

PSAT/NMSQT

List of Academic Skills

The PSAT/NMSQT Score Report prioritizes and customizes skills feedback for each student. The skills reported represent those that have the best chance of improvement with extra work.

Critical Reading Skills

CR1 Understanding main ideas in a reading passage

How to improve: Read the passage carefully and try to determine the author’s overall message. Practice making distinctions between the main idea and supporting details.

CR2 Understanding tone

How to improve: When reading, consider how an author’s choice of words helps define his or her attitudes. Pay attention to the way in which tone conveys meaning in conversation and in the media.

CR3 Comparing and contrasting ideas presented in two passages

How to improve: Read editorials that take opposing views on an issue. Look for differences and similarities in tone, point of view, and main idea.

CR4 Understanding the use of examples

How to improve: Authors often include examples in their writing to communicate and support their ideas. Read different kinds of argumentative writing (editorials, criticism, personal essays) and pay attention to the way examples are used. State the point of the examples in your own words. Use examples in your own writing.

CR5 Recognizing the purpose of various writing strategies

How to improve: Writers use a variety of tools to achieve their effects. While you read, look for such things as specific examples, quotations, striking images, and emotionally loaded words. Think about the connotations of specific words and why the author might have decided to use them.

CR6 Applying ideas presented in a reading passage

How to improve: When you read, try to determine the author’s ideas and assumptions and then think about how they might apply to new situations.

CR7 Determining an author’s purpose or perspective

How to improve: Authors write for a variety of purposes, such as to inform, to explain, or to convince. When you read, try to determine why the author wrote what he or she wrote.

CR8 Making connections between information in different parts of a passage

How to improve: Work on figuring out the relationship between the material presented in one part of a reading passage and material presented in another part. Ask yourself, for example, how facts presented in the beginning of a magazine article relate to the conclusion.

CR9 Distinguishing conflicting viewpoints

How to improve: When reading, practice summarizing main ideas and noting sentences that mark transition points. Learn to understand methods of persuasion and argumentation. Expand your reading to include argumentative writing, such as political commentary, philosophy, and criticism.

CR10 Being thorough

How to improve: Don’t just pick the first answer choice you see that looks tempting. Be sure to evaluate all the choices before you select your answer, just as you would read an entire paragraph rather than assume its meaning based only on the first sentence.

CR11 Understanding difficult vocabulary

How to improve: Broaden your reading to include newspapers and magazines, as well as fiction and nonfiction from before the 1900s. Include reading material that is a bit outside your comfort zone. Improve your knowledge of word roots to help determine the meaning of unfamiliar words.

CR12 Understanding how negative words, suffixes, and prefixes affect sentences

How to improve: When reading, pay attention to the ways in which negative words (like “not” and “never”), prefixes (like “un” and “im”), and suffixes (like “less”) affect the meaning of words and sentences.

CR13 Understanding complex sentences

How to improve: Ask your English teacher to recommend books that are a bit more challenging than those you’re used to reading. Practice breaking down the sentences into their component parts to improve your comprehension. Learn how dependent clauses and verb phrases function in sentences.

CR14 Recognizing connections between ideas in a sentence

How to improve: Learn how connecting words (such as relative pronouns and conjunctions) establish the relationship between different parts of a sentence.

PSAT/NMSQT List of Academic Skills (continued)

CR15 Recognizing words that signal contrasting ideas in a sentence

How to improve: Learn how certain words (such as “although,” “but,” “however,” and “while”) are used to signal a contrast between one part of a sentence and another.

CR16 Recognizing a definition when it is presented in a sentence

How to improve: Learn how such elements as appositives, subordination, and punctuation are used to define words in a sentence.

CR17 Understanding sentences that deal with abstract ideas

How to improve: Broaden your reading to include newspaper editorials, political essays, and philosophical writings.

CR18 Understanding and using a word in an unusual context

How to improve: Work on using word definitions when choosing an answer. Try not to be confused by an unusual meaning of a term.

CR19 Comprehending long sentences

How to improve: Practice reducing long sentences into small, understandable parts.

CR20 Choosing a correct answer based on the meaning of the entire sentence

How to improve: Make sure your answer choice fits the logic of the sentence as a whole. Don’t choose an answer just because it sounds good when inserted in the blank.

CR21 Understanding sentences that deal with scientific ideas

How to improve: Read magazine articles about scientific subjects to improve your comfort level in this area.

