

# INTRODUCTION TO ADMISSIONS TESTS

## ALL ABOUT THE SAT & ACT



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# Who is Marigold Prep?

- Virtual support for test prep, every major academic subject, and executive functioning
- Decades of tutoring & test prep experience
- Provided online instruction "before it was cool"



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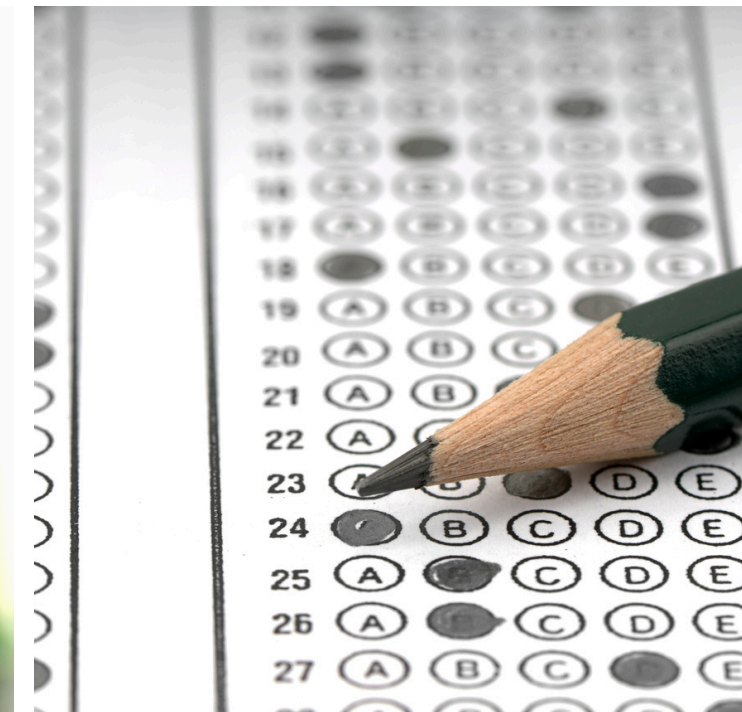
[cassie@marigoldprep.com](mailto:cassie@marigoldprep.com)





# Today we'll cover:

- **Overview** of the PSAT, SAT & ACT
- **Choosing** the right test
- **Testing optional** fluency
- Getting **prepared**
- FAQ / Live Q&A





# SAT & ACT Overview



# What are the SAT & ACT, anyway?

- They are **not** necessarily testing student intelligence
- They **are** testing a student's ability to take a multi-hour test on a Saturday morning
- They assess **content knowledge of reading, language, and math**
- These are also tests of critical thinking and problem solving
- The SAT and ACT remain the primary college entrance exams for US universities
- Colleges **do not have a preference between the SAT & ACT**, nor do they need to see both tests
- Each official test is offered 7 times per year



# What about the PSAT?

- **The PSAT is essentially a practice run at the SAT**, especially for freshmen and sophomores.
- For juniors, it's an **opportunity to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship**, depending on score.
- This year's PSAT will be **digital for all students**.
- The PSAT is **not a college admissions test**, like the SAT and ACT.
- The PSAT is **extremely similar to the SAT**, but is scored out of 1520 because it is slightly less difficult.
- Still, a PSAT score is universally considered an **accurate indicator of an SAT score**.
- The PSAT is offered in **mid-October every year**, typically through a student's school.



# Choosing a Test





# STANDARDIZED TEST FORMATS

<b>ACT</b>	<b>SAT</b>
<b>1. English</b> 45 minutes, 75 questions	<b>1. Verbal Module 1</b> 32 minutes, 27 questions
<b>2. Math (Calculator)</b> 60 minutes, 60 questions	<b>2. Verbal Module 2</b> 32 minutes, 27 questions
<b>3. Reading</b> 35 minutes, 40 questions	<b>3. Math Module 1 (Calculator)</b> 35 minutes, 22 questions
<b>4. Science</b> 35 minutes, 40 questions	<b>4. Math Module 2 (Calculator)</b> 35 minutes, 22 questions
<b>Total ACT Duration</b> <b>175 minutes</b> <b>215 questions</b>	<b>Total Digital SAT Duration</b> <b>134 minutes</b> <b>98 questions</b>



# Differences in **Timing**

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- The ACT is **3 hours**, while the SAT is **2 hours and 14 minutes**.
- On average, students have about **48 seconds per question** on the ACT, and **1 minute 22 seconds per question** on the SAT.
- Since the SAT is adaptive, **it can collect more specific data in a shorter amount of time**. Students aren't spending as much time on too-easy or too-hard questions.
- The SAT **will display a digital countdown timer at the top of the screen**. This will make it easier for students to manage their time and "do the math on the test, not on the clock."

