

CHAPTER ONE

About the SAT Subject Test: U.S. History

You're serious about going to the college of your choice. You wouldn't have **opened** this book otherwise. You've made a wise choice, because this book can help you to achieve your goal. It'll show you how to score your best on the SAT Subject Test: U.S. History. The first step to a better score is to understand the test.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ON THE SAT SUBJECT TEST

The following information about the SAT Subject Test is important to keep in mind as you get ready to prep for the SAT Subject Test: U.S. History. Remember, though, that sometimes the test makers change the test policies after a book has gone to press. The information here is accurate at the time of publication but it's a good idea to check the test information on the College Board **website** at collegeboard.com.

Originally, SAT stood for *Scholastic Aptitude Test*. Then, when the test changed in the **mid-1990s**, the official name was changed to *Scholastic Assessment Test*. Finally, in 1997, the test makers announced that SAT **no longer stands for anything, officially**.

What Is the SAT Subject Test?

The SAT Subject Test is actually a set of more than 20 different Subject Tests. These tests are designed to measure what you have learned in such subjects as literature, physics, biology, and Spanish. Each test lasts one hour and consists entirely of multiple-choice questions. On any one test date, you can take up to three Subject Tests.

How Does the SAT Subject Test Differ from the SAT?

SAT is largely a test of verbal and math skills. True, you need to know some vocabulary and some formulas for the SAT; but it's designed to measure how well you read and think rather than how much you remember. The SAT Subject Test tests are very different. They're

Colleges use your SAT Subject Test scores in both admissions and placement decisions.

designed to measure what you know about specific disciplines. Sure, critical reading and thinking skills play a part on these tests, but their main purpose is to determine exactly what you know about writing, math, history, physics, and so on.

How Do Colleges Use the SAT Subject Test?

Many people will tell you that the SATs (I and II alike) are flawed—that they measure neither your reading and **thinking skills** nor your level of knowledge. But these people don't work for colleges. Those schools that require SATs feel that they are an important indicator of your ability to succeed in college. Specifically, they use your scores in one or both of two ways: to help them make admissions and/or placement decisions.

Like the SAT, the SAT Subject Tests provide schools with a standard measure of academic performance, which they use to compare you with applicants from different high schools and different educational backgrounds. This information helps them to decide whether you're ready to handle their curriculum.

Many colleges require you to take certain SAT Subject tests. Check with all of the schools you're interested in applying to before deciding which tests to take.

SAT Subject Test scores may also be used to decide what course of study is appropriate for you once you've been admitted. A low score on the Literature Test, for example, might mean that you have to take a remedial English course. Conversely, a high score on an SAT Subject Test: Mathematics Test might mean that you'll be exempted from an introductory math course.

Which SAT Subject Test Tests Should I Take?

The simple answer is: those that you'll do well on. High scores, after **all**, can only help your chances for admission. Unfortunately, many colleges demand that you take particular tests and some schools will give you a degree of choice in the matter, especially if they want you to take

You can take up to three SAT Subject tests in one day.

a total of three tests. Before you register to take any tests, therefore, check with the colleges you're interested in to find out exactly which tests they require. Don't rely on high school guidance counselors or admissions handbooks for this information. They might not give you accurate or current information.

When Are the SAT Subject Tests Administered?

Most of the SAT Subject Tests, including U.S. History, are administered six times a year: in October, November, December, January, May, and June. A few of the tests are offered less frequently. Due to admissions deadlines, many colleges insist that you take the SAT Subject Test no later than December or January of your senior year in high school. You may even have to take it sooner if you're interested in applying for "early admission" to a school. Those schools that use scores for placement decisions only may allow you to take the SAT Subject Test as late as May or June of your senior year. You should check with colleges to find out which test dates are most appropriate for you.

How Do I Register for the SAT Subject Test?

The College Board® administers the SAT Subject Tests, so you must sign up for the tests with them. The easiest way to register is to obtain copies of the *SAT Registration Bulletin* and *Taking the SAT Subject Tests*. These publications contain **all** of the necessary information, including current test dates and fees. They can be obtained at any high school guidance office or directly from the College Board. You can also find information online at collegeboard.com.

In fact, with a credit card, **you** can register online rather than through the mail. You can **also** reregister by telephone if **you** have previously registered for an SAT or SAT Subject Test. If you choose these options, you should still read the College Board publications carefully before you **make** any decisions.

How Are the SAT Subject Tests Scored?

Like the SAT, the SAT Subject Tests are scored on a 200–800 scale.

What's a "Good" Score?

