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## When should you take the SAT?

The SAT is offered seven times each year, and students can take the test as often as they like. On average, students take the test three times before applying to colleges. Unfortunately, many students mistakenly think that schools average their SAT scores – they don't. Some colleges (such as the University of California schools) take your highest score in an individual sitting, while other schools (such as the University of Southern California and other private universities) take your highest math, reading and writing score, regardless of test date. As such, there is no penalty for taking the SAT numerous times.

### So when should you prepare for the SAT?

Some students use the summer before their junior year as a chance to get a head start. They have free time, so they prepare for the SAT and PSAT simultaneously. (The difference between the two tests is that the PSAT does not have the essay portion or Algebra II.) These students take the PSAT and SAT in October of their junior year and get an SAT score under their belt early. Since the tests are only a week apart, students can easily keep the testing strategies in their heads. If they score well on the PSAT, they might be considered for a National Merit Scholarship and even earn money toward college.

Other students will wait until the spring to take the SAT for the first time. Since it is offered in April, May and June, students will get ready over the winter; thorough preparation is a three-month process. Some students wait until spring so they can finish taking Algebra II and have all of the knowledge possible before going into the exam. Of course, this is also the time when SAT subject tests, AP tests and even final exams are being given, so some students might be overwhelmed with testing.

The last group of students will take the test “cold” in the spring-time and then prepare over the summer before their senior year. The fall test dates are seniors' last chance before their college applications are due. Since this test makes up one-third of their application, students must focus on this exam over the summer. The December test date is usually the final sitting for seniors to get the scores on their applications.

Whenever you decide to prepare, it is important to keep in mind that this is a serious and necessary time commitment. Make sure to dedicate resources to the SAT – nearly two-thirds of college-bound students seek some form of help to prepare. 