

SPECIALIZED HIGH SCHOOLS ADMISSIONS TEST – FAQ ON REDESIGNED TEST

Overview

Starting with the fall 2017 Specialized High Schools Admissions Test (SHSAT) administration, for admissions to schools in the 2018-19 school year, the SHSAT will be redesigned. The test administered in October and November 2016 for admission to schools in September 2017 was the final administration of the test under the previous design¹.

The purpose of this document is to answer frequently asked questions about the redesigned SHSAT.

What is the SHSAT?

The SHSAT is the competitive, objective, and scholastic achievement examination used as the sole factor to determine admissions to New York City’s Specialized High Schools (with the exception of LaGuardia High School). All current New York City residents in 8th grade or in 9th grade for the first time, and in public, private, and parochial schools who plan to apply to one of these Specialized High Schools must take the SHSAT. The SHSAT is administered in the fall for admission to Specialized High Schools in the following school year (i.e., students seeking admission for September 2018 will take the test in fall 2017). Students interested in taking the SHSAT should speak with their school counselors. Families can also visit a Family Welcome Center to speak to staff from the Office of Student Enrollment.

Why is the SHSAT changing?

The SHSAT is changing in order to better align it to curriculum and instruction students experience in their classrooms on a daily basis. The test was formerly made up of two sections: verbal and math. The verbal section comprised five scrambled paragraphs, ten logical reasoning questions, and five informational reading comprehension passages with six questions each, for a total of 45 questions in the section. The math section comprised a mix of word and computational problems, for a total of 50 questions. The verbal and math sections were worth 50 points each and students had 150 minutes to take the test. This design was used for SHSAT for more than two decades.

Scrambled paragraphs and logical reasoning are not item types that students are likely to see in their day-to-day instruction today and, in fact, for many students, the SHSAT may be the only situation in which they see these types of questions. Given this, NYCDOE is updating the test design based on the New York State Learning Standards, making the test better aligned to the work students are doing in the classroom. While the redesigned SHSAT focuses on content and question types that should be familiar to students based on their instruction, the exam will continue to be challenging, as it is used to identify top performers for competitive Specialized High Schools admissions.

When is the SHSAT changing?

The first administration of the SHSAT with the updated test design will be in fall 2017, for admission to Specialized High Schools in September 2018.

¹ With the exception of the upcoming August 2017 administration for new entrants to New York City; this August 2017 administration is only for September 2017 admission.

How is the SHSAT changing?

There are a number of ways in which the SHSAT is changing for the fall 2017 (and forward) test administration:

- Standard testing time is increasing from 150 minutes to 180 minutes.
- The verbal section is being renamed the English Language Arts (ELA) section.
- The ELA section will no longer include scrambled paragraphs and logical reasoning questions.
- The ELA section will now include questions that address revising/editing skills, in addition to continuing to have reading comprehension passages and questions; all ELA questions will be multiple choice questions.
- The math section will now include five “grid-in” questions, in which students must solve a computational question and provide the correct numerical answer, rather than selecting the answer from various multiple choice options; the math section will also continue to have multiple choice word problems and computational questions.
- All multiple choice questions will now have 4 answer choices instead of the previous design with 5 answer choices.
- Each section (ELA and math) will include 57 items: 47 items in each section will be scored, with each question worth 1 raw score point, and the remaining 10 items in each section will be field test items that are not used in determining a student’s score. Scoring and the process for using test results to determine admission to the Specialized High Schools is not changing. See further below for details.

This table summarizes the redesigned test:

Standard testing time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 180 minutes
ELA section (57 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 revising/editing questions: 5-8 stand-alone questions and 2 passages with 6-8 questions each (<i>see attached sample questions</i>) • 6 reading passages with 5-7 questions each² • All questions are multiple choice questions
Math section (57 items)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 grid-in questions (<i>see attached sample questions</i>) • 52 multiple choice word problems and computational questions
Other notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All multiple choice questions (all ELA questions; all math questions except grid-in items) will have 4 answer choices instead of 5. • All passages in 2017 will be nonfiction passages; starting in 2018 literary passages and persuasive passages (e.g., editorials) could be included on the test. • Embedded field test passages and items will be interspersed throughout the relevant sections of the test (10 items in each section); students will not be able to determine which questions are the field test questions.