Math Skills

M1 Using basic concepts and operations in arithmetic problem solving

How to improve: Practice solving problems involving positive and negative integers, fractions, decimals, ratio, percent, exponents, square roots, place value, and digits. Also practice solving problems involving odd and even integers, prime numbers, multiples, divisibility, and remainders.

M2 Understanding geometry and coordinate geometry

How to improve: Review geometry units in your textbook involving perimeter, area, volume, circumference, angles, lines, and slope. Familiarize yourself with the formulas given at the beginning of math sections of the test.

M3 Dealing with probability, basic statistics, charts, and graphs

How to improve: Practice solving problems that involve basic probability, basic counting, and finding the average (arithmetic mean), median, and mode. Look for charts and graphs in newspapers and magazines, and practice interpreting the data in them.

M4 Creating either figures or algebraic equations, inequalities, or expressions to help solve problems

How to improve: Practice solving problems by drawing or visualizing figures to help you understand the problem. Practice developing equations, inequalities, or expressions from verbal descriptions, figures, or numerical data.

M5 Using basic algebraic concepts and operations to solve problems

How to improve: Review algebraic concepts and rules, such as those involving substitution, exponents, solving equations and inequalities, and combining algebraic expressions.

M6 Making connections among mathematical topics

How to improve: Practice problems that require combining skills acquired in different math courses, such as problems that use combinations of arithmetic, algebra, and geometry.

M7 Organizing and managing information to solve multistep problems

How to improve: Write down your steps in solving the problem. Monitor the steps as you go along, keeping in mind what the question is asking.

M8 Using logical reasoning

How to improve: Practice solving problems in which you must consider different possible cases. Make adjustments in your solution strategy when things aren’t going as well as they should. It may help to look at the problem from different perspectives. Solving problems that require you to justify your answer may help you develop this skill.

PSAT/NMSQT List of Academic Skills (continued)

M9 Recognizing patterns and equivalent forms

How to improve: Try recognizing a pattern by considering a simpler case. Try rewriting or rearranging the given expressions in a different form.

M10 Recognizing logical key words

How to improve: Pay attention to key words, such as “not,” “at least,” “at most,” “must be,” “could be,” “possible,” and “different.” These words determine the meaning of the question and therefore must be understood to correctly solve the problem.

M11 Using answer choices to help solve the problem

How to improve: Looking at the answer choices may help you understand the problem. Sometimes the choices can help identify a strategy for solving the problem.

Writing Skills

W1 Being precise and clear

How to improve: Learn to recognize sentence elements that are ambiguous and confusing. In your writing, choose words carefully and connect them for clear meaning.

W2 Following conventions in writing

How to improve: Review the chapters in a grammar book that cover grammatical conventions, such as word choice, use of noun and prepositional phrases, and sentence construction. Work with your teacher to become more familiar with the conventions of standard written English.

W3 Recognizing logical connections within sentences and passages

How to improve: Use the writing process to help you revise your draft essays. Work with classmates and teachers to clarify meaning in your writing.

W4 Using verbs correctly

How to improve: Make sure that you can identify the subject and verb of a sentence. Make sure you understand subject and verb agreement.

W5 Recognizing improper pronoun use

How to improve: Learn to understand the distinction between informal, spoken pronoun usage and standard written pronoun usage. Review the way you use pronouns in your own writing. Ask your teacher to help you identify and correct pronoun errors in your own writing.

W6 Understanding the structure of sentences with unfamiliar vocabulary

How to improve: Read material that contains unfamiliar vocabulary. Look for context clues to help you guess at the meaning of unfamiliar words as you read.

W7 Understanding complicated sentence structures

How to improve: Refer to a grammar book to identify various sentence patterns and their effective use. Vary the sentence patterns in your own writing.

W8 Understanding the structure of long sentences

How to improve: As you read, break long sentences into smaller units of meaning.

W9 Understanding the structure of sentences with abstract ideas

How to improve: Read newspapers, magazines, and books that deal with subjects such as politics, economics, history, or philosophy.

W10 Understanding the structure of sentences that relate to science or math

How to improve: Focus on how something is said as well as on what is said. Write about the things you are learning in math and science classes. Read articles in the science section of newspapers and magazines so that you will feel more comfortable with scientific or math content.

W11 Understanding the structure of sentences that relate to the arts

How to improve: Focus on how something is said as well as on what is said. Read articles in newspapers and magazines about the arts so that you will feel more comfortable with these subjects.