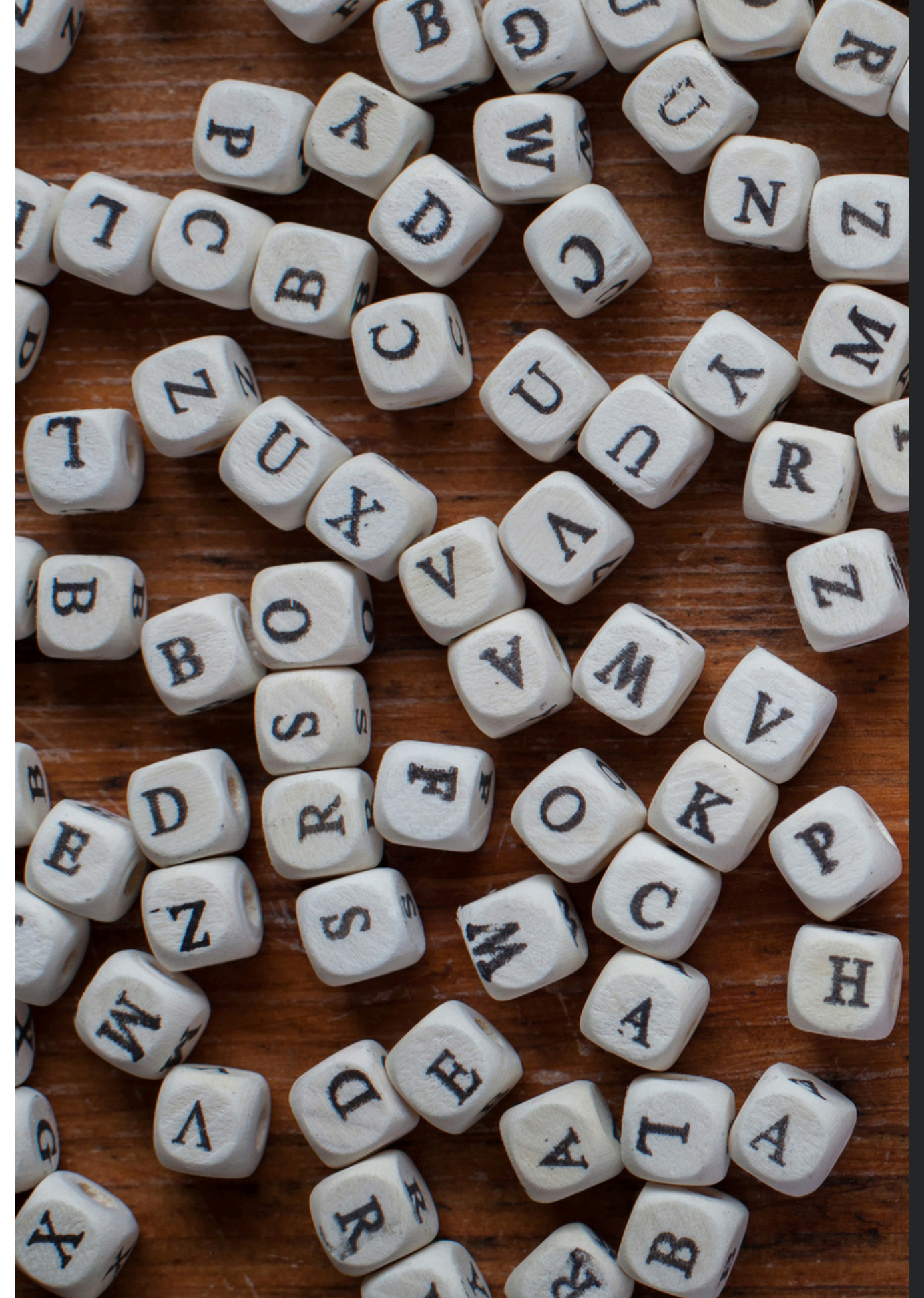




# Differences in Reading & Writing

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- The SAT has **one section covering both Reading and Writing**, called “Verbal”. The ACT has an **individual Reading section** and an **individual Writing section**.
- The SAT’s Verbal section will contain reading comprehension questions structured around **shorter passages with one question each**. The ACT’s Reading section contains **longer passages with 10 questions each**.
- The SAT’s Verbal section also includes passages dealing with **non-conventional writing**, like poetry or notes for a hypothetical essay.
- The questions on both tests address **the same concepts and skills**: grammar, identifying main ideas, discussing the intent of the author, etc.

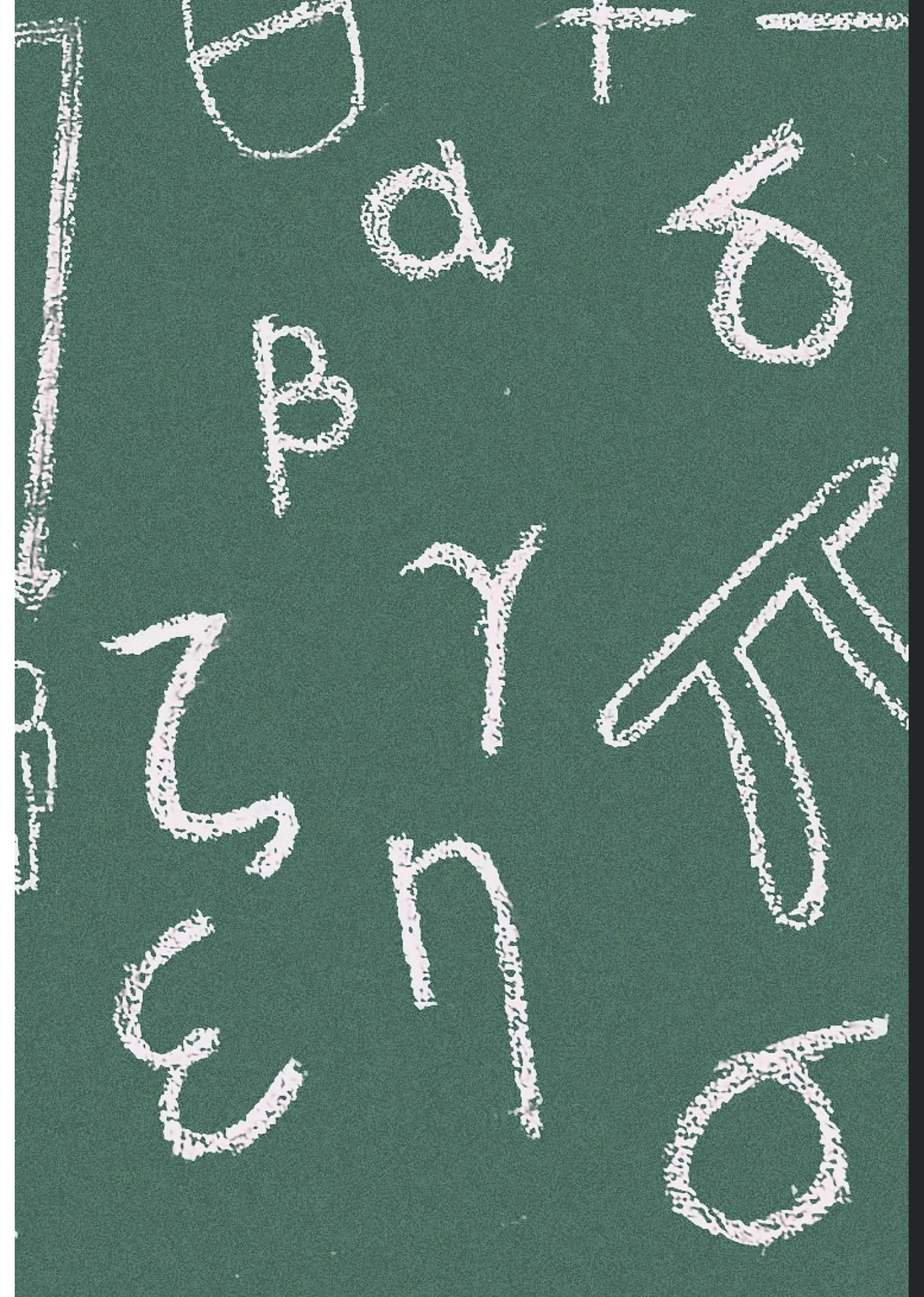




# Differences in **Math**

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- Both the SAT and ACT test concepts taught in **Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2.**
- The **ACT tests a broader set of skills**, and contains more Geometry/ Trigonometry than the SAT.
- The **SAT uses more word problems**, and often gives the student unnecessary information.
- **Calculators are allowed on all math problems on both tests.** For the SAT, students have access to an on-screen graphing calculator (Desmos) built directly into the testing software.





# A word about ACT Science...

- The ACT Science section **does not test a student's prior knowledge of the science** they learn in school (bio, chem, physics, etc).
- Instead, it tests a student's ability to **interpret charts and graphs.**
- It is also testing a student's ability to do this the end of a fast paced, 3-hour exam.
- In some ways, it is more **similar to a reading comprehension exam** than a science test.
- For some students, the science section is a **deal-maker or deal-breaker** for the ACT.

## Experiment 2

In each of Trials 4–6, Steps 1–4 in Experiment 1 were performed except that in Step 3, solid monohydrate was recovered by *vacuum filtration* (see Figure 2).

