Frequently Asked Questions about taking the SAT and the ACT through Northwestern University’s Midwest Academic Talent Search (NUMATS)

Q. What is the SAT?
A. The SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) is a test designed primarily for college-bound juniors and seniors. The test consists of two sections: reading and writing (sentence completions, word context, and passage-based reading) and math (multiple choice and student-produced response questions). There is an optional writing portion that is not included in the talent search. The entire test takes 3 hours to complete, but the total time the students are at the testing center is over 4 hours. The test is designed by the College Board. All Michigan high school students are required to take the SAT to receive a Michigan diploma. Students, whether they are interested in ATYP’s language arts or math programs, must sit for the full test.

Q. What is the ACT?
A. The ACT assesses high school students’ general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work. The multiple-choice test covers four skill areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science. There is an optional writing portion that is not included in the talent search. The test is designed to assess all students’ knowledge of basic subjects and is usually administered in the student’s junior year. The entire test takes three hours, but the students are at the testing center for more than four hours. Again, if you are testing for ATYP you must complete the full test.

Q. Why do NUMATS and ATYP suggest that I take the SAT or ACT?
A. You have already exhibited substantial academic talent. The Academic Talent Search process provides a second screening device, either the SAT or the ACT, which can be a valuable tool in discovering your potential for excellence in mathematical and verbal areas. Since it is an above-grade-level test, it provides an assessment of your readiness to study curriculum at advanced levels. The SAT seems to be a better fit for younger students who have never taken an above-grade-level test. Older students, or younger students who have participated in the talent search previously, can take either the SAT or the ACT.

Q. Are the SAT or ACT too difficult for sixth and seventh graders?
A. The test will be difficult. There will be MANY questions that you will not be able to answer. Nevertheless, experience has shown that the very ablest of you will do reasonably well on the test. There is no passing or failing grade on this test. The test score only indicates the extent of your above-grade-level reasoning ability, which you cannot fully demonstrate on grade-level achievement tests because their level of difficulty is too low.

Q. If I decide to take the SAT or ACT, should I prepare for it?
A. It’s probably a good idea to familiarize yourself with the types of questions on the test you will be taking. You will either receive a booklet from the testing company with preparation material included or be given access to preparation materials online. The booklet contains actual sample tests. Practice questions are available at www.collegeboard.com (SAT) or www.actstudent.org (ACT). We also offer a Test Preview Seminar that helps students understand the expectations for the test (online registration is available on our website). Young students should NOT be coached or tutored on an ongoing basis as preparation for this test. The purpose
of this process is for students to demonstrate how they think about these mathematical and verbal concepts before they have been taught the content.

Q. How soon do I get my score?
A. The test company mails scores directly to your home approximately two to four weeks after the test administration. NUMATS also provides information on how to access your scores online in the Toolbox. The Toolbox will also give you recommendations for future coursework as well as access to research and online seminars.

Q. Will I hear from ATYP after I take the test?
A. ATYP traditionally sends a follow-up letter to all students who have their scores reported to the ATYP office (SAT code 1944, ACT code 6007). Students are notified in the spring (by late April or within one month of your test date, whichever is later) whether their test scores qualify them for the program. If you test by March and have not heard from us by May 1, please contact us at atyp-info@wmich.edu or (269) 387-3553 to make sure we have received your scores. You may email your scores to us or make a copy and send them in the mail. A meeting is then held with more detailed information regarding course offerings.

Q. When and where will the SAT or ACT test be given?
A. The SAT will be given on a Saturday morning in January or March. The ACT will be given on a Saturday in February. You may test at either Western Michigan University or at any other site that is convenient for you. Available sites will be listed when you register. You should be at the test site no later than 7:45 a.m. Other testing dates are available but taking the test no later than March works best to qualify for ATYP.

Q. What if there is bad weather the morning of the SAT or ACT test?
A. Listen to the radio for a test cancellation at your test site. Just because tests are cancelled at one site does not mean they are cancelled for all sites. Test cancellation is unlikely except in cases of extremely bad weather. If the test is cancelled, you will be notified of a re-scheduled date.

Q. How do I register for the SAT or ACT?
A. Registration for NUMATS includes registration for the SAT or ACT. The NUMATS website (ctd.northwestern.edu/numats/register) is the recommended way to register. Young students cannot register directly online for the SAT or ACT.

Q. What should I bring to the test?
A. Take your Admission Ticket (you will receive one from the College Board or ACT about 3-14 days before the test), at least three No. 2 non-mechanical pencils with good erasers, identification (either photo ID, passport, or the Talent Search Participant Form from NUMATS) and an acceptable calculator. You may also bring a quiet snack and water bottle. Do not bring watches that beep. Cell phones must be turned off throughout the entire morning. If you will be tempted to turn it on, we recommend leaving it at home.

Q. If I have questions after I have read the information booklets, can I call anyone?
A. Talent Search information can be found at ctd.northwestern.edu/numats. General ATYP information can be found at www.wmich.edu/atyp. SAT questions should be directed to collegeboard.com or to their office at (609) 771-7600; their offices are open until 8:45 p.m., ET. ACT questions should be directed to act.org or to their office at (319) 337-1270; their offices are open until 8 p.m., CT.