

**CLIFFS**

**PSAT**

**PREPARATION GUIDE**

and  
**N**ATIONAL  
**M**ERIT  
**S**CHOLARSHIP  
**Q**UALIFYING  
**T**EST

**PRELIMINARY SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST**

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## PREFACE

**YOUR PSAT/NMSQT SCORES ARE IMPORTANT!** They can help you (1) plan your college career, (2) get a scholarship, and (3) practice for the SAT for college entrance. Therefore, your study time must be used most effectively. You need the most comprehensive test preparation guide that you can realistically complete in a reasonable time. It must be short, direct, precise, easy-to-use, and thorough, giving you all the information you need to do your best on the PSAT/NMSQT.

In keeping with the fine tradition of Cliffs Notes, this guide was developed by leading experts in the field of test preparation as part of a series to specifically meet these standards. The testing strategies, techniques, and materials have been researched, tested, and evaluated, and are presently used at test preparation programs at many leading colleges and universities. This guide emphasizes the **BOBROW TEST PREPARATION SERVICES** approach, which focuses on six major areas:

1. Ability Tested
2. Basic Skills Necessary
3. Understanding Directions
4. Analysis of Directions
5. Suggested Approaches with Samples
6. Practice-Review-Analyze

These major areas include important mathematical terminology, formulas, and a helpful list of prefixes, suffixes, and roots, followed by a complete practice exam with answers and in-depth explanations.

This guide was written to give you the edge in doing your best by giving you maximum benefit in a reasonable amount of time and is meant to augment, not substitute for, formal or informal learning throughout junior high and high school. If you follow the Study Guide Checklist in this book and study regularly, you will get the best test preparation possible.

## STUDY GUIDE CHECKLIST

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Read the PSAT/NMSQT Information Bulletin.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Become familiar with the Test Format, page 3.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Familiarize yourself with the answers to Questions Commonly Asked about the PSAT, page 5.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Learn the techniques of Two Successful Overall Approaches, page 7.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Carefully read Part II, Analysis of Exam Areas, beginning on page 11.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Review lists of Common Prefixes, Suffixes, and Roots, page 20.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Review math Terminology, Formulas, and General Information, page 34.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Strictly observing time allotments, take the Full-Length Practice Test, section-by-section, beginning on page 47.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Check your answers and make corrections, page 72.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Analyze your Practice Test results, page 73.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Fill out the Tally Sheet for Problems Missed to pinpoint your mistakes, page 75.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. While referring to each item of the Practice Test, study ALL the Answers and Explanations that begin on page 79.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Review as necessary Basic Skills, Terminology, Formulas, and General Information given in Part II of this book.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. CAREFULLY READ "FINAL PREPARATION" on page 99.

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## **PART I: Introduction**



## COMMON FORMAT OF A RECENT PSAT/NMSQT EXAM

<hr/> <hr/>		
Section I	Verbal Ability	65 Questions
50 Minutes	Antonyms	12-18 Questions
	Analogies	12-18 Questions
	Sentence Completion	12-18 Questions
	Reading Comprehension	18-25 Questions
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Section II	Mathematical Ability	50 Questions
50 Minutes	Math Ability	32-40 Questions
	Quantitative Comparison	10-18 Questions
Total Testing Time 100 Minutes		Approximately 115 Questions
- 1 Hour, 40 Minutes		
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## **GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

The PSAT/NMSQT measures verbal and mathematical abilities related to college. It is a preview of the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test), which is usually required for admission to college. The results of the test should help you plan your college career. The test lasts one hour and forty minutes, and consists entirely of multiple-choice questions.

You will spend 50 minutes on a verbal section (65 questions) and 50 minutes on a mathematical section (50 questions). The verbal section tests your reading comprehension and the breadth of your vocabulary. The math section presents problems in arithmetic, algebra, and geometry.

## QUESTIONS COMMONLY ASKED ABOUT THE PSAT/NMSQT

**Q: WHO ADMINISTERS THE PSAT/NMSQT?**

**A:** The PSAT/NMSQT is administered by the College Entrance Examination Board and the National Merit Scholarship Corporation in conjunction with Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey.