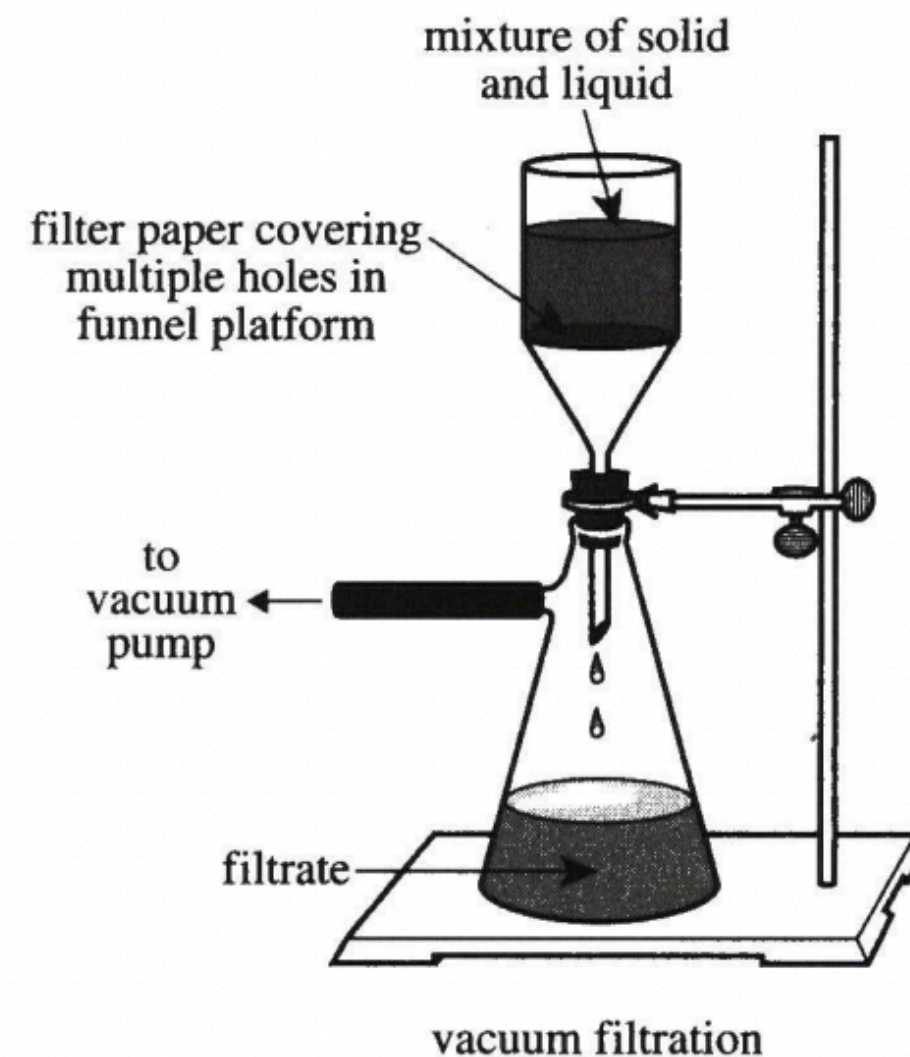


Figure 2

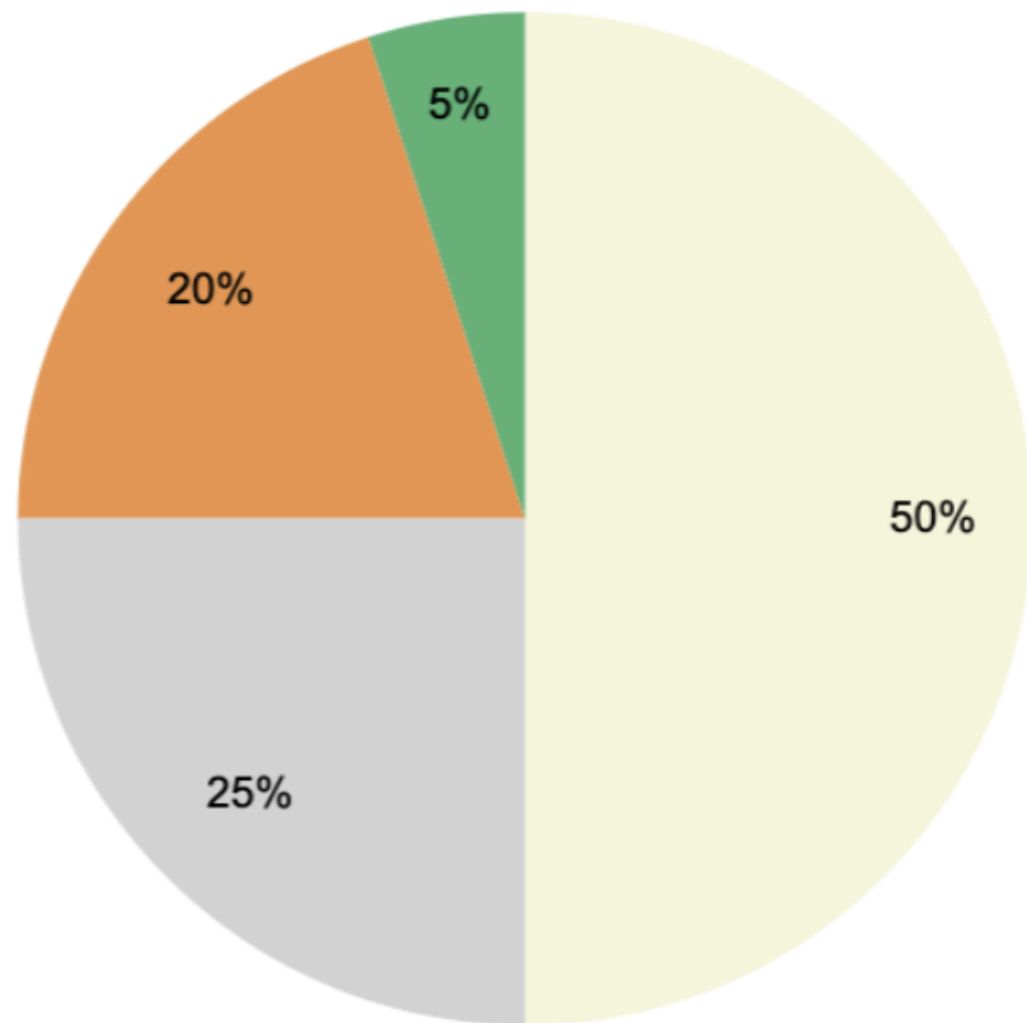
The results of Experiments 1 and 2 are shown in Table 1.



