

September 14, 2018

Dear Parents,

As you know we had our grade 9-10 students will sit the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) in October. The intent of these practice tests is to give us an idea of where your child stands in terms of preparation to study at university. The results give us, and you, more information about academic potential. Keep in mind these are practice for the actual SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Tests) that are administered for students preparing to go to university. If students intent to apply to the United States for university study, the SAT's are taken usually during the student's grade 11 year and can be repeated.

These test are just one measure of university readiness and as with any kind of practice, the results tend to go up as students have more experience with standardized testing. Testing practice, however, is not the main focus of our programme.

Students will note their email and will therefore be able to access their results in early December online. Our school will receive the results as well electronically shortly after and then in paper copy usually after the winter holiday. Please see the enclosed information about how to interpret the PSAT results entitled "Understanding the PSAT". Should you have any questions, please contact your child's English or math teacher or me and we would be happy to discuss your child's results further.

Sincerely,

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Reading Test: 60 Minutes, 47 questions. You have to answer roughly 5 questions every 6 minutes.

There is no one "right way" to approach the Reading section. Some people like to read the passages carefully, some like to skim them, and some like to save time by going straight to the questions. The answer will usually depend on your reading speed.

Writing and Language Test: 35 minutes, 44 questions.

Math No Calculator Section: 25 minutes, 17 questions.

Remember to look at the "big picture" in this section, and don't be afraid to use estimation if the answers are spaced out. Questions get harder as they go within each question type (multiple choice, student-produced responses).

Math With Calculator Section: 45 minutes, 31 questions.

Remember that the questions get harder as they go within each question type (multiple choice, student-produced responses), so you want to go a little faster in the first half to save yourself the extra time you will need for the hard questions at the end. Don't forget to review the list of Math formulas that you need to know (see below).

Please

note: there is no Essay section on the PSAT.

Here is the College Board recommends (taken from <http://www.collegeboard.com>):

- Be well-rested and ready to go. Get a good night's sleep the night before the test.
- Eat breakfast.
- Use two No. 2 pencils and a good eraser — a pencil is required for the multiple-choice questions and the essay. Mechanical pencils are not allowed. Pens are not allowed. (The school provides these.)
- Bring snacks. You will get a short break at the end of each hour of testing time. You can eat or drink any snacks you have brought with you during these breaks. A healthy snack will go a long way toward keeping you alert during the entire test.
- Make sure you use a No. 2 pencil on the answer sheet. It is very important that you fill in the entire circle darkly and completely. If you change your response, erase it as completely as possible. Incomplete marks or erasures may affect your score. It is very important that you follow these instructions when filling out your answer sheet.

Below are some tips for test taking:

If you find yourself starting to zone out or panic, sit back, close your eyes and take a few deep breaths and try to hit the "reset" button on your brain. It's only the PSAT, after all, and it's not an official part of the college application process.

-Overall Strategies: Remember to "look at the big picture" and to pay close attention to the wording of each question. Don't forget to consider order of difficulty—if an answer choice looks too easy on a hard problem, then it's probably not the correct answer.

-Scoring: DON'T. SKIP. ANY. QUESTIONS. If you are unsure about a question, then mark it, take a "placeholder" guess, and move on. There is no penalty for incorrect answers on the new PSAT, so make sure that you fill in every last bubble and you will get one out of every four questions correct, simply by chance. I strongly suggest that you do not wait until there is only one minute left to do this! Make sure all the bubbles are filled in well ahead of time, in case the proctor accidentally ends the test early.

-Write it Down: As for the rest of the test, make sure to write everything down! The more you try to do in your head, the harder you have to think. Write things down as soon as you think of them, and you will prevent yourself from "burning out" later in the test. (This will also be helpful if you finish a section early and want to double-check your answers.) Don't forget to circle/underline relevant text—the more you write on the test, the better. Circle/underline relevant text in the Critical Reading passages and to try to "put your own words in the blank" for the Sentence Completions.

-Math: get the ball rolling: When coming back to a question you didn't know how to do, start anywhere. Doing something - anything - often gets the ball rolling enough for you to solve the question. Don't worry about "setting it up" correctly - just solve for something, draw a picture, estimate, etc.

-Math: "Drawn to Scale": You can assume that it's "Drawn to Scale" unless told otherwise. If a math problem doesn't specifically say that it's *not* drawn to scale, you can assume that it *is* drawn to scale. So always double-check your answers to make sure they make sense according to the illustration. For example, if you answered 30 degrees but it looks more like 120, then you know you must have made a mistake. In fact, you should always use common sense to quickly double-check your answers, even on problems that don't involve geometry. Even questions that say they are "not drawn to scale" are usually close approximations of the original—in other words, it's not drawn to scale, but it's not far off, either.

-Math: Plugging In: On the math section, ALWAYS CONSIDER PLUGGING IN AS AN OPTION. Remember, if the answer choices contain variables, plug in for those variables. If the problem does not include any specific values, plug in your own numbers. When the answers are constants, plug in the answers.

-Math: Formulas to Memorize. [this page](#) for a list of all the math formulas and concepts



- **Reading Test: the question is king.** Pay close attention to the wording of the question, and re-read the question several times (beginning / middle / end) to make sure that you are not going in the wrong direction. Don't be fooled into choosing the right answer to the wrong question, or an answer choice that is true, but not correct.

-**Reading Test: always peek at the next question to identify "question pairs."** The Reading Test on the new PSAT loves question pairs--questions where the following question says something like "Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?" In fact, this happens 10 times over the course of the PSAT's 47 question--twice per passage. This means that 20 of the 47 questions on the test are part of these question pairs!

Outsmart the Reading test by always peeking one question ahead. This will allow you to answer these questions in pairs, using the line numbers in the latter questions to help you find the answer to the former questions. Remember that your answers should always agree with each other--if they are not connected, then one of them is incorrect.

-**Grammar: read it s l o w l y:** One of the best ways to hear grammar errors is to read the sentence very slowly - about half the speed you'd normally talk. Don't just go with what "sounds right"--investigate all possible errors in the sentence in a meticulous manner. Among other things, the SAT loves to test verbs, pronouns and prepositional idioms.

-**Writing and Language: focus on the goal of the question, not just what "sounds best."**

-****Pacing**:** Usually, when students run out of time on a test, or have to rush at the end, this happens because they took too long to complete the first half of the test. Make sure that you set a "halfway" goal for yourself based on the number of questions in the section. **For instance, in a 45 minute math section with 31 questions, you should be on least question #16 (ideally even further) by the time you are halfway through the section.**

From <http://www.mcelroytutoring.com/blog-post.php?id=4077>