



**Better scores. Better choices.**

## SAT SUBJECT TEST FAQ

### What are the SAT Subject Tests?

The SAT Subject Tests are supplementary college admissions tests administered by the College Board. They are designed to measure a student's readiness to complete college level work in particular academic subjects. The following subject tests are offered:

#### *English*

- Literature

#### *History*

- U.S. History
- World History

#### *Mathematics*

- Mathematics Level 1
- Mathematics Level 2

#### *Science*

- Biology E/M
- Chemistry
- Physics

#### *Languages*

- Chinese with Listening
- French
- French with Listening
- German
- German with Listening
- Spanish
- Spanish with Listening
- Modern Hebrew
- Italian
- Latin
- Japanese with Listening
- Korean with Listening

### How are the Subject Tests different from the SAT?

The SAT Reasoning Test is just that – a test that aims to measure both mathematical and verbal reasoning ability. The Subject Tests, however, are more academic in nature and allow students to demonstrate mastery of content in those subject areas in which they excel. While the questions on the Subject Tests tend to be less “tricky” than those on the Reasoning Test and more like questions students have answered on tests in school, it's important to remember that these are still the SATs. Previous SAT test prep gives students the tools they need to effectively negotiate the multiple-choice test format, whether they are splitting the semantic hairs of similar answer choices or deciding to substitute or backsolve a math problem.

### What is the format of the Subject Tests?

All Subject Tests are one hour multiple-choice exams. There are no essay or short answer questions. The Language with Listening tests, however, do feature both reading and listening sections, and students need to bring a compact disc player and headphones with them to the test center.

## **How are the Subject Tests scored?**

Subject Tests are scored on the familiar 200-800 SAT scale. It is worth noting that national average scores on the Subject Tests are generally higher than those of the SAT sections since students take only those tests for which they feel the most prepared. Your score report will contain information about these percentiles, but college care far more about the 200 to 800 number. No matter what the test, 600s are good and 700s are fantastic.

## **What schools require SAT Subject Tests? How many?**

Colleges' Subject Test policies vary widely: some require one or two different Subject Tests, while others "recommend" them and still others do not require any. Students and parents are advised to check with the colleges to which they're applying to find particular requirements. For your convenience, PrepMatters has compiled a list of the testing requirements of over 160 schools that can be found on our website at [www.prepmatters.com](http://www.prepmatters.com).

## **When should Subject Tests be taken?**

Subject Tests are administered on the same dates as the SAT Reasoning Test, with the exception of the March test date, and students may take up to three tests on a single day. Some tests, such as the Latin or Language Tests with Listening, are only available in November or June; be sure to check the schedule at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) for the latest information.

In general, the best time for a student to take a Subject Test is immediately after he's completed coursework in that subject. Occasionally, this means a strong student can take a Subject Test at the end of sophomore year to "get ahead" of the testing schedule. Usually, Subject Tests are best taken in May or June of junior year. Sometimes the testing schedule requires a student to put off taking these tests until the fall of senior year. If this is the case, be very careful about delaying the history or science tests. These tests are especially "fact dependent" and can require significant review on the part of the student who's spent the entire summer forgetting about the Whiskey Rebellion and molecular orbital theory. Such a student is better off taking these tests at the end of junior year and putting off the Math or Literature tests until the fall.

## **How much time should be spent in preparation?**

In general, we recommend four to six weeks of preparation for a Subject Test. A tutor can help a student more quickly acclimatize himself with the format of the test, highlight the SAT test taking methods that most directly apply to that test, and provide content review for those topics with which a particular student may struggle. Weekly practice tests – either as homework or in a timed and proctored environment – serve to both chart progress and pinpoint subject areas for focused review.

A student who is forced, whether by the testing calendar or college admissions requirements, to take a test for which he is not well prepared may require more time and focused study. (See the guidelines below for more test-specific information.)

## **What else should I know about the individual Subject Tests?**

### **Literature**

The Literature Subject Test is not tied to any particular class in school and thus is often taken by those students who need to satisfy application requirements but haven't recently completed the right history or science course – whether they're qualified for the test or not. It resembles the SAT Critical Reading section in that it is composed of a sequence of short reading passages followed by multiple-choice questions; therefore, students with strong Critical Reading scores often do well. The Literature test differs from the SAT in that the passages themselves are drawn from American and British literature from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, heavily feature poetry, and are thus more difficult to understand. While stopping short of asking students to identify rhyme scheme or metonymy, the test does tax students' abilities to both understand tone, metaphor and imagery, and deal with more complex diction and syntax. Well prepared students will be conversant with the standard tools and vocabulary of literary criticism as taught in school.

