjects. Each prompt is one or two sentences long and asks students to respond to the situation described. Prompts may relate to the student, to the student’s community, or to the world in general.