**Q: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PSAT AND THE NMSQT?**

**A:** Taking the PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test) qualifies you to compete in the National Merit Scholarship Program. So another name for the PSAT is the NMSQT (National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test).

**Q: CAN I TAKE THE PSAT/NMSQT MORE THAN ONCE?**

**A:** You may take the test only once in a school year. The PSAT/NMSQT is administered once a year, in October. Your high school will inform you of the test date and invite you and your fellow students to take the test.

**Q: WHAT MATERIALS MAY I BRING TO THE PSAT/NMSQT?**

**A:** Bring your registration form, positive identification, a watch, three or four sharpened Number 2 pencils, and a good eraser. You may not bring scratchpaper, calculators, or books. You may do your figuring in the margins of the test booklet or in the space provided.

**Q: MAY I CANCEL MY SCORE?**

**A:** Yes. You may do so by notifying your test supervisor *before* you leave the examination room.

**Q: SHOULD I GUESS ON THE PSAT/NMSQT?**

**A:** If you can eliminate one or more of the multiple-choice answers to a question, it is to your advantage to guess. Eliminating one or more answers increases your chance of choosing the right answer. To discourage wild guessing, a fraction of a point is subtracted for every wrong answer, but no points are subtracted if you leave the answer blank.

**Q: HOW SHOULD I PREPARE FOR THE PSAT/NMSQT?**

**A:** Understanding and practicing test-taking strategies will help a great deal, especially on the verbal section. Subject-matter review is particularly useful for the math section. Subject matter and strategies are covered in this book.

**Q: HOW AND WHEN SHOULD I REGISTER?**

**A:** After your school notifies you of the time and place of testing, report to that location on the test day to register and pay the required fee.

**Q: WHAT ARE THE NMSC SCHOLARSHIPS?**

**A:** The National Merit Scholarship Corporation awards scholarships to about 4000 winners each year; it also sponsors an achievement program which tries to increase educational opportunities for minority students. Further information about the merit and achievement programs is available in the official PSAT/NMSQT Bulletin.

**Q: HOW DO I OBTAIN A BULLETIN AND FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE PSAT/NMSQT?**

**A:** Check with your high school counselor or write to the following agencies:

1. To get information about the test itself, write to

**PSAT/NMSQT**  
**Box 1025**  
**Berkeley, California 94701**  
**(415) 849-0950**

If you live in Mexico, western Canada, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, or Wyoming.

2. If you live in any other state or in eastern Canada, write to

**PSAT/NMSQT**  
**Box 589**  
**Princeton, New Jersey 08540**  
**(609) 921-9000**

3. To get information about NMSC scholarship programs, write to

**National Merit Scholarship Corporation**  
**Educational Services Department**  
**One American Plaza**  
**Evanston, Illinois 60201**  
**(312) 866-5100**

## TAKING THE PSAT/NMSQT: TWO SUCCESSFUL OVERALL APPROACHES

### I. The "Plus-Minus" System

Many who take the PSAT/NMSQT don't get their best possible score because they spend too much time on difficult questions, leaving insufficient time to answer the easy questions. Don't let this happen to you. Since every question within each section is worth the same amount, use the following system, *marking on your answer sheet*:

1. Answer easy questions immediately.
2. Place a "+" next to any problem that seems solvable but is too time-consuming.
3. Place a "-" next to any problem that seems impossible. Act quickly; don't waste time deciding whether a problem is a "+" or a "-".

After working all the problems you can do immediately, go back and work your "+" problems. If you finish them, try your "-" problems (sometimes when you come back to a problem that seemed impossible you will suddenly realize how to solve it).

Your answer sheet should look something like this after you finish working your easy questions:

1. A ● C D E  
+2. A B C D E  
3. A B ● D E  
-4. A B C D E  
+5. A B C D E

*Make sure to erase your "+" and "-" marks before your time is up.* The scoring machine may count extraneous marks as wrong answers.