# Score Composition %

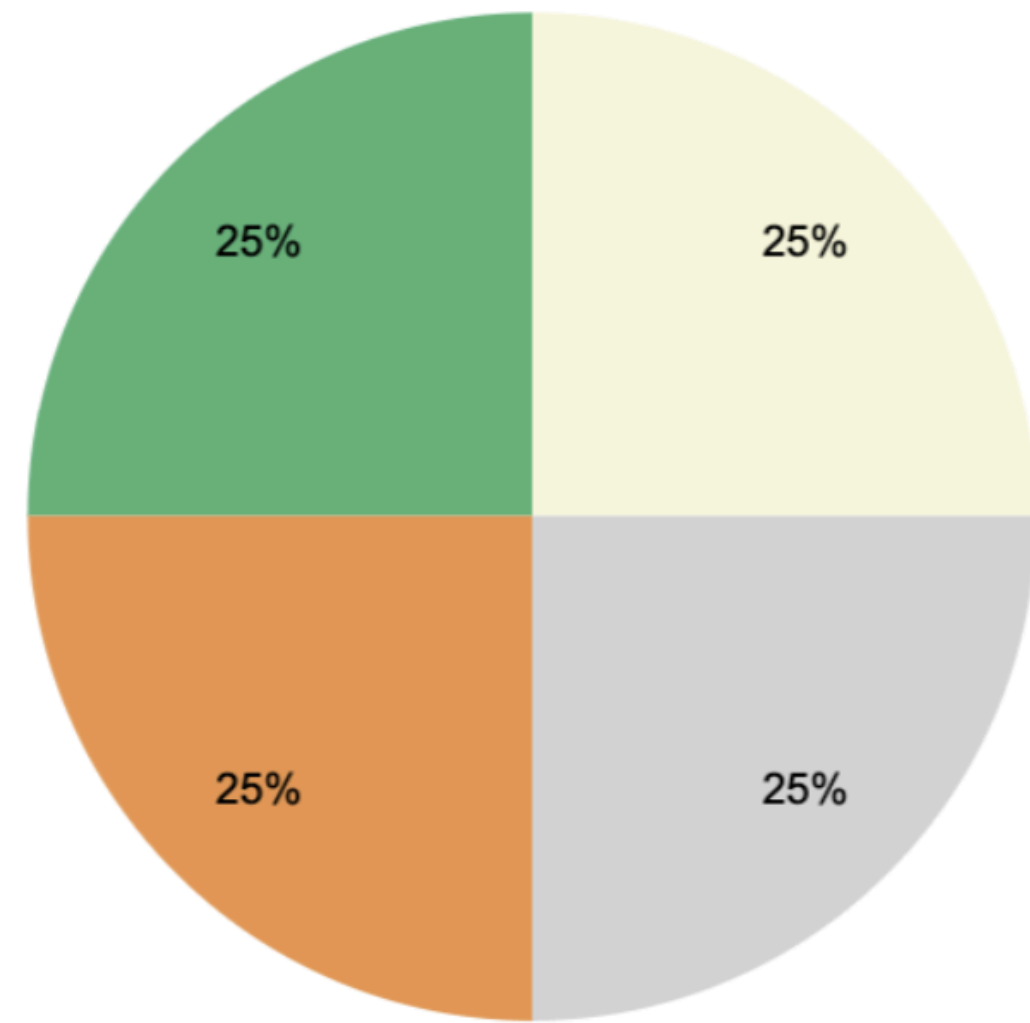
SAT

● Math ● English ● Reading ● Science



ACT

● Math ● English ● Reading ● Science





# How the Test Adapts

## Module 1

Students are given questions of mixed difficulty, with the **more difficult questions being weighted more heavily**, or worth more points.

**Less Difficult**

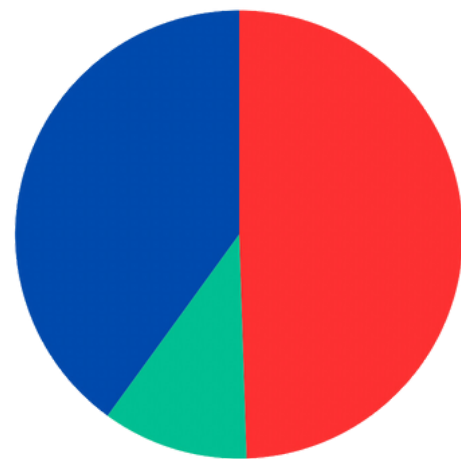
**Moderately Difficult**

**Most Difficult**



### Less Difficult Module 2

Students who do not answer as many difficult (or heavily weighted) questions correctly will be routed to a less difficult second module. Correct answers in this module are generally worth fewer points.

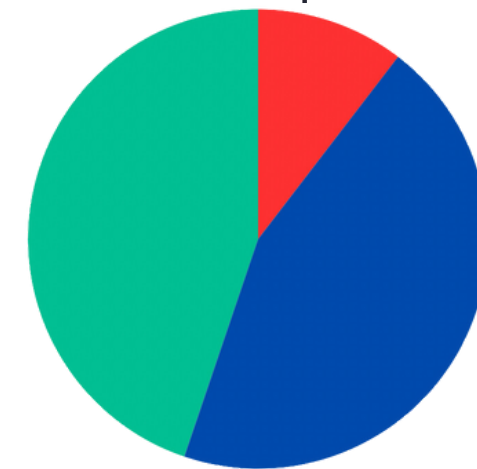


Student  
**routed** based  
on  
**performance**



### More Difficult Module 2

Students who answer more difficult (or more heavily weighted) questions correctly will be routed to a more difficult second module. Correct answers in this module are generally worth more points.





# What this means for your score

Students routed to the **more difficult module** have access to questions that are **worth more points**. This means that they can **get fewer questions correct, but still get a higher score** than a student routed to the less difficult module.

On the flip-side, students who are routed to the **less difficult module** are essentially **locked out of higher potential scores**. This gives an added **importance to performing well at the beginning** of the test.



# How difficult is difficult?

“Hard” vs “easy” is subjective, so they may not feel the same for each student. College Board will determine a question’s level based on how other students have performed on that question during pilots and the experimental sections of previous tests. **However, if a student consistently feels they’re encountering more challenging problems as they go through the test, that’s a good sign!**



# THE ACT VS SAT

	ACT	SAT
Timing & Duration	Full test duration is <b>3 hours</b>	Full test duration is <b>2 hours and 14 minutes</b>
	On average, students have <b>less than one minute per question</b>	On average, students have <b>over one minute per question</b>
	<b>Student is responsible</b> for knowing how much time is left	<b>Countdown timer is displayed</b> at the top of the screen
Calculator Use	Calculator can be used for the <b>entire exam</b>	Calculator can be used for the <b>entire exam</b>
	Students need to <b>bring a calculator</b> to the test	<b>Digital calculator is provided</b> , or students can bring their own
Content	<b>Format/ Order:</b> English, Math, Reading, Science	<b>Format/ Order:</b> Reading/Writing (Module 1), Reading Writing (Adaptive Module), Math (Module 1), Math (Adaptive Module)
	Reading is a dedicated section that features <b>four long passages with 10 questions each</b>	Reading and Writing are combined into one section featuring <b>short passages with one question each</b>
	Writing/Language focuses on <b>nuts and bolts</b>	Reading/Writing will feature passages with <b>non-conventional writing like poetry a hypothetical essays</b>
	Charts and graphs are featured in a <b>dedicated Science section</b>	<b>Charts and graphs</b> are mixed in with the Math and Verbal sections
Taking the Test	Every student takes the <b>same material</b> in each section	<b>Will be adaptive</b> , using the questions in Module 1 to adjust the difficulty of questions subsequent Adaptive Module
	Time spent at beginning of testing session to <b>bubble in student's name, school, etc</b> and answers submitted on bubble sheet.	<b>App is linked</b> to student's College Board account and automatically populates information and answers submitted digitally
	Test taken at designated testing centers on specific days	Test taken at designated testing centers on specific days
Scoring	Every questions is weighted, or worth, the same	Difficult questions are weighted more heavily. This means correct answers on "harder" questions contribute to a higher score
	Scores take approximately <b>two to three weeks</b> to process	Scores currently take two to three weeks to process, but should eventually be available within <b>hours or days</b>
	Scored out of 36: Average of 4 sections out of 36	Scored out of 1600: Total of 2 sections out of 800



How do I know which test is best for **my student?**



**Take the guess work out!**  
Students should **take a practice test** for each exam and **review the results with an expert.**



