



**ONLINE, AT-HOME
TESTING 2020**



Amidst test center closures, standardized exams have moved to online, at-home testing. This option can be great for students who otherwise wouldn't be able to test during the coronavirus pandemic. But there will also be challenges.

This guide is an overview of this new testing world.

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Test formats and tech requirements

The major appeal of online, at-home testing is that students can take exams without going to a testing center. Students just need internet access and must meet the tech requirements.

Test	At-Home Testing Dates	Tech Requirements	Test Format Changes
Grad-Level Exams (GRE, GMAT, LSAT)	Began in March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer (Mac or PC) that runs Windows Speaker, microphone, and webcam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note-taking is limited to a virtual whiteboard, physical whiteboard, or paper with a sheet protector (no regular paper allowed) The GMAT and LSAT each omit one section
TOEFL	Began in March 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer (Mac or PC) that runs Windows Speaker, microphone, and webcam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note-taking is limited to a physical whiteboard or paper with a sheet protector (no regular paper allowed)
IELTS	Began in April 2020 for students in select locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer (Mac or PC) Speaker, microphone, and webcam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaking test is conducted face-to-face via Zoom Scores are available within 7 days Provides an indicative score only, which may not be accepted by all institutions
Duolingo English Test	Always an at-home exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer (Mac or PC) Speaker, microphone, and webcam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No changes (has always been an at-home exam)
ISEE	Began in May 2020 for students in the US and Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer (Mac or PC) Speaker, microphone, and webcam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scores are available within 48 hours
SSAT	Limited administrations began May 2020; large-scale administrations began in August in the US and Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Computer (Mac or PC) Speaker, microphone, and webcam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excludes the ungraded experimental section
AP exams	May–June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any computer or mobile device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shortened to 45 minutes Eliminated multiple-choice questions Excluded some units
SAT	Unknown (delayed)	Unknown	Unknown
ACT	Expected late 2020/early 2021 for US students only	Unknown	Expected to look like the computer-based ACT currently offered to international students

Proctoring and test security

Proctoring at-home exams securely and effectively can be somewhat of a conundrum. Here are the approaches that testing organizations have considered or tried so far.



AP exams were unproctored. This year's exams were open book and open note. There were no multiple-choice questions, and free-response questions were designed so that students would not earn points by looking up facts online or in textbooks. AP teachers received copies of their students' work to look for inconsistencies, while the College Board also claimed to use a range of digital security tools, including plagiarism detection software. (Of course, similarly unproctored SAT/ACT administrations would be implausible, since these exams are largely multiple-choice tests.)



Other exams are live proctored. Students taking the GRE, GMAT, LSAT, TOEFL, ISEE are monitored by live proctors—through ProctorU, OnVUE, and Prometric—while they complete their exams. Students use their webcams to show proctors a 360-degree view of their testing environment, and proctors are able to view and control students' screens during the exam.



Another option is automated proctoring, powered by AI. Artificial intelligence behavior monitoring has made automated proctoring a reality at some universities and is a key part of the Duolingo English Test's approach to test security. Other testing organizations may soon follow suit. An automated proctoring system can take a video recording of the student while tracking their activities and identifying any suspicious behavior, such as unusual eye movement patterns, key strokes, the use of prohibited devices, speech patterns, and additional people in the testing room. Video segments with potential exam violations are flagged for a human audit. Test administrators can also store these recordings for future reference if any questions about a student's score arise.

We're awaiting details on the SAT and ACT. So far, a few possibilities have been raised:

- ↳ **Live proctors for every exam.** The College Board has acknowledged that an at-home SAT would require proctoring at a scale never before seen but has yet to provide further details. Meanwhile, ACT is looking at numerous options, including live proctoring every full-length exam with a webcam on each student for the duration of the exam.
- ↳ **Provisional score reports verified by shorter, live-proctored exams.** According to ACT, another option is to have students take a full-length exam *without* a proctor and then receive a "provisional score report" for that exam. To verify their provisional scores, students would take a shorter exam—around 20 minutes—which would be live proctored. However, it's possible this approach may increase students' testing anxiety without providing accurate verification of students' skills.
- ↳ **An online, at-home ACT is unlikely to roll out before 2021.** Although the at-home SAT has been delayed due to internet access concerns, the College Board still plans to work toward a digital, at-home option for the future.

Pros and cons

Testing organizations, counselors, and students must weigh several advantages and disadvantages of online, at-home testing.

Pros:

- **More opportunities.** Online, at-home testing provides students with safe access to exams that would otherwise be impossible while test centers are closed.
- **Quick access.** Accessing an at-home exam is as quick and easy as logging on if students already own the necessary devices. At-home options can benefit students who normally have limited access to in-person test centers. Moreover, it's possible that testing organizations may provide some tech assistance to students who need it, like the College Board did for AP test-takers.
- **Comfortable setting.** Taking exams from the comfort of their home may help reduce students' testing anxiety. Students have control over how they set up their testing environments and can build their confidence by completing practice exams in the exact same setting they'll experience on test day.
- **Online interface.** Students who are comfortable reading and working on a computer may prefer the ease of an online testing interface. Some exams include on-screen highlighters and other tools that may be helpful to students.
- **Precise timing.** On-screen timers ensure that students receive the exact same amount of time on every section. Students don't have to worry about defective clocks in a classroom or proctors accidentally ending a section too early.
- **Faster scoring.** Scores are often available sooner than usual for certain exams, such as the IELTS and ISEE. International students taking the computer-based version of the ACT typically receive their scores 2-3 business days after the exam, so a similar timeframe may be possible for US students who complete an at-home ACT.

Cons:

- **Tough transitions.** Moving from paper to a computer can be hard for both students and testing organizations. It takes time, effort, and money for testing organizations to remake exam materials for a new medium. Students accustomed to paper versions of exams must also spend time adjusting their strategies for a new testing experience.
- **Unequal access.** Disparities in students' internet access, technology, and at-home testing environments prevent some students from accessing at-home exams and may exacerbate issues of equity that already exist. The College Board has delayed the rollout of an at-home SAT because 3 hours of uninterrupted, video-quality internet cannot currently be guaranteed for all students.
- **Tech glitches.** Problems with the various devices and technology these exams rely on are a major concern. In May, tech glitches affected thousands of AP students, who could not submit their responses and were forced to retake the exams. Furthermore, anxiety about possible tech glitches on future exams may impact students' performances.
- **Software security.** Some students have raised concerns about the safety of remote proctoring software that gives proctors access to students' data along with the ability to control students' computers and webcams.
- **Scoring limitations.** Certain changes to at-home scoring processes may be less convenient for students. For example, students taking the at-home GMAT cannot preview or cancel their scores at the end of the exam, while students who send IELTS Indicator scores to universities may still be asked to take the in-person IELTS when test centers reopen.
- **Cheating concerns.** Widespread cheating is a major concern of at-home testing. Prometric has reported catching students using small bluetooth devices, smart watches, and prohibited calculators during exams. On the flip side, students have complained about AI software incorrectly flagging harmless movements, and some students of color have encountered issues with exams' facial recognition software. A remote testing experience that is both secure and fair remains a complicated challenge.

Online, at-home testing is a brave new world in standardized tests. There will be wins and stumbles along the way, and every test will look slightly different.

We'll keep you abreast of the changes and are here to help should you or your students have questions.

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