Understanding PSAT Scores

Parent and Student Presentation

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Dr. Michael Portas
michael.portas@pequannock.org
Twitter: @michaelportas

Objective: To be able to interpret your test score report, and apply that understanding meaningfully

Goal: Students will understand that their results, however strong, horrendous or otherwise, provide the basis for a study plan not only for future testing, but also for their studies in school.

What's New?

- In short, seemingly everything has changed on the PSAT, most importantly that the assessment is all online
- The separate Reading and Writing sections are now a single [Reading & Writing Section](#)
- Students may use a calculator for the entire math assessment
- College Board is using adaptive responses technology, which means performance in the first module will affect what students see in the second module. With more difficult questions earning more points, this change complicates matters somewhat.
- Scratch paper will be provided—do not bring your own. But definitely do bring a pen or pencil to take notes
- Sample PSAT tests are available for [paper](#) (nonadaptive) and [online](#) formats.
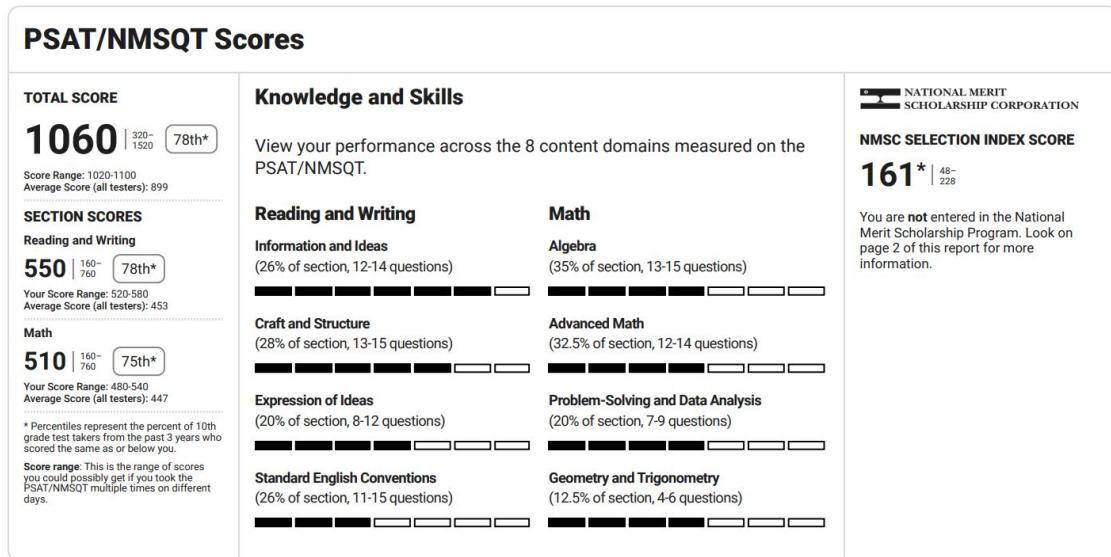
SCORING INFORMATION

For the PSAT, your score is intended to be essentially the equivalent of a score on the SAT. I have not heard a truly satisfactory explanation for why the sections for the PSAT 10 and PSAT/NMSQT are 760 points each rather than 800. The PSAT 8/9 is 720 points per section.

Pay close attention to your rank (nationally representative sample percentile) against students at your grade level in the state and nation (your competition), as well as your NMSC index score (used for National Merit Scholarship consideration - NJ score was 223 for the Class of 2023 after being 222 for the previous two years).

There are also subscores that provide a more granular understanding of how you did in targeted areas. They lack the precision of the former score report that broke down every question in sequential order, but do help identify areas of strength and what needs to be addressed.

Score Structure

PSAT/NMSQT Scores

TOTAL SCORE

1060 | 320–1520 | 78th*

Score Range: 1020-1100
Average Score (all testers): 899

SECTION SCORES

Reading and Writing

550 | 160–760 | 78th*

Your Score Range: 520-580
Average Score (all testers): 453

Math

510 | 160–760 | 75th*

Your Score Range: 480-540
Average Score (all testers): 447

* Percentiles represent the percent of 10th grade test takers from the past 3 years who scored the same as or below you.

Score range: This is the range of scores you could possibly get if you took the PSAT/NMSQT multiple times on different days.

Knowledge and Skills

View your performance across the 8 content domains measured on the PSAT/NMSQT.

Reading and Writing

Information and Ideas
(26% of section, 12-14 questions)

Craft and Structure
(28% of section, 13-15 questions)

Expression of Ideas
(20% of section, 8-12 questions)

Standard English Conventions
(26% of section, 11-15 questions)

Math

Algebra
(35% of section, 13-15 questions)

Advanced Math
(32.5% of section, 12-14 questions)

Problem-Solving and Data Analysis
(20% of section, 7-9 questions)

Geometry and Trigonometry
(12.5% of section, 4-6 questions)

NATIONAL MERIT SCHOLARSHIP CORPORATION

NMSC SELECTION INDEX SCORE

161* | 48–228

You are **not** entered in the National Merit Scholarship Program. Look on page 2 of this report for more information.