### II. The Elimination Strategy

Take advantage of being allowed to mark in your testing booklet. As you eliminate an answer choice from consideration, *make sure to mark it out in your question booklet* as follows:

- ? ~~(A)~~  
? ~~(B)~~  
~~(C)~~  
~~(D)~~  
? ~~(E)~~

**Notice that some choices are marked with question marks, signifying that they may be possible answers. This technique will help you avoid reconsidering those choices you have already eliminated and will help you narrow down your possible answers.**

**These marks in your testing booklet do not need to be erased.**

## **PART II: Analysis of Exam Areas**

This section is designed to introduce you to each PSAT/NMSQT area by carefully reviewing the—

1. Ability Tested
2. Basic Skills Necessary
3. Directions
4. Analysis of Directions
5. Suggested Approach with Sample Problems

This section emphasizes important test-taking techniques and strategies and how to apply them to a variety of problem types. It also includes valuable terminology, formulas, basic math information, and a compact list of prefixes, suffixes, and roots to assist you in the verbal section.



## INTRODUCTION TO VERBAL ABILITY

The Verbal Ability sections of the PSAT/NMSQT consist of four types of questions; antonyms and analogies, sentence completion, and reading comprehension. The section is 50 minutes in length and contains 60 to 65 questions. This section generates a scaled Verbal Ability score that ranges from 20 to 80, with an average score of about 43 for Juniors later entering college.

A CAREFUL ANALYSIS OF EACH TYPE OF VERBAL ABILITY QUESTION FOLLOWS.

### ANTONYMS

#### *Ability Tested*

The Antonym section tests your vocabulary—your ability to understand the meanings of words and to distinguish between fine shades of meaning.

#### *Basic Skills Necessary*

This section requires a strong high school vocabulary. A strong vocabulary cannot be developed instantly; it grows over a long period of time spent reading widely and learning new words. Knowing the meanings of prefixes, suffixes, and roots will help you to derive word meanings on the test.

#### *Directions*

Each word in CAPITAL LETTERS is followed by five words or phrases. The correct choice is the word or phrase whose meaning is most nearly *opposite* to the meaning of the word in capitals. You may be required to distinguish fine shades of meaning. Look at all choices before marking your answer.

#### *Analysis*

1. Remember that you are looking for the opposite *or most nearly opposite*; therefore, the word you choose may not be a direct opposite.
2. Since the directions advise you to consider all choices, you should not jump to a conclusion and choose the first opposite you see. Some choices may be very close, varying only by the slightest degree of meaning.



**Suggested Approach With Samples**

1. Be aware of the part of speech of the capitalized word. Its opposite must be the same part of speech. *Example:*

**MOUNTAIN**

- |            |                |            |
|------------|----------------|------------|
| (A) lower  | (C) hill       | (E) smooth |
| (B) valley | (D) descending |            |

Since *mountain* is a noun, its opposite must also be a noun. This consideration rules out (A), (D), and (E); and since a valley is more opposite to a mountain than a hill, the correct choice is (B).

2. If the capitalized word has a positive connotation, its opposite must have a negative connotation. *Example:*

**SATISFACTION**

- |             |                |         |
|-------------|----------------|---------|
| (A) working | (C) discomfort | (E) joy |
| (B) comfort | (D) grades     |         |

*Satisfaction* is a positive word; it refers to something good. You should immediately eliminate (B) and (E) because they are also positive. (A) is the wrong part of speech, and (D) is neither positive nor negative out of context. The correct choice is (C).

3. Try using the given word in a short, clear sentence; try to think of how you've heard the word used before. You may discover a context for it that will help you make a choice. *Example:*

**CATASTROPHIC**

- |              |                |                |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| (A) luck     | (C) successful | (E) manageable |
| (B) accident | (D) disastrous |                |

Sentence: "Losing my wallet was catastrophic" (the cause of a sudden, great disaster). Since a catastrophic experience is something negative, the correct choice is positive (C).

4. Don't choose an antonym that is too broad or too limited to be an opposite.

**LACONIC**

- |               |             |                |
|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| (A) long      | (C) lavish  | (E) many-sided |
| (B) talkative | (D) liberal |                |

*Laconic* means "using few words." Although (A), (C), (D), and (E) are all partial opposites because they contain the idea of "much" as opposed to "few," only (B) specifically refers to language.