# Testing Policy Fluency





# Testing Policy Fluency

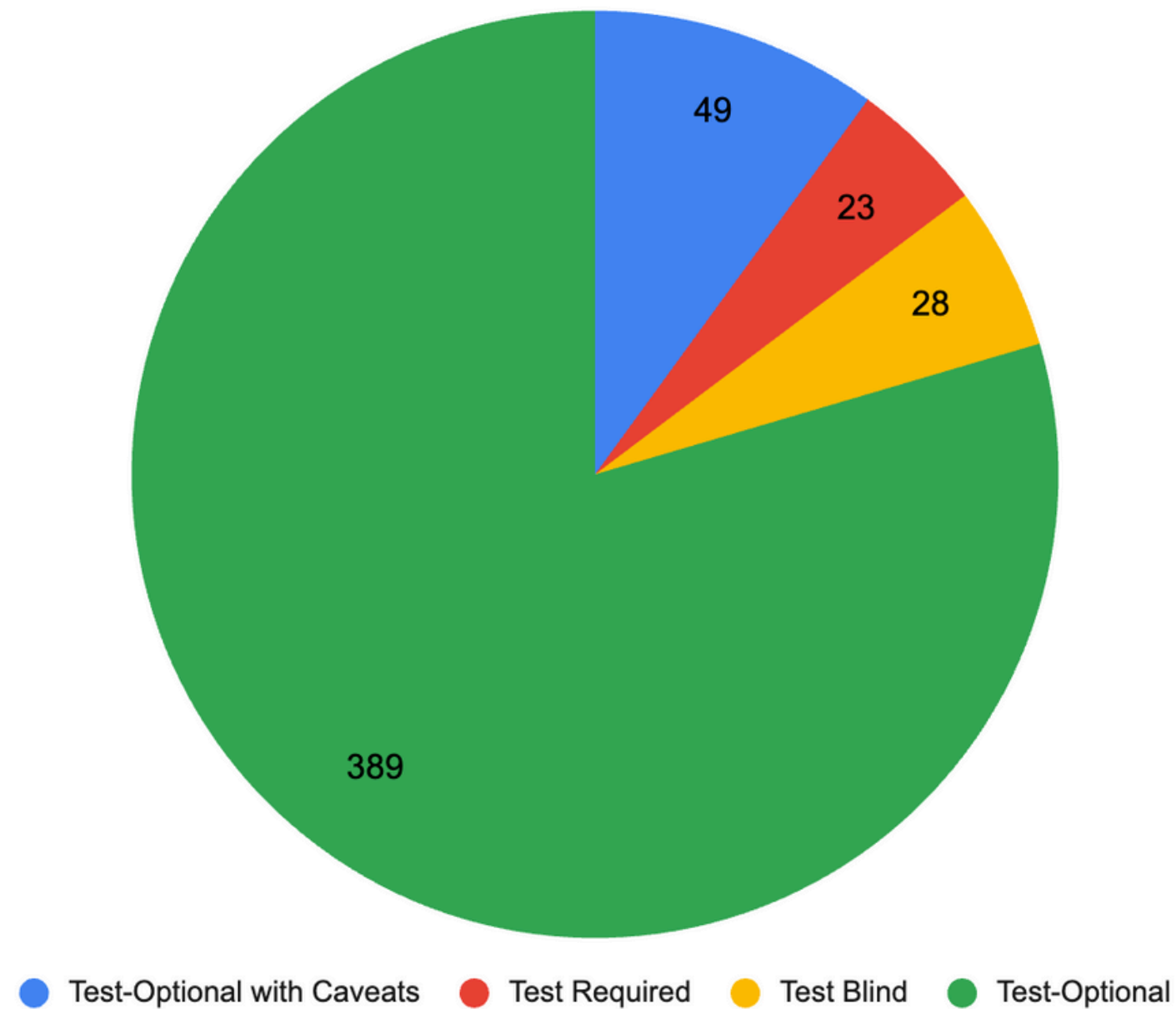
Test Policy	What does it mean?	Should I submit SAT/ACT scores?
Test Blind	Test scores do not hold weight in admissions decisions, even if submitted.	You do not need to submit scores, but consult with your college counselor to make sure you won't need/want a test for certain program or financial aid considerations.
Test Optional	Schools will consider test scores if a student submits them, but will not penalize a student if they do not submit them.	Yes, if your score is above the average score for incoming freshman at the college. No, if your score is below the average, and be aware the other parts of your application might hold more weight.
Test Optional with Caveats	Scores are not required for a school in general, but are required for certain programs and scholarships.	Yes, if your score is above the average score for incoming freshman at the college and/or required for a certain program/scholarship.
Test Optional Based on GPA	Scores are required if students have below a certain GPA.	Yes, if your score is above average for incoming freshman at the college and/or you have below the minimum required GPA.
Test-Flexible	Sometimes used interchangeably with "test-optional", test-flexible also means schools require tests, but will take AP or IB exams instead of an SAT/ACT.	Yes, and you should aim for a competitive score. In the absence of a competitive SAT/ACT score, submit another test score that "shows off" your testing proficiency.
Required	There's no getting out of it.	Yes, and you should aim for a highly competitive score.



# Testing Policy Distribution

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Test Policy Distribution - Top 500 U.S. Universities



- There are about **1900 test-optional colleges** in the US.
- This includes test-optional with caveats/based on GPA.
- This represents about **80% of US colleges.**



**Boston College**, Test Optional until at least 2024: *Internal research has shown that test scores, when used alongside other factors such as grades, curriculum rigor, writing, co-curricular involvement, and recommendations, **add measurable value in predicting academic success**. For this reason, students who complete the SAT or ACT are encouraged to submit their scores.*

