



## **Subject Tests: “Recommended” versus “Required”**

Up until a few years ago, most private colleges and universities as well as some public ones required applicants to take two SAT subject tests and the most selective schools required applicants to report all their scores even when they had taken more than the requisite number of tests. Currently, however, very few schools actually require subject tests although a relatively small number still “recommend” them.

To understand what this means for you, it’s necessary to recognize the main reason for the change: the subject test requirement is said to have been a deterrent to first generation students, many of whom come from high schools with sub-optimal college guidance programs and don’t even know the subject tests exist until late in the game.

Furthermore, the subject tests have not proven to be particularly good predictors of college success, and as the Advanced Placement program has grown, more students each year are taking AP tests, making some of the subject tests seem redundant.

Be advised, though, that a number of colleges currently require specific subject tests for particular programs. For instance, Engineering programs frequently require the Math 2 and either Chemistry or Physics tests. Some undergraduate Business programs want applicants to take the Math 2 test, and direct entry Nursing and Pharmacy programs like to see a science subject test, while Architecture programs often ask for a math one.

The number of colleges that currently “recommend” subject tests for all applicants is relatively small, but it includes not just ones with admit rates in the single digits, but also some slightly less selective ones like Lafayette and Lehigh.

So, how optional are subject tests really? In general, applicants from good high schools with a college-going culture will be expected to submit subject test scores if they apply to colleges that recommend them. Stanford's website says, "SAT Subject Tests are optional. Because SAT Subject Test scores can highlight your areas of strength, we welcome the self-reporting of these results in your application." In other words, even though they wish to downplay their importance, they like to know about them although they wish to spare you the expense of paying the College Board to send official scores.

My guess would be that most of the applicants to Stanford from schools with a college-going culture report multiple scores. In my experience, the students from this type of background who are most likely to gain admission to the most selective colleges have always been the ones who submitted more than the colleges asked for, sometimes considerably more.

Even if you don't end up applying anywhere that recommends subject tests, if you believe you can do well on one or more of them, it can't hurt to take them. Good scores could potentially help you even at schools that don't require them, and if you don't do well, no one has to know you took the tests.

Subject tests, which are an hour long each, are administered on regular SAT dates, so you can't take a subject test the same month you take the regular SAT. You can take up to three subject tests at a time, but not all of them are offered on every test date, and students rarely take more than two at once, so plan ahead!