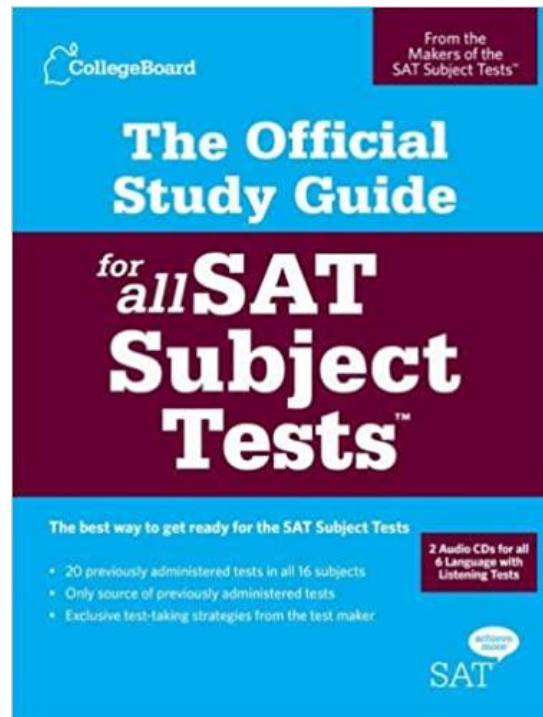


SAT Subject Tests - What they are; why your child may (or may not) need to take them

Written by Jack Delehey on 2020 December 18th



I know, I know. You just got a handle on the SATs and ACTs. If you are part of my course and your child is a Junior in high school, at this point I have helped your child decide which test she is going “all in” on, which test she likes better, performs better on, and where she’ll spend her next ~9 months improving her score.

After all, it’s fairly black and white: every single college in the United States (if they accept standardized test scores as part of their application process) accepts *either* the ACT or SAT. You know this, your child knows this and it’s why you likely have heard “so which will your child choose?” way too many times to count.

Anyway, enough of that. At this time of the year in my program, we’re beyond that decision. Your child, a high school junior, has picked one and is officially “all-in” on that test...and that’s the only test he’ll have to take, right?

Maybe. And maybe not.

SAT Subject Tests: What they are

Perhaps when you were going through the college application process, you heard the term “SAT II Tests”...yep, they’re the same thing. From 1937 to 1994, that’s what The College Board referred to them as. Since ‘94, they’ve gone through a handful of names, but recently The

College Board seems to have stuck with “SAT Subject Tests.” The College Board, as of 2020, offers 20 different possible tests, each one hour long. In essence, they provide a way for a student to demonstrate academic strength in a *particular subject*.

Rapid fire info

*SAT Subject Tests are additional tests a student can, but does not have to take to be accepted to college. If a student performs well on one/multiple of these subject tests, it can improve her admissions chances with colleges

*Students can take the test at any time in high school: 9, 10, 11, 12 grade but students typically take them between 10-11 grade.

*Used to be more mandatory: 10 years ago, many more colleges required them. These days, they’re starting to fall into the “optional” category at most schools.

Who they’re not optional for

[Spark admissions wrote a fantastic blog on this subject](#), which I highly recommend skimming if you have the time. It’s a one-stop-shop to answering all your SAT Subject Test questions.

Summary: the SAT Subject test really isn’t optional for students applying to very particular programs within certain schools (see [spark admissions blog](#) for these programs as of 2020). Additionally, if you’re in *my program*, I’ll push you to take two SAT Subject Tests if the following schools are on your possible application list:

Carnegie Mellon University
Dartmouth College
Duke University
Emory University
Georgetown University
Harvard University
Lehigh University
Princeton University
Rice University
University of Pennsylvania
Yale University

That’s because, for these schools, SAT Subject test are labeled as “recommended.” Could you gain acceptance without them at these schools? Yes. But if you’re in my program, I’m pushing you to take them...it’ll take two hours out of your Saturday and *will* make a difference in admissions.

So they’re optional...should my son/daughter take them?

Ultimately, the decision is up to both of you. A general rule of thumb is if you believe taking an SAT Subject Test will improve your overall application, you should take that test.

For most of my students, that threshold seems to be right around a 700+ score. A 700+ or above is worth submitting, a 690 or below is not worth it. *However, ultimately, this is a blanket statement and should not be utilized as an end-all-be-all rule.* Every student is different, which is why you (and your child) should sit down and decide for yourself if taking these tests is worth it. If you still are unsure, I recommend just taking two tests, seeing how you score, and then deciding whether to *submit* these scores on the back end or not.

An easy 800

Pro tip: if your child is bilingual and [The College Board offers the language](#), your child should absolutely sign up to take that test. That's likely the easiest perfect score your child could get...and who cares that your child grew up speaking the language since she was 2 years old? College admissions certainly won't care...they'll just see "800" and nod approvingly.

Summary

In summary: SAT Subject Tests are still a thing. Talk to me in 10 years and they may be extinct. But for now, in 2020, they are still very much a thing and should be accounted for.

Of course, in 2020, all of this comes with the caveat that this has been the most unusual college admissions year ever, so take everything with a grain of salt. A global pandemic will do that. But when the world does return back to normal, SAT Subject Tests will still be around.

Do you need help navigating the college search process (or know someone who does)? [Click here](#) to see if and how we can help (or pass the link along to your fellow parent that might be able to use it)!

Happy college-searching,
-Jack