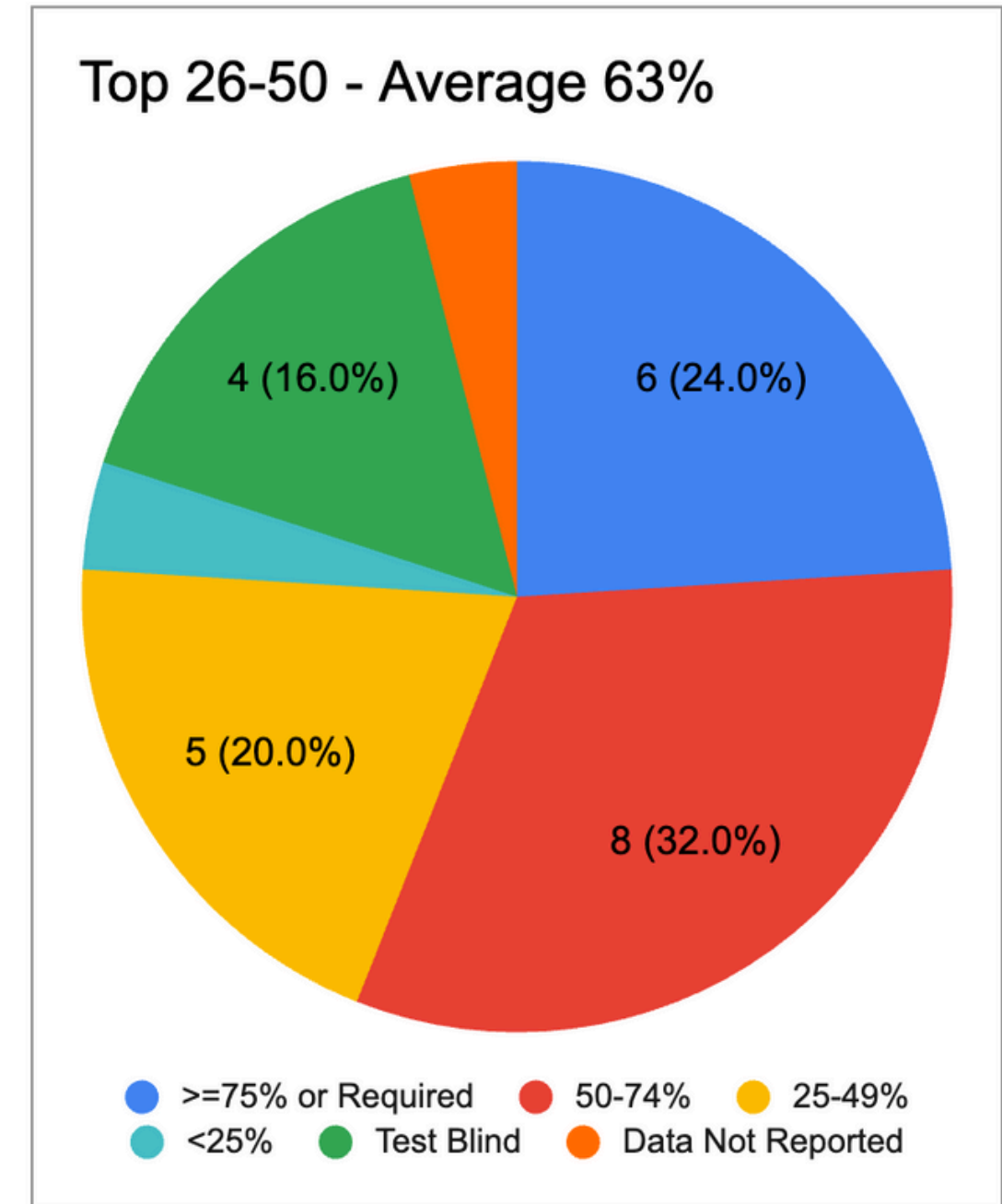
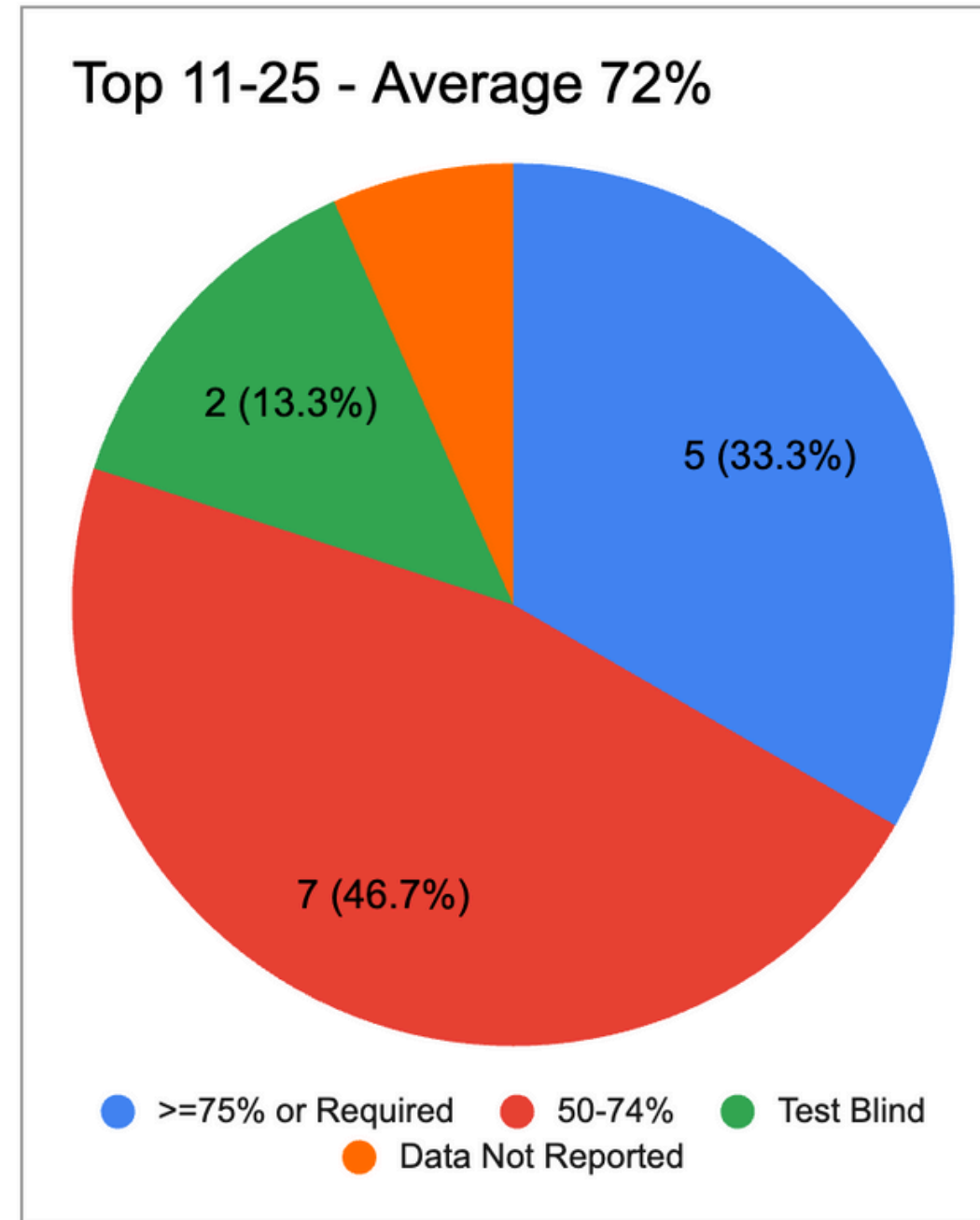
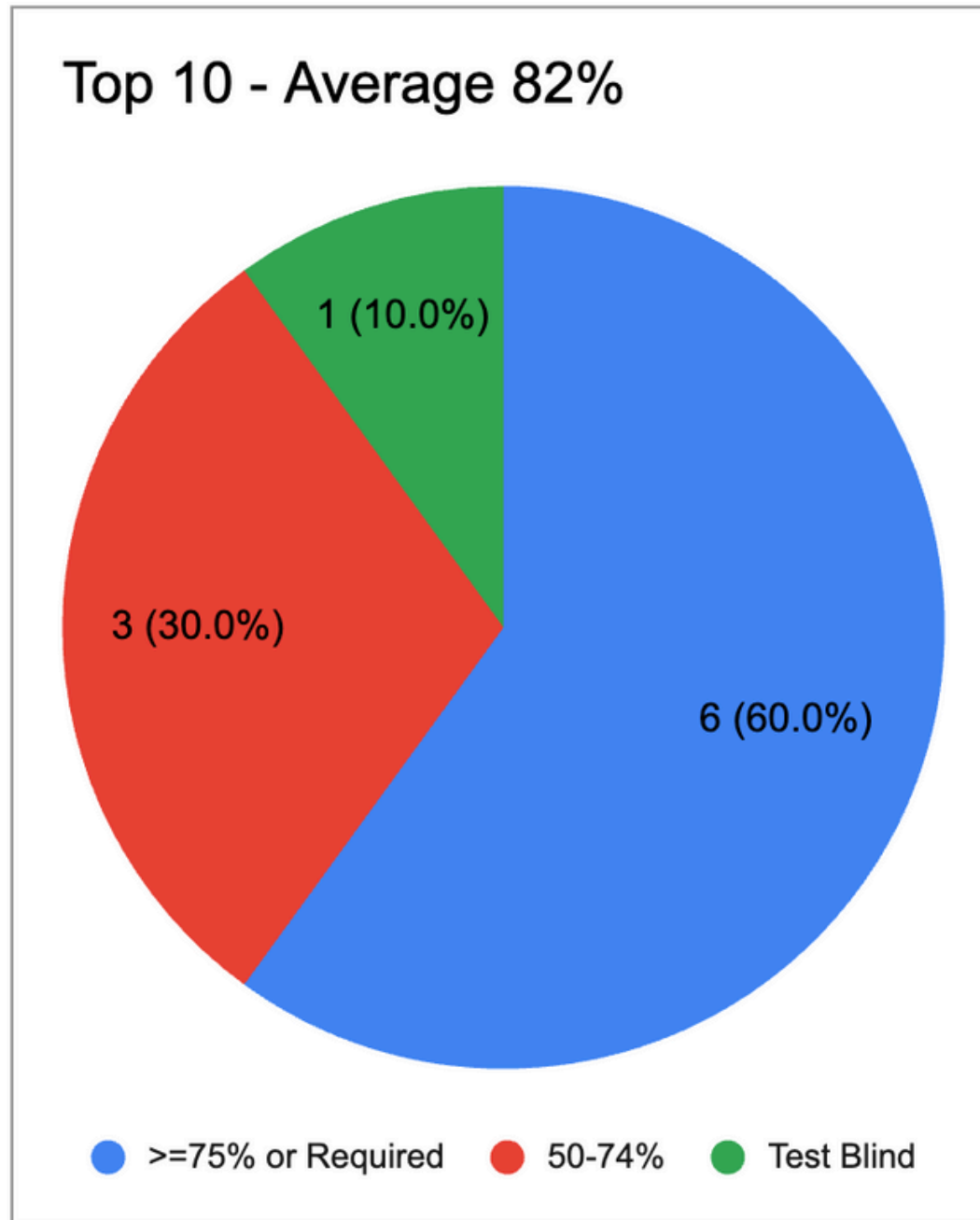
**Oberlin College**, Test Optional until at least 2025: *Test-optional truly means test-optional: the **absence of scores will not count against a student's** application in any way.*