### **U.S. History**

The 90 question US History Subject Test covers history from colonization to the present-day and contains questions on political, social, economic trends – but NOT on military events. Students should focus on knowing the most important trends in US history and on understanding the narrative: reasons for colonization, causes of the Revolution, what issues the framers debated when considering the Constitution, the struggle over what to do with slavery, etc. Although most courses will cover these areas well, students are commonly rusty on the earlier material. It is important that review of older information begins relatively early in the spring to reduce the likelihood of a rushed and frantic bout of memorization. Since the test covers a wide swath of time, students may see questions that initially appear confusing or difficult. Using process of elimination with poise and confidence is the key to answering these questions correctly. Helpfully, certain areas and figures are predictably important, for example Andrew Jackson and the National Bank. Practice tests and strategic review can be of great benefit for this test.

### **World History**

The 95 question World History Subject Test is essentially an hour-long trivia quiz. It reaches back in time to the Paleolithic and comes up to the present day (Gilgamesh to the Iraq War); it covers countries around the globe from Chile eastward to China. However, a substantial portion of the test is on European history, not only the interactions (political, economic, philosophical and religious) on the continent but also how European countries impacted the rest of the globe politically and economically (exploration and colonization). Questions also appear regularly on China and India. Because of the massive scope of the test, it is important that students have a good understanding of the major trends shaping world history, focusing not only on details but also asking themselves what those details mean and why they are significant. Types of questions range from strictly informational, to identifying the origins of a text, to recognizing what period and country a piece of art came from. Success in this test depends not only on knowing certain information, but also on the ability to use what one knows to eliminate false answers.

### **Mathematics Level 1 and Level 2**

Each test comprises 50 multiple-choice questions drawn from subject material ranging from introductory algebra and geometry to more advanced mathematics covered in most junior year pre-calculus courses. The Mathematics Level 2 test is significantly more difficult than the Level 1 test, and many students struggle to complete it in one hour. Students who are applying to engineering schools or as mathematics or physics majors are advised to take the Level 2 test, as are exceptional students applying to the most competitive schools for which any slight "edge" can help. All other students should take the test on which they can earn the higher score, regardless of their perception of which test "looks better" to colleges. Higher scores look better to colleges.

## Languages

The harsh reality of the language tests is that SAT scores are inherently curved. The preponderance of native language speakers who take these tests skews the distribution of the scores and makes it difficult for even good students to do well here. As an extreme example, consider the Chinese with Listening Subject Test, which boasted an *average* score of 758 last year! Who takes that test? People who speak Chinese.

Students who have completed AP level coursework may wish to see if their skills are up to the challenge. Those who have recently spent a semester abroad may also find that they can do well on the test, but all students are encouraged to take practice tests ahead of time to see where they stand.

## Biology E/M

There are actually two Biology Subject Tests: Biology E and Biology M. For each of the E and M tests, students first answer 60 general multiple-choice questions followed by 20 questions that respectively target environmental science or molecular biology. Most area schools focus more heavily on the latter rather than the former, so students are typically more qualified for the M test. (This is especially true of students who have completed AP level work.)

Students who have only completed an introductory (non AP) biology class can do well on this test, but will likely require review or instruction in some of the more advanced material.

## Chemistry

The Chemistry Subject Test is generally regarded as the most difficult of the science Subject Tests and should only be taken by those students who have completed an AP level class. It is an 85 question test that, in addition to the standard multiple-choice questions, features complicated true/false and identifications for which students should practice and with which students need to feel comfortable. In addition to covering a range of topics not seen in introductory courses, this test does require some straightforward computation, and students are not permitted to use a calculator.

## Physics

While not allowing students calculators, the 75 question Physics Subject Test manages to be all about students' knowledge of and ability to solve physics equations. Recent completion of a physics class is essential to success and students who have taken classes that have required them to memorize the equations throughout the course of the year will do well. Those whose classes allowed them to use "cheat sheets" on tests will need to do some memorization, as the Subject Test does not provide the equations they'll need. Actual mathematics on the test is limited, but students need to be comfortable with algebraic manipulations of the equations for almost all questions. AP Physics students should note that the Physics B curriculum is a solid overview of all of the material on this test. Physics C students, however, will need to review the many topics not covered in their course, such as optics, waves and atomic physics.