



At the End of the PSAT is a Pot of Gold!

Luck won't get you an \$80,000 scholarship, but the PSAT can. Amazingly, there are numerous scholarship opportunities available from most colleges when a student's PSAT score falls within a certain range. Taking this test seriously can help students reap great financial rewards – and that's no blarney.

Full tuition, room and board, unlimited laundry, cafeteria passes, study abroad stipends, honors dorms, and graduate money are some of the great benefits that are given by colleges to students who score high enough on their PSAT and qualify for a National Merit ranking.

It is a bragging right for colleges to have National Merit Scholars among their student body. These students represent the top one percent of the nation. Very often colleges will compete for these students to come to their school. These schools may even sweeten the pot by adding more benefits to entice students like free computers or additional spending money.

The correct acronym is PSAT/NMSQT, which stands for Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test. Unlike the SAT, which is administered seven times annually, the PSAT is only offered once in October, and only counts toward potential scholarships in a student's junior year. For a small fee, students can sign up for the test at most local high schools. Sign-ups are usually held until the day of the test as long as there is still room available. It is administered the third Wednesday or Saturday of October.

Winning PSAT scores can vary several points depending on year and place where the test is taken. In 2006 semi-finalists qualified at a score of 216 in Texas, but Mississippians only needed a score of 205 (out of 240). For qualifying students to achieve finalist status, they are required to write an essay, provide a transcript, post an SAT score, and send some other necessary paperwork to the National Merit Board before the deadline. The National Merit Board will then choose a certain percentage of finalists to be named National Merit Scholars, Corporate Scholars, or College Scholars.

It's important to begin preparing for the PSAT in the ninth grade. Students should take the test for practice in October of their freshmen and sophomore years. This will help familiarize them with the test before their junior year. They will also receive their test booklet back in the mail, which is advantageous because it can be used to assess weaknesses and strengths. For maximum preparation, students need to have completed Algebra 1 and Geometry before the eleventh grade.

Another advantage of studying for the PSAT is that students will also be studying for the SAT. Since The College Board changed the test in 2005, the tests are very similar. The only difference in content is that there is not an essay or Algebra 2 on the PSAT. This can take a lot of pressure off juniors and seniors when it comes time to study for the SAT if they have already got the PSAT down.

Now that you know more about the PSAT and its significance, you can start preparing. You don't have to get lucky to get good scholarship. The dividends of doing well on this test could pay off tremendously and have you seeing green.