**Colorado College**, Test Optional until further notice: *We do not penalize those who submit test scores and will only use them if they enhance your chances for admission. If you apply test-optional or submit scores that do not strengthen your application, **we will place greater emphasis on your academic performance**.*

**Emerson College**, Test Optional until further notice: *Students **who feel that their standardized test scores do not effectively represent their skills and talents** or effectively demonstrate their ability to succeed within the college environment may opt to forgo submitting them for review.*

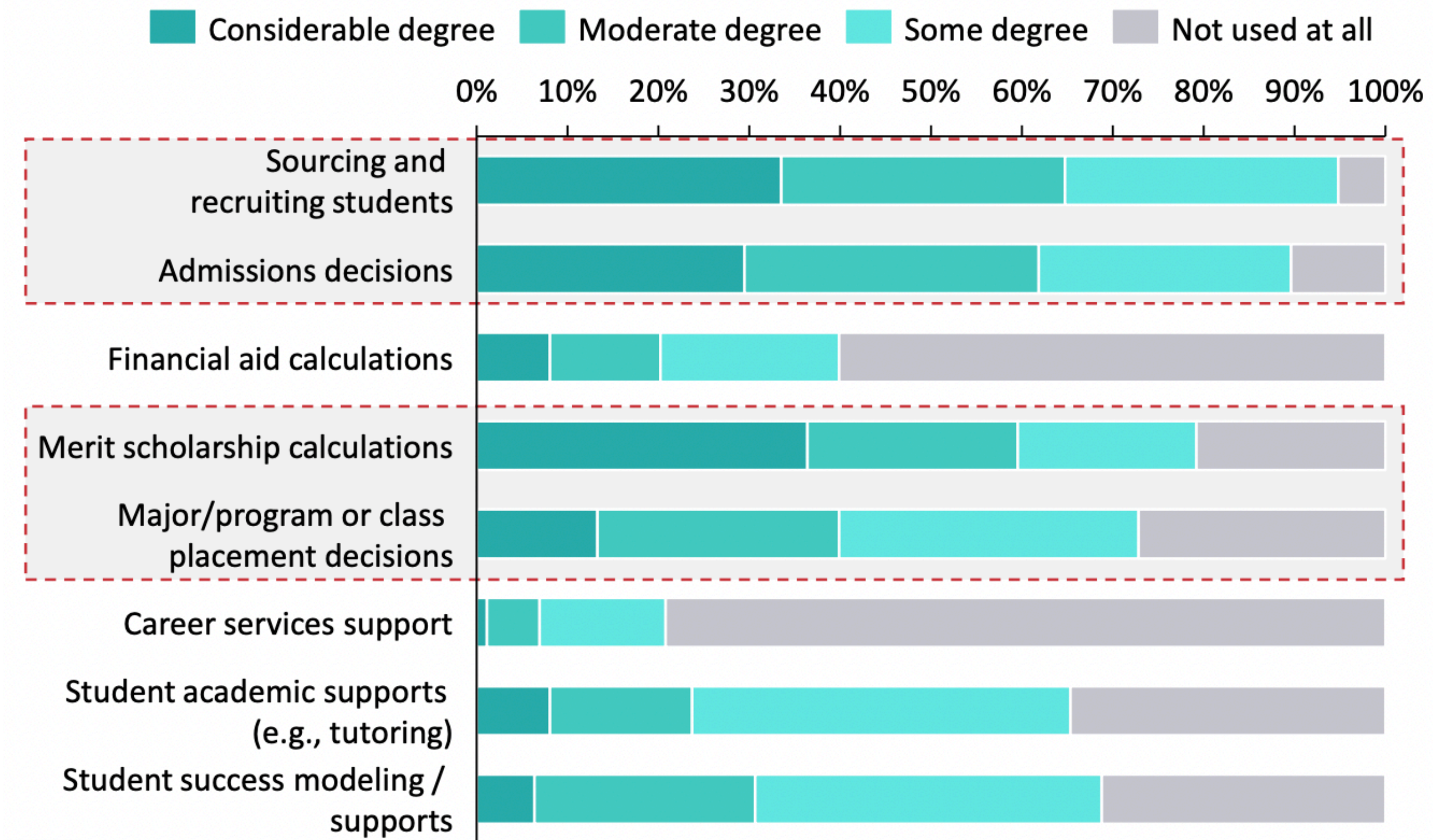


# Student Score Submissions





# Use of Tests in Admissions Decisions



Source: EY-Parthenon Higher Ed Admissions Decision Maker Survey (n=207)



# Getting Prepared





# Testing Timeline

When should my student **take** the SAT/ACT?



- Primary focus should be GPA and taking/ getting into rigorous classes
- **Take the PSAT** in October.

