Understanding New PSAT Scores

Find out how your PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10 scores are calculated and what those scores mean.

Calculating Your Score

Because there's no penalty for guessing, your raw score is the number of questions you answered correctly. Raw scores are converted to scores on a scale of 160 to 760 using a process called *equating*. Equating adjusts for slight differences in difficulty between various versions of the test (such as versions taken on different days).

The College Board uses equating to make sure there's no advantage in taking the test on a particular day. A score of 400, for instance, on one day's test means the same thing as a 400 on a test taken on a different day — even though the questions are different.

Making Sense of the Numbers

Score ranges, mean (average) scores, benchmarks, and percentiles can be used to see if you're on track for college readiness.

For the next few years, norm groups for the score ranges, mean scores, and percentiles described below will be derived from research data, not the prior year's test-taking populations. A norm group, also called a reference population, is the group whose data your results are compared to.

Score Ranges

Tests can't measure exactly what you know, and many factors can affect your score. After all, no two days are the same, and if you were to take the PSAT/NMSQT or PSAT 10 three times in a week or once a week for a month, your scores would vary.

That's why it's helpful to think of each score as a range that extends from a few points below to a few points above the score earned. Score ranges show how much your score might change with repeated testing, assuming that your skill level remains the same.

Mean (Average) Scores

Your score report will show you the mean, or average, scores earned by typical U.S. test-takers per grade. Unless your score is much lower than average, you're probably developing the kinds of reading, writing and language, and math skills you'll need in college.

College Readiness Benchmarks

You'll see a benchmark for each section of the PSAT/NMSQT and PSAT 10. Benchmarks are the scores that represent college readiness. In other words, if you score at or above the benchmark, you're on track to be ready for college when you graduate high school.

If you score below the benchmark, you still have time to work on your skills. Use the detailed feedback in your online score report to see which skills need the most improvement.

Percentiles

A percentile is a number between 0 and 100 that shows how you rank compared to other students. It represents the percentage of students in a particular grade whose scores fall at or below your score.

For example, a 10th-grade student whose Math percentile is 57 scored higher or equal to 57 percent of 10th-graders. You'll see two percentiles:

The Nationally Representative Sample percentile shows how your score compares to the scores of all U.S. students in a particular grade, including those who don't typically take the test.

The User Percentile — Nation shows how your score compares to the scores of only *some* U.S. students in a particular grade, a group limited to students who typically take the test.