

# Popular Testing Timelines

Two main tests—ACT and SAT—and 14 possible national test dates in one year can leave families wondering when is the best time to prepare and test. On the following pages, we provide guidelines for 10th through 12th grade students. These timelines are meant to give you a general guide; every student is different. We always recommend talking with a Compass director to identify the ideal timeline for your family. Many schools offer a test during the school day or during a window of days; this scheduling may also impact when and how students prepare.



## NATIONAL TESTING CALENDAR

	SAT	ACT	OTHER
August	●		
September	●	●	
October	●	●	PSAT/NMSQT
November	●		
December	●	●	
January			
February		●	
March	●		
April		●	
May	●		AP Exams
June	●	●	
July		●*	

NOTE: \*NO JULY TEST DATE IN NEW YORK

## 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE

**PSAT or PSAT 10** The PSAT/NMSQT is the traditional October offering that allows 11th grade students to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship Program. Many schools also offer this test to 10th graders, but these students' scores will not count toward National Merit. The PSAT 10 is structured identically to the PSAT/NMSQT; thus, some schools prefer to give the spring PSAT 10 to 10th graders to provide a better sense of where students stand closer to the end of the academic year. Schools may also choose to use PSAT scores to aid in AP placement decisions going into the next year.

**PRACTICE TESTS** In the late spring or early summer after 10th grade, take a practice SAT and a practice ACT to determine which is the better test for you. Compass offers practice tests and consultations to help you craft an individualized test preparation plan.

10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	October	PSAT
	November	
	December	
	January	
	February	
	March	PSAT 10
	April	
	May	
June		

## JUNIOR AND SENIOR YEARS

While Compass believes in customizing a test preparation plan to each student’s unique schedule, many students find success with common timelines for their testing. What follow are three popular testing timelines. These examples are based on students’ initial practice test scores—10th grade PSAT, practice SAT, or practice ACT—but it’s also possible that a different timeline would work better for a student because of additional factors like extracurriculars or travel plans.

EARLY TESTING	TRADITIONAL TESTING	DEFERRED TESTING
P/SAT > 1200	P/SAT 900–1200	P/SAT < 900
ACT > 25	ACT 17–25	ACT < 17

While we indicate the most popular test dates for each timeline, we do not mean to suggest that students must test on those dates. Schedules are complex; the best test date is the one that works for you. But thoughtful planning can help ensure that there is ample time for preparation in advance of the exams. This page covers the early testing timeline. Please see the following pages for traditional and deferred testing.

### EARLY TESTING

- ▶ **BEGIN PREPARATION** Students in this score range frequently aim to complete testing by the end of 11th grade so that they can concentrate on other aspects of the college application process in the fall of senior year. Preparation typically begins over the summer before 11th grade. For those within striking range of National Merit, tutoring or a targeted class may include preparation for the PSAT/NMSQT in October.
- ▶ **FIRST SITTING** SAT students often move from the PSAT/NMSQT straight into the November exam while preparation is still fresh. December is a popular test date for early ACT students. Both test dates are advantageous for students who want to lock in a first score before holiday distractions.
- ▶ **REFRESH** Students may want to sit for a couple of practice exams or work with a tutor to refresh strategies before taking the exam a second time. Many students also take the spring to work with a tutor or enroll in a review course to prepare for exams.
- ▶ **SECOND SITTING** Spring test dates are popular times for students in this score range to retake the exam. The March SAT is ideal as students can then turn to focus on finals and APs. The April ACT is a good opportunity to post a second score before the end-of-the-year crush.
- ▶ **APs** Compass’ private tutoring and live review courses can help students prepare for their May AP exams.
- ▶ **SUMMER TESTING** The July ACT and August SAT are popular for students who decide to delay their second sittings and for those who may want to take the test a third time before Early Decision applications are due.