- Take your first (and possibly second) SAT/ACT if you have **already completed Algebra 2**
- Take the PSAT (NMSQT) in October

- Take your first SAT/ACT in March or April if you are **currently in Algebra 2**
- If possible, aim to take your **final test in May/June**
- **In our opinion**, every student should have tested at least once by the end of their Junior year

- If you are unable to wrap up testing within Junior year, aim to take your last test by September Senior year
- **EA/ED decisions are in November**, regular admissions deadlines are in December and January

# Preparation Timeline

When should my student **start preparing** for the SAT/ACT?



## START PREP IF:

- You have **completed Algebra 2**
- You have a **rigorous junior year**
- You want **200+ points** of improvement
- You have **learning differences**, test **anxiety**, or known **gaps in academic fundamentals**

## START PREP IF:

- You meet the aforementioned criteria, but **cannot logistically fit in prep** over the summer
- Still, if possible, try to do *SOMETHING* over summer when you have **increased mental capacity**

## START PREP IF:

- You are **currently in Algebra 2**
- The demands of summer and/or junior year did not allow you to start prep earlier.

## START PREP IF:

- **In our opinion**, students should **start prep prior to Senior year**, but we understand that life happens.
- Regardless of where your student is, summer is a great time to **brush up on skills** for a final test



# HOW SHOULD MY STUDENT PREPARE?



## SELF STUDY

### BEST FOR:

Highly motivated students, students looking for minimal improvement, students applying exclusively to schools/programs that do not prioritize test scores



## PRIVATE TUTORING

### BEST FOR:

Students aiming for more than ~100/ 2-3 points of improvement, students scoring above 1200, students with unpredictable schedules, students with academic gaps, learning differences, anxiety, or issues with accountability



## GROUP CLASS

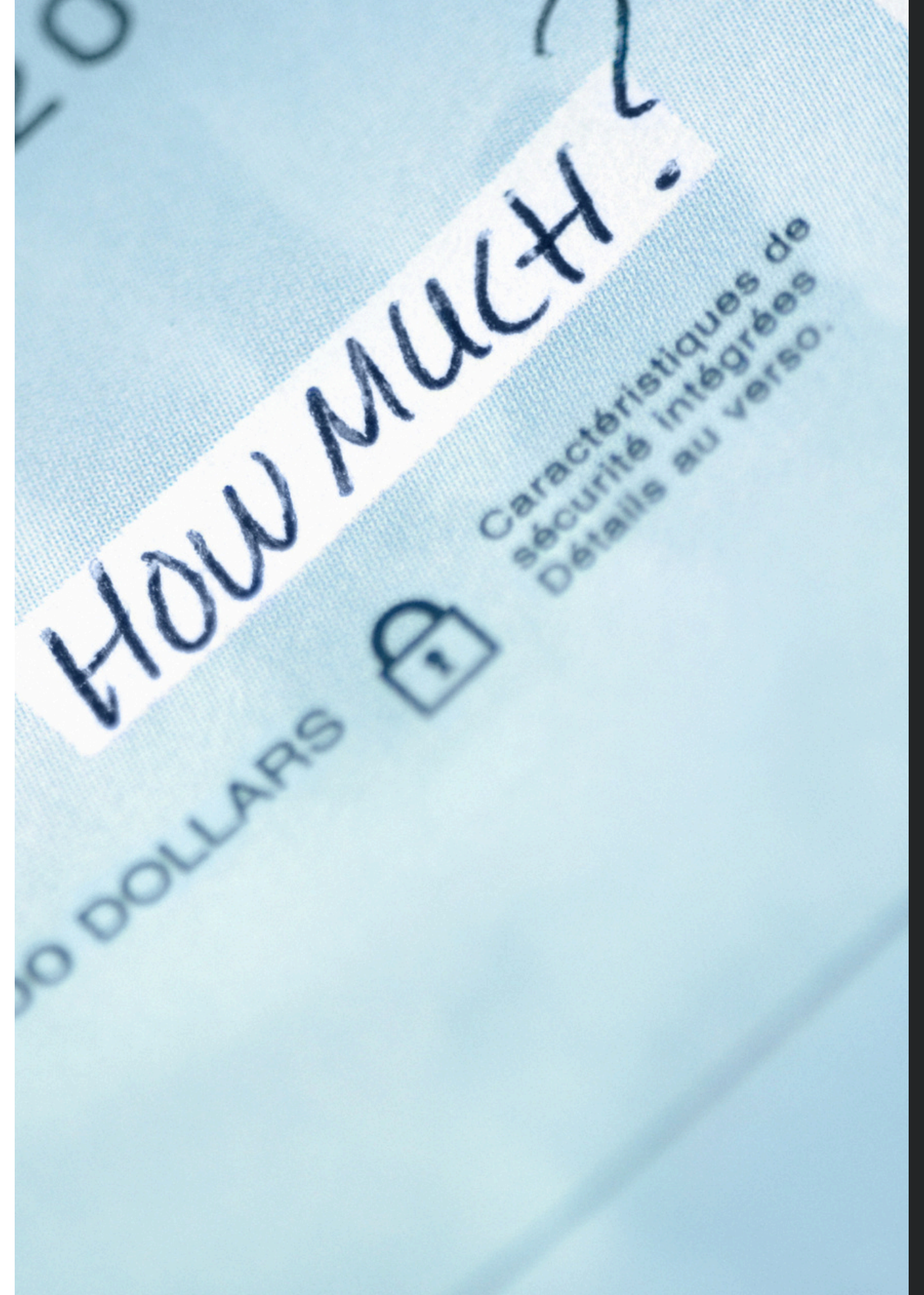
### BEST FOR:

Students scoring under 1200/ 25 and aiming for ~100/ 2-3 points of improvement, students with predictable schedules

# How much should my student prepare?

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- This is **entirely based on the student**, their starting score, their goal score, and their learning style.
- For meaningful point increases (150/4+), students generally prepare for **at least 3 months** and meet with a tutor **1-2 times per week**.
- **Not all point increases are created equally**. For example, going from a 1000 to a 1200 is usually “easier” than going from a 1200 to 1400.
- Find a program that will **customize an approach** based on your families’ **needs, schedule, budget**.
- **Avoid programs** that offer point increase guarantees or pitch “one size fits all” packages.
- Like anything in life, time and effort yield results. **Dramatic point increases (300/ 8+) are possible**, but do not happen overnight.







# Receiving & Using Accommodations

Being correctly accommodated can remove some major anxiety. A few examples:

- **Extended time** testing gives struggling students breathing room to self-soothe.
- **1-1 or small-group** testing removes some of the perceived social pressure of being surrounded by peers.
- **Screen-readers and large-print test booklets** make it possible to access the test material for students with certain disabilities

If your student qualifies for accommodations, then by definition they both **need and deserve** them. **Advocate early and often** for their accommodations at school and at their testing center.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **What is a "good" score** on the SAT/ACT?
- **How much prep** should I do for the SAT/ACT?
- **When should I take** my first SAT/ ACT?
- **How many times** should I take the SAT/ACT?
- How will **colleges** receive my scores?







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# Additional questions?

[Click here](#) to schedule a free consultation to discuss a customized test prep plan for your student.

**415 237 3377**

**HELLO@MARIGOLDPREP.COM**