That's tricky. The obvious answer is: the score that the colleges of your choice demand. Keep in mind, though, that SAT Subject Test scores are just one piece of information that colleges **will** use to evaluate you. The decision to accept or reject you **will** be based on many criteria, including your high school transcript, your SAT scores, your recommendations, your personal statement, your interview (where applicable), your extracurricular activities, and the like. So, failure to achieve the necessary score doesn't automatically mean that your chances of getting in have been damaged.

Want to register for the SAT Subject Test or get more info? Ask your school counselor's office for the SAT Registration Bulletin, which contains a Registration Form, test dates, fees, and instructions.

By mail: Mail in the Registration Form to the College Board.

Online: With a credit card, you can register online at collegeboard.com.

By phone: You can register by phone only if you have registered for an SAT test in the past.

**College Board SAT Program
(609) 771-7600
collegeboard.com**

The mean SAT Subject Test: U.S. History Test score for 2003 college-bound seniors was 589.

What If I Get Sick During the Test or Really Blow It?

If, after taking the test, you have serious doubts about your performance on the test and believe for any reason the score will not reflect your abilities, you may cancel your score. Cancelling your score means that the score will not become part of your test record or be reported to colleges. You must submit the necessary paperwork by the Wednesday after the test. Once your scores are cancelled you may not reinstate them. If you took more than one SAT test on the same date, you must cancel all scores for that date. More information is available at collegeboard.com.

The College Board used to offer a service known as Score Choice™ that allowed you to look at your scores and then decide whether or not you wanted the score on a particular SAT test to be included on your permanent score record that colleges get. That option is no longer available. Unless you cancel your score, it will automatically become part of your permanent record to be reported to schools.

Gather your test materials the day before the test You'll need:

- Your admission ticket
- A proper form of I.D.
- Some sharpened No. 2 pencils
- A good eraser

What Should I Bring to the SAT Subject Test?

It's a good idea to get your test materials together the day before the tests. You'll need an admission ticket; a form of identification (check the *Registration Bulletin* to find out what is permissible); a few sharpened No. 2 pencils; and a good eraser. (Note that calculators are not allowed on any of the SAT Subject Tests except for Math Level IC and Math Level IIC.) If you'll be registering as a standby, **collect** the appropriate forms beforehand. Also, make sure that you know how to get to the test center.

UNDERSTANDING THE SAT SUBJECT TEST: U.S. HISTORY

Now that you know the basics about the SAT Subject Tests, it's time to focus on the U.S. History test. What's on it? How is it scored? After reading this chapter, you'll know what to expect on Test Day.

Content

The SAT Subject Test: U.S. History expects you to have a mastery of the concepts and principles covered in a one-year, college-prep U.S. history class. This one-hour exam consists of 90 to 95 multiple-choice questions covering topics from our nation's earliest days through the present. It covers items of social, economic, political, intellectual, cultural history, and foreign policy. An approximate percentage of questions covering these items that appear on the test is listed on the next page.

Topics	Approximate Percentage of Test
Political History	32–36%
Economic History	18–20%
Social History	18–22%
Intellectual and Cultural History	10–12%
Foreign Policy	13–17%

Preparation

The best preparation is to complete a one-year survey course in American history at the college-preparatory or AP level. A great majority of the test questions are derived from commonly taught subject matter in such a course in secondary schools. No one text or mode of instruction is better than another. The test questions are written to measure knowledge, skills, and abilities. According to the College Board, the questions may:

- Challenge you to recall standard information concerning facts, dates, people, terms, concepts, and generalizations.
- Ask you to analyze and interpret visual material, including charts, cartoons, graphs, paintings, photographs, and maps.
- Require you to relate to given data.
- Direct you to evaluate data for a specific purpose. This would be done as you make your judgment on evidence such as proof and consistency, or on external criteria, i.e., via comparison with other theories, works, and standards.

Scoring Information

This exam is scored in a range from **200–800** (in multiples of ten), just like a section of the SAT. Your raw score is calculated by subtracting $\frac{1}{4}$ of the number of questions you got wrong from the number of questions you got right. If you answered 70 questions correctly and 25 questions incorrectly, your raw score would be:

Number correct:	70
$\frac{1}{4} \times$ Number incorrect:	– 6.25
Raw score:	63.75 (rounded to 64)

This raw score is then compared to all the other test takers' scores to come up with a scaled score. This scaling takes into account any slight variations between test administrations. On a recent administration, it was possible to miss **10** questions and still receive a scaled score of **800**. A raw score of **65** on a **1995** SAT Subject Test: U.S. History translated into a **730**. So, you can miss a few questions and still receive a competitive score.