

1. INTRODUCTION

The Classic Learning Test (CLT) launched in December 2015 as a long-awaited alternative to the SAT and ACT. As of December 2018, more than 15,000 students at schools across the United States have taken an exam from the CLT suite of assessments,¹ and over 140 colleges and universities have adopted it as an admissions test.² The CLT is a different kind of standardized college entrance exam. It aims to dramatically improve students' test-taking experience, and to motivate positive change in assessment and education.

Improving Students' Test-Taking Experience

For students, the CLT is refreshingly user-friendly, clear-cut, and modern. It was designed with the goal of providing the best possible test-taking experience, and it includes the following features:

- » Online platform, on students' own devices
- » Clean, consistent format
- » Straightforward scoring—120 questions, 120 possible points
- » Shorter test-taking time—120 minutes
- » Same-day scores

ONLINE PLATFORM

The CLT is primarily administered online (84% of total test administration in 2018), though a paper version is an option for in-school testing. The online platform is more natural for contemporary students than a pencil and paper format, and it reduces the possibility of confusion and unnecessary mistakes. Students can select and change their answers with one click without having to fill in Scantron bubbles or take time to erase.

Students take the test on their own devices. Using an unfamiliar device for a high-stakes test can be frustrating since every desktop, laptop, and tablet has its own subtle differences. Allowing students to use a device they are already familiar with reduces the possibility that the device itself will impair the student's score.

¹ The CLT suite of assessments is comprised of the CLT, a college entrance exam; the CLT10, a preparatory exam for the CLT offered to 9th and 10th graders; and the CLT8, an end-of-grade assessment tool designed for 8th-grade students as they prepare for high school.
² The full list of colleges which have adopted the CLT as an admissions exam is provided at <https://www.cltxam.com/colleges>.

CLEAN, CONSISTENT FORMAT

The CLT is designed with simplicity and balance. Each of the three sections has 40 questions. Each Verbal Reasoning and Grammar/Writing section has exactly four (4) reading passages, and each passage has exactly ten (10) questions. Knowing what to expect frees students from anxiety that can come from a less predictable test design.

Each section loads into a single browser window, so that students can scroll to any part of that section without changing pages.

The test aesthetic is clean and free from distraction. It uses a white background and a readable serif font, and the reading questions line up side by side with the passage.

A progress bar is provided at the top of the page, with a percentage number, to give students a visual sense of how close they are to completion.

STRAIGHTFORWARD SCORING

On the CLT there are 120 scored questions, each worth one point, for a total of 120 points possible. There is no penalty for incorrect answers. The 120-point scale allows the test to be divided into three equally valuable sections with 40 questions each. This straightforward scoring method is yet another means by which CLT provides transparency and a better test experience.

SHORTER TEST-TAKING TIME

The CLT is 120 minutes long—2 hours—not counting the optional 30-minute essay. In contrast, the ACT is 2 hours and 45 minutes long, and the SAT is 3 hours long. The CLT was designed to be shorter than those tests due to evidence that the scores for many students can be negatively affected by the mental exhaustion they may experience after lengthy testing. CLT aims to provide colleges with a more accurate snapshot of students' academic ability by using a shorter test.

SAME-DAY SCORES

Students can access their scores on the same day they take the test. CLT operations releases scores after the students and proctor have left the last test site, and students may log in to their account to view their results. By contrast, wait time for SAT multiple choice scores is 13-23 days in the 2018-2019 academic year.³ For the ACT, "Multiple choice scores are normally available within two weeks after each national test date, but it can sometimes take up to eight weeks."⁴ Same-day CLT test results eliminate the long wait and help to reduce student anxiety.

Students may also share their CLT scores with colleges of their choice using their secure, online student account. For both the SAT and ACT, students may send score reports to only four colleges for free, after which there is a fee per each additional college. But for students taking the CLT, score sharing is free to an unlimited number of colleges. This significantly enhances students' ability to reach the colleges they care about, and it alleviates part of the financial burden of the college application process.

Motivating Positive Change in Assessment and Education

Besides offering a logistically better and more humane test experience, the Classic Learning Test sets itself apart by its content. CLT aims to change the landscape of assessment, and education generally, by providing a standard that is intellectually richer and more rigorous than other college entrance exams.

3 College Board, Getting Scores, When to Expect Scores, <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/scores/getting-scores>.

4 ACT Test Scores, "How Can I See My Scores?" <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/scores.html>.

The SAT and ACT are designed to reflect public school curricula, specifically the Common Core State Standards framework. Those standards rely more on recent writings and “informational texts” than on classic books and great stories. Their alignment with Common Core also pigeonholes the SAT and ACT to test only one kind of education.

The CLT is different. Hallmarks of the CLT’s content include the following:

- » Assesses both aptitude and achievement
- » Is more rigorous
- » Provides great reading passages
- » Promotes good education

APTITUDE AND ACHIEVEMENT

The CLT aims to assess not only students’ achievement, but also their aptitude. This is important as an aptitude test defers to the diversity of curriculum within American education. An achievement test, by definition, has to assume a particular body of content or set of academic standards to master.

Of course, students must draw upon the teaching they have received in order to demonstrate what they have learned. “Achievement” of knowledge is a vital and necessary aspect of assessment, and it is relevant for the CLT. Colleges are rightly interested in the educational content of the students who apply for admission. But entrance exams have historically sought to determine not only what students know but how they think. At its inception in 1926, the SAT’s initials stood for Scholastic Aptitude Test. However, the SAT has since rebranded itself and renounced its former identity as an aptitude exam. It now tests students based on their familiarity with the Common Core curriculum.

