



Grade 11

This is the year for standardized tests (SAT and ACT) and intensified college, career, and scholarship searches. Students need support, guidance, and encouragement as they begin to organize the multiple deadlines and forms involved in the college application process. School counselors and VSAC can help.

If you haven't done so already, visit VT Guidance Central.

Students, log on to VT Guidance Central (see box on page 11). From the “Your Tools” page, click on “Choices Planner” to:

- **search for majors and colleges** — In School Finder, use search factors such as location, size, and majors to identify colleges to research (see the worksheet on page 45).
- **take self-assessments** to learn about how interests and values affect career choice — Take the Interest Profiler assessment (30 to 40 minutes) and complete the Work Values sorter (10 minutes).
- **prepare for the SAT and/or ACT** — Go to www.learningexpressadvantage.com for **free** practice tests. Use account ID 10254 for access.

College preparation kicks into high gear this year. Meeting with a school counselor early in the process will keep students on the right track! Also check out the monthly planning tips for students and parents at www.vsacroadmaps.org.

Parents, continue to check on grades and ask about assignments. For many students, junior year is the most academically challenging.

Student task list

- Begin your college search. See pages 23–24 for factors to consider when researching colleges. Start identifying schools you may want to visit during spring or summer vacation.
- Begin attending college fairs. Check out suggested questions on page 25.
- Prepare for standardized tests. For information on the SAT and ACT, see pages 19–21.
- Register for VSAC’s College Pathways, a free day-long conference for juniors and their parents offered every spring. For dates, locations, and registration, visit www.vsac.org or call 800-642-3177 in early February.
- Learn about financial aid and scholarships; attend a VSAC Paying for College financial aid night in your community. Visit www.vsac.org or check with your school counseling office for the date of a presentation at your school.

Parent/adult task list

- Attend open houses and teacher conferences at your student’s school.
- Continue discussing and exploring college options with your student.
- Get to know the resources offered by the high school counseling office.
- Help your student register in the fall for the PSAT/NMSQT and in the spring for the SAT or ACT.
- Begin visiting colleges with your student (see pages 28–29 for tips).
- Learn about financial aid and scholarship options; attend the VSAC Paying for College financial aid night at your school. Log on to www.vsac.org or check with the school’s counseling office for dates.
- Attend VSAC’s College Pathways, a free conference for juniors and parents held every spring. For dates, locations, and registration, visit www.vsac.org or call 800-642-3177 in early February.
- Have engaging conversations that explore your student’s personality, likes, and dislikes.

Standardized tests

As part of the application process, many colleges require standardized tests such as the SAT or the ACT. These tests indicate where a student stands in comparison to other students nationwide.

- A standardized test is not an intelligence test; your student cannot fail.
- In the application process, most colleges place the most weight on high school coursework and grades — not on test scores.
- Tests have registration deadlines.
- Registration fees can be waived for students with financial need (your student’s school counselor can help determine whether your student qualifies).
- Students should check college Web sites or catalogs to see what tests, if any, colleges require or prefer.

Types of standardized tests

The **SAT** is an aptitude and achievement test designed to assess a student’s ability to handle college-level material.

The **ACT** is a multiple-choice achievement test designed to measure mastery of high school subject material.

The **PSAT** is a practice test for the SAT, most often taken in October of junior year. It is not part of the admissions process.

The **PLAN** is a practice test for the ACT. It’s most often taken during the fall of sophomore year and is not part of the admissions process.

Both the SAT and the ACT are usually taken in the spring of junior year and again the fall of senior year if students want to improve their scores.

For both of these tests, results arrive six weeks after the test.

Be aware of the differences between the ACT and the SAT. Some colleges accept the ACT in place of both the SAT reasoning test and SAT subject tests. Taking one test instead of two can save time and money.

See page 21 for more information.

SAT or ACT?

Most colleges and universities will accept the SAT or the ACT. Some students find that one test makes better use of their strengths than the other does. Each year an increasing number of students take both tests so they can submit the better set of scores to admissions offices.

Students should talk with a school counselor to determine which test(s) to take based on their strengths and abilities, and based on the application requirements of the schools they're considering.

Students who decide to take the ACT instead of the SAT should plan to take the ACT writing section.

Preparing

Several **free online practice tests** are available to help students prepare for and study for the PSAT, SAT, PLAN, and ACT:

- **PLAN:** www.actstudent.org/plan
- **ACT:** www.actstudent.org
- **PSAT** and **SAT:** www.collegeboard.com
- **Learning Express:** www.learningexpressadvantage.com (free practice tests for several standardized tests, including the SAT and ACT). For access, use account ID 10254.

The VSAC Resource Center offers **test prep books** at its library in downtown Winooski. Materials can be borrowed either at the center or through interlibrary loan at your local school or public library. For test materials and other titles, search our online catalog at **www.vsac.org** (select "Resource Library Catalog" in the Quick Links box on the home page).

Many high schools offer **free workshops or classes** to help students prepare for the SAT and ACT. Students should inquire at their high school counseling office for more information.

SAT subject tests

In addition to the standard SAT reasoning test, SAT subject tests are required by some of the more competitive colleges either for admission or for placement in a specific program. These one-hour tests assess a student's knowledge in specific subjects (English, math, science, history, foreign language).

Students cannot take SAT subject tests on the same day they take the SAT reasoning test. Students must register separately for subject tests. A student can take one, two, or three subject tests in a single morning. There is a fee for each test.

If your student must take a particular SAT subject test, she should try to take it as soon as possible after having studied the subject in school. That way, the material will be fresh.

To learn more or to register online, visit **www.collegeboard.com**.

	SAT	vs.	ACT
When students typically take it	Spring of junior year and/or fall of senior year		Junior year and/or fall of senior year
Type of test	Designed to assess a student’s ability to handle college-level material; important to know and practice test strategies and reasoning skills in order to score well		Designed to test knowledge and mastery of high school subject material; important to use knowledge and reasoning skills to score well
When it is administered	Seven times per year		Six times per year
Test structure	Ten sections: three critical reading, three math, three writing, and one experimental (masked to look like a regular section)		Four sections: English, math, reading, and science reasoning; experimental section is added to tests on certain dates only and is clearly experimental; optional fifth section on writing
Test content	Math: up to ninth grade geometry and Algebra II No science section Reading: sentence completions; short and long critical reading passages; reading comprehension with a stress on vocabulary; questions testing grammar, usage, and word choice		Math: up to trigonometry Science section Reading: four passages — one each on prose fiction, social science, humanities, and natural science; English section stresses grammar
Penalty for wrong answers	Yes		No
Scoring	200–800 per section, combined for a single total score Highest possible combined score: 2400		1–36 for each subject, averaged for a composite score Highest possible composite score: 36
Scores sent to schools	If a student requests that a score report be sent to specific colleges, the report will include scores received on every test taken.		A score-choice option allows students to choose which schools will receive their scores and which scores the schools will see.
Other uses	Scholarship purposes		Scholarship purposes Certain statewide testing programs
When to register	At least five weeks before the test date		At least five weeks before the test date
Test dates and more information	The College Board www.collegeboard.com		ACT, Inc. www.act.org