### 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE SCORE

- ▶ **P/SAT:** > 1200
- ▶ **ACT:** > 25

		SAT	ACT
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	September	○	○
	October	○	○
	November	●	
	December	●	●
	January		
	February		○
	March	●	
	April		●
	May	○	
	June	○	○
Summer	July		●*
	August	●	

Testing Window

- Most Popular Test Date
- Potential Test Date
- \* No July Test Date in New York

## TRADITIONAL TESTING

- ▶ **BEGIN PREPARATION** Many students in this range will begin preparing for the SAT or ACT during the late summer or early fall of 11th grade. September is a popular start time, especially when test preparation can be scheduled alongside homework, because students are often focused on academics. Some students wait until after the October PSAT/NMSQT, but we find that a few lessons in advance of the PSAT/NMSQT can relieve some of the stress of that testing experience.
- ▶ **FIRST SITTING** Preparation generally intensifies in the months leading up to the exam. Most SAT students will take the exam for the first time in March. May and June can also work well for a first sitting. ACT students often choose April for their first test, though June is also quite popular, and February is a possibility for those feeling prepared early.
- ▶ **APs** Students taking APs in early May often skip the May SAT sitting and take the remainder of May to prepare for a June SAT or ACT instead.
- ▶ **REFRESH** Summer is a good time to take practice tests and engage tutors or enroll in a review course to help refresh the skills solidified in the spring.
- ▶ **SECOND SITTING** The September ACT and the October SAT are the most common second-sitting test dates for students on this timeline. The July ACT and August SAT are also popular options. November is generally the last advisable date for students applying via regular decision; those applying early should be finished by October.

## 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE SCORE

- ▶ **P/SAT:** 900–1200
- ▶ **ACT:** 17–25

		SAT	ACT
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	September	○	○
	October	○	○
	November	○	
	December	○	○
	January		
	February		○
Summer	March	●	
	April		●
	May	○	
	June	○	○
	July		●*
	August	●	
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	September	●	●
	October	●	○
	November	○	

Testing Window

- Most Popular Test Date
- Potential Test Date
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“ I love the challenge of the tests. They are fascinating puzzles to unlock, and I enjoy giving my students the techniques they need to master them. I tutor and also work in research and development for Compass, and I enjoy uniting the curiosity and focus of research with the support and encouragement of tutoring.



-SARAH D., COMPASS TUTOR  
CLEMSON UNIVERSITY, MA, ENGLISH

## DEFERRED TESTING

- ▶ **BEGIN FOUNDATIONAL WORK** Students in this score range often begin with foundational work over the summer before or during the fall of junior year. This work may include traditional test preparation, but it may also be focused on solidifying fundamental knowledge by reviewing math concepts, practicing reading comprehension skills, and learning conventional grammar rules. The goal is to make formal test preparation less stressful in the few months leading up to the exam.
- ▶ **FORMAL TEST PREPARATION** Whether or not students have done foundational work over the summer or fall, most will begin test preparation 3–4 months in advance of the late spring exams. A practice test in January can help assess how much a student has grown since initial diagnostic exams and set a baseline for improvement. Tutoring proceeds steadily throughout the spring.
- ▶ **APs** Depending on whether students are taking AP Exams, they may want to spend time in April devoted to studying for the AP, or instead use that time to prepare for their first SAT or ACT sitting.
- ▶ **FIRST SITTING** Students on the deferred timeline will often skip the March SAT and April ACT, aiming instead for the May or June SAT or June ACT. This gives students the full spring to prepare, allowing them to concentrate on school and extracurriculars in the meantime.
- ▶ **REFRESH** It's common for students to grow more focused on college applications during the summer after 11th grade—practice tests and a refresh of tutoring or a summer class can help encourage this focus.
- ▶ **SECOND SITTING** Any late summer or fall test date has the potential to be a good time for a second sitting; the August–October SAT or the July and September ACT are popular. Each of these test dates gives students the opportunity to sit for the exams a third time in the fall if it makes sense to do so.

## 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE SCORE

▶ **P/SAT:** <900

▶ **ACT:** <17

		SAT	ACT
11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	September	○	○
	October	○	○
	November	○	
	December	○	○
	January		
Summer	February		○
	March	○	
	April		○
	May	●	
	June	●	●
	July		●*
	August	●	
	September	●	●
	October	●	○
	November	○	
12 <sup>th</sup> Grade			

Testing Window

- Most Popular Test Date
- Potential Test Date
- \* No July Test Date in New York