The CLT, instead of evaluating how much students have crammed for the test, considers students’ intellectual capacity. The CLT assesses skills students can develop through a variety of education types, such as their ability to communicate clearly, to understand metaphors, to think logically, and to solve puzzles. Thus the test is not dependent on a one-size-fits-all curriculum.

MORE RIGOR

CLT also seeks to address the problem of test score inflation. The SAT and ACT no longer differentiate among top students. Even a perfect 1600 on the SAT or a perfect 36 on the ACT does not set students apart from others applying for admission to Harvard, MIT, or other top universities. What is needed is a more rigorous standard that can truly differentiate students at the upper tail of the distribution. The Scoring Comparison for CLT vs. SAT vs. ACT shows that the CLT is more rigorous than the competing tests, and that students can set themselves apart with a strong showing on the CLT⁵.

GREAT READING PASSAGES

For two-thirds of its reading passages, the CLT uses an author bank of more than 100 men and women whose writings have had a lasting influence on culture and society. While the author bank is not an exhaustive list of every important thinker, the CLT intentionally acknowledges the particular significance of certain authors. The full author bank is listed in Chapter 2.

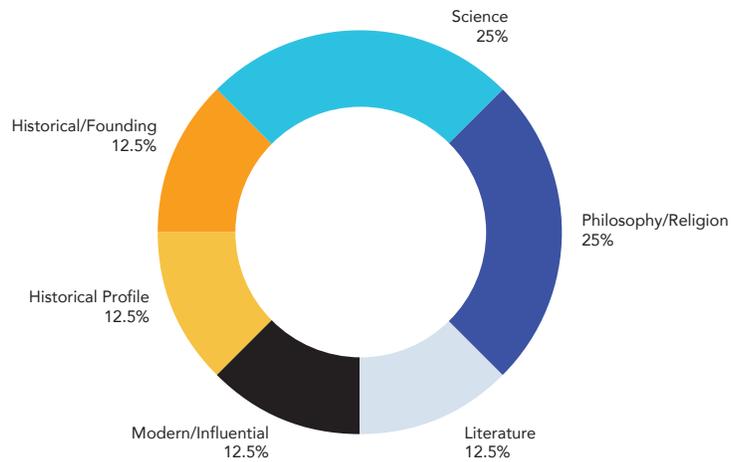
An important reason CLT uses older sources is that these texts have stood the test of time. Shakespeare was relevant 300 years ago, 50 years ago, and today, and it’s likely he will be relevant 100 years from now. The authors used on the CLT are truly worthy of student’s time and attention. Using older texts also gives the CLT healthy neutrality on contemporary political matters. The SAT and ACT, by drawing primarily from contemporary sources, tend to tacitly favor certain political opinions. Rather than favoring either side of the political spectrum, the CLT draws from works that are grounded and established in tradition.

5 CLT vs. SAT vs. ACT. <https://www.cltexam.com/comparison>.

The CLT’s reading passages also cover subjects that other standardized tests neglect. A study of the eight available SAT practice tests found that only 2% of the passages (1 out of 48) related to ethics, and that none of the passages related to religion. Only 6% of the readings came from classic literature. By far the largest SAT reading passage category was science, and of those passages, twice as many were written by bloggers or journalists as those written by scientific thinkers themselves.⁶

By contrast, the CLT has a balanced distribution of subject categories. On every test, out of eight reading passages, two (25%) are in Philosophy/Religion. One (12.5%) of the passages is drawn from Literature, two (25%) are in Science, one (12.5%) is an excerpt from Historical/Founding Documents, one (12.5%) is a Historical Profile, and one (12.5%) is drawn from Modern/Influential Thinkers.

CLT Reading Passages



PROMOTING GOOD EDUCATION

Ultimately the CLT seeks to enhance the way young people are educated. Students are no longer limited to the SAT and ACT. With the introduction of the CLT, schools and homeschooling families have a fresh incentive to focus on enduring ideas.

The test preparation process for the CLT is vastly different than for other tests. The SAT and ACT require extensive—and expensive—test prep in order to navigate them, and the process lends itself to student anxiety rather than encouraging a love of learning. In contrast, the authors students read in advance of and during the CLT are soul-enriching. Students preparing for the CLT gain training in creative problem solving and thinking skills that will benefit them their whole lives.

While “college and career readiness”—the objective of the Common Core State Standards—is important, it should not be the main goal of secondary education. Schools should instead aim to form men and women who are intellectually curious, think deeply, reason well, and live with integrity. The CLT promotes education that helps students on their way to becoming productive adults, but such qualities are also ends in themselves.

By elevating excellent writing and including students in the Great Conversation that began centuries ago, the CLT seeks to raise the standard of schooling in America and contribute to a movement in which education is meaningful and lasting.

Contents of the Technical Report

This technical report is a guide explaining the details of how the CLT exam works. Chapters 1-6 describe the design and administration of the CLT, and Chapters 7-12 explain and analyze the test’s metrics.

Chapter 2 presents the content of the test itself, including sample questions, the author bank, and information on how test questions are organized by difficulty level. Chapter 3 outlines the steps CLT takes to develop, edit, and prepare each test for administration. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 explain how the CLT is administered and describe the measures taken to ensure the test’s security and fairness.

Chapters 7 and 8 provide information on how CLT scores are reported to students and colleges and how these scores compare to scores on the SAT and ACT. Chapters 9 and 10 present demographic statistics on CLT test questions and reported scores, and Chapters 11 and 12 quantify the test’s reliability and validity.

⁶ “What’s Really on the SAT?” CLT, 2018.