Each category is measured across 7 performance score bands

The online report should provide links to questions that align to each knowledge and skill area

Note how you stack up against the competition

Reading & Writing Subscores
These subscores reflect how well you did on specific content domains that appeared on your PSAT. The subscores are:
- Information and Ideas
- Craft and Structure
- Expression of Ideas
- Standard English Conventions

Math Subscores
These subscores reflect how well you did on specific content domains that appeared on your PSAT. The subscores are:
- Algebra
- Advanced Math
- Problem Solving & Data Analysis
- Geometry and Trigonometry

Use your scratch paper to jot notes and practice the process of elimination. You can still use this to mark up answer choices:

- Cross out down to the right = "I know this is incorrect."
- Dot = "Meh. I'm not sure what to do with this."
- Check = "I think this might be correct."
- Double Check = "I am confident this is correct."

First, read the question and write down your own answer ***before*** you look at the answer choices.

Skip nothing. If you're stumped, make a note of the question and move on. Either get back to it with fresh eyes, or fill in your guess letter. Use that letter for all blanks.

Identify +/-/N context for language

Free Advice

1

The following text is adapted from Amy Lowell's 1912 poem "Summer."

> It is summer, glorious, deep-toned summer,
> The very crown of nature's changing year
> When all her surging life is at its full.
> To me alone it is a time of pause,
> A void and silent space between two worlds,
> When inspiration lags, and feeling sleeps,
> Gathering strength for efforts yet to come.

As used in the text, what does the phrase "a void" most nearly mean?

A) A useless

B) An empty

C) A forgotten

D) An incomplete

2

In the 1960s, Sam Gilliam, a Black painter from the southern United States, became the first artist to drape painted canvases into flowing shapes. He later explored a different style, _____ quilt-like paintings inspired by the patchwork quilting tradition of Black communities in the South.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) predicting

B) refusing

C) hiding

D) creating

Reading & Writing (Section 1)

Broken into two 32-minute modules, each with 27 questions

Note: "SAT words" are no longer on the SAT. Rather, the vocabulary questions focus on "Words in Context." Questions with the "most nearly means" phrasing are glorified fill-in-the-blanks. Focus on roots of words rather than memorizing obscure words.

The key to the reading questions is evidence. Focus on the words *because* & *but*, and don't worry about interpreting anything.

For writing questions, remembering the 3 C's is critical: clear, concise, and consistent.

In terms of grammar, focus primarily on pronouns, subject-verb agreement, transitions, apostrophes, and verb tenses. Maybe colons, too.

If you base your answers on the logic of "Well, it sounds right/wrong," you should expect to do poorly. Read slowly and exaggerate pauses for commas and you will more likely hear the errors.

Reading & Writing – Craft and Structure

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure the comprehension, vocabulary, analysis, synthesis, and reasoning skills and knowledge needed to:

- Understand and use high-utility words and phrases in context.
- Evaluate the structure and purpose of texts.
- Make connections between topically related texts.

In recommending Bao Phi's collection *Sông I Sing*, a librarian noted that pieces by the spoken-word poet don't lose their _____ nature when printed: the language has the same pleasant musical quality on the page as it does when performed by Phi.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

A) jarring
B) scholarly
C) melodic
D) personal

Reading & Writing – Information & Ideas

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure comprehension, analysis, and reasoning skills and knowledge and the ability to locate, interpret, evaluate, and integrate information to:

- Evaluate central ideas and details.
- Show command of evidence from text, tables, bar graphs, and line graphs.
- Make inferences.

Many animals, including humans, must sleep, and sleep is known to have a role in everything from healing injuries to encoding information in long-term memory. But some scientists claim that, from an evolutionary standpoint, deep sleep for hours at a time leaves an animal so vulnerable that the known benefits of sleeping seem insufficient to explain why it became so widespread in the animal kingdom. These scientists therefore imply that _____

Which choice most logically completes the text?

A) it is more important to understand how widespread prolonged deep sleep is than to understand its function.

B) prolonged deep sleep is likely advantageous in ways that have yet to be discovered.

C) many traits that provide significant benefits for an animal also likely pose risks to that animal.

D) most traits perform functions that are hard to understand from an evolutionary standpoint.

Reading & Writing – Standard English Conventions

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure the ability to edit text to conform to core conventions of Standard English sentence structure, usage, and punctuation.

According to Naomi Nakayama of the University of Edinburgh, the reason seeds from a dying dandelion appear to float in the air while _____ is that their porous plumes enhance drag, allowing the seeds to stay airborne long enough for the wind to disperse them throughout the surrounding area.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

A) falling,

B) falling:

C) falling;

D) falling

Helpful Tip
Consistent use of punctuation for apposition will appear on your test. These all do the same thing with different sophistication levels:
- Parentheses
- Commas
- Long dashes

Reading & Writing – Expression of Ideas

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure the ability to revise texts to improve the effectiveness of written expression and to meet specific rhetorical goals.

Iraqi artist Nazik Al-Malaika, celebrated as the first Arabic poet to write in free verse, didn't reject traditional forms entirely; her poem "Elegy for a Woman of No Importance" consists of two ten-line stanzas and a standard number of syllables. Even in this superficially traditional work, _____ Al-Malaika was breaking new ground by memorializing an anonymous woman rather than a famous man.

Which choice completes the text with the most logical transition?

A) in fact,

B) though,

C) therefore,

D) moreover,

Helpful Tip
Transitions either **maintain** the logic flow or **turn** the idea. Consider the role of the word *although* in any context.

Math (Section 2)

Broken into two 35-minute modules, each with 22 questions

Historically sophomores have not done particularly well on this section.

According to College Board, there are four areas assessed:
•Algebra
•Advanced Math
•Problem Solving and Data Analysis
•Geometry and Trigonometry

About 30% of the questions are contextual and are word problems. They generally connect to science and social studies and require close (slow) reading.

Math sections go from easy to hard, and typically have a defined midpoint at which the challenge level jumps. Students targeting scores in the 500s should prioritize spending time getting everything right in that first half.

Math -- Algebra

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure the ability to analyze, fluently solve, and create linear equations and inequalities as well as analyze and fluently solve equations and systems of equations using multiple techniques. Questions include:

- Linear equations in 1 variable
- Linear equations in 2 variables
- Linear functions
- Systems of 2 linear equations in 2 variables
- Linear inequalities in 1 or 2 variables

If $f(x) = x + 7$ and $g(x) = 7x$, what is the value of $4f(2) - g(2)$?

A) -5

B) 1

C) 22

D) 28

Store A sells raspberries for $5.50 per pint and blackberries for $3.00 per pint. Store B sells raspberries for $6.50 per pint and blackberries for $8.00 per pint. A certain purchase of raspberries and blackberries would cost $37.00 at store A or $66.00 at store B. How many pints of blackberries are in this purchase?

A) 12

B) 8

C) 5

D) 4

Math -- Advanced Math

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure skills and knowledge central for progression to more advanced math courses, including demonstrating an understanding of absolute value, quadratic, exponential, polynomial, rational, radical, and other nonlinear equations. Questions include:

- Equivalent expressions
- Nonlinear equations in 1 variable and systems of equations in 2 variables
- Nonlinear functions

$$g(x) = x^2 + 55$$

What is the minimum value of the given function?

A) 3,025

B) 110

C) 55

D) 0

In the xy-plane, a line with equation $2y = 4.5$ intersects a parabola at exactly one point. If the parabola has equation $y = -4x^2 + bx$, where b is a positive constant, what is the value of b?

Math -- Problem-Solving & Data Analysis

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure the ability to apply quantitative reasoning about ratios, rates, and proportional relationships; understand and apply unit rate; and analyze and interpret 1- and 2-variable data. Questions include:

- Ratios, rates, proportional relationships, and units
- Percentages, 1-variable data
- Distributions and measures of center and spread
- 2-variable data: models and scatter plots
- Probability and conditional probability
- Inference from sample statistics and margin of error
- Evaluating statistical claims: observational studies and experiments

In a group, 40% of the items are red. Of all the red items in the group, 30% also have stripes. What percentage of the items in the group are red and have stripes?

A) 10%

B) 12%

C) 70%

D) 75%

The density of a certain type of wood is 353 kilograms per cubic meter. A sample of this type of wood is in the shape of a cube and has a mass of 345 kilograms. To the nearest hundredth of a meter, what is the length of one edge of this sample?

A) 0.98

B) 0.99

C) 1.01

D) 1.02

Math -- Geometry and Trigonometry

From College Board: Questions in this domain measure the ability to solve problems that focus on area and volume; angles, triangles, and trigonometry; and circles. Questions include:

- Area and volume
- Lines, angles, and triangles
- Right triangles and trigonometry
- Circles

Two nearby trees are perpendicular to the ground, which is flat. One of these trees is 10 feet tall and has a shadow that is 5 feet long. At the same time, the shadow of the other tree is 2 feet long. How tall, in feet, is the other tree?

A) 3

B) 4

C) 8

D) 27

The length of a rectangle's diagonal is $5\sqrt{17}$, and the length of the rectangle's shorter side is 5. What is the length of the rectangle's longer side?

A) $\sqrt{17}$

B) 20

C) $15\sqrt{2}$

D) 400

Closing Advice (Also Free)

"Nobody plans to fail, but many people fail to plan."

Chart your own course for success and take advantage of every resource you have available. And read. Read every day. Read.