² In future years there could be some small variation in the breakdown between revising/editing questions and reading comprehension questions in the ELA section.

What do the new items look like?

See the attachment for samples of the revising/editing questions that will be part of the ELA section and the grid-in items that will be part of the math section. These sample items also include brief explanations of why the correct answers are correct.

Will there be more practice items available?

Yes, the *2017-18 Specialized High Schools Student Handbook* will include two full-length practice tests. These two practice tests will match the format of the redesigned test. The handbook will be available to all students and schools in hard copy in June 2017. Students and families will also be able to download the handbook here: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/specialized/default.htm>.

Why are field test items embedded in the test?

Field testing is a critical component of the test development process, and helps to ensure that tests are reliable, valid, and free of bias. In past years, all field testing associated with the SHSAT took place outside New York City. By embedding field test items on the SHSAT, NYCDOE will be able to further ensure that test items are free of bias for New York City's diverse student population. Field test questions are embedded in many types of standardized tests, ranging from the New York State grades 3-8 ELA and math tests to the SATs.

Will students know which items are the field test items?

No, students will not be able to determine which items are the field test items. These items will be interspersed throughout the relevant section of the test (i.e., the math field test items will be part of the math section of the test) and will look like the operational scored test items. Students should not spend any time trying to determine which items are scored and which items are field test items. An incorrect answer to a field test question has no impact on a student's test score and eligibility for admission.

Will the ELA section still come first, followed by math?

Yes. The previous test started with the verbal section, followed by math. For the redesigned test, ELA will come first and math will continue to be second.

How much time should students spend on each section of the test?

Students will have 180 minutes to complete the redesigned test (unless a student has an extended time accommodation through an IEP or 504 plan, or because the student is an English Language Learner). Students can apportion that time between the two sections as they best see fit. It is recommended that students work carefully, moving at a comfortable pace and keeping track of the time.

Will accommodations continue to be available for students with disabilities and English language learners (ELLs)?

Yes. Students with disabilities will be provided with the accommodations listed in their IEPs or 504 plans, unless the accommodation is not permitted on the SHSAT, or if the accommodation is not needed on the SHSAT. ELLs and former ELLs taking the SHSAT are granted extended testing time. Bilingual mathematics glossaries in the NYCDOE's nine major languages will also be provided to ELLs and former ELLs on the day of the SHSAT.

Is the scoring process changing? What about the use of results to determine admission to the Specialized High Schools changing?

No. SHSAT scores will continue to be based on the number of correct answers marked. The number of correct answers, called a raw score, is determined for each test taker. Because there are multiple forms of the SHSAT, raw scores from different test forms cannot be compared directly. To make valid score comparisons, a raw score must be converted through a process called calibration into a scaled score. Scaled scores are on a scale that is common to all test forms, making it possible to compare these scores directly. The composite score is the sum of the ELA and math scaled scores. The composite score, in conjunction with students' Specialized High Schools preferences (as marked on the SHSAT answer sheet) and seat availability, will continue to be used to determine admissions to Specialized High Schools.

How does a student sign up to take the SHSAT?

Students interested in taking the SHSAT should speak with their school counselor or a staff member at a Family Welcome Center during the registration period, which opens in September 2017 for this fall's test. Each student who requests testing will be issued a Test Ticket, which will indicate the date, time, and location assigned to the student for testing.

Where can I learn more?

For sample items and updates concerning Specialized High School admissions, please visit: <http://schools.nyc.gov/ChoicesEnrollment/High/specialized/default.htm>.

ELA Section

Revising/Editing Sample Items

Revising/Editing in a Passage

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage below and answer the questions following it. You will be asked to improve the writing quality of the passage and to correct errors so that the passage follows the conventions of standard written English. You may reread the passage if you need to. Mark the **best** answer for each question.

Studying Religions

(1) According to the National Council for the Social Studies, “knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for effective and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world.” (2) In support of this idea, the world history standards in most states in this country include a basic overview of the five major world religions. (3) While public schools are not allowed to promote one religion over another, school officials should understand that the study of world religions through an academic lens was an essential component of history and social studies instruction and needs to be part of every student’s education.

(4) It is impossible to deny the role that religion plays in history, literature, and current events. (5) Some schools and teachers are hesitant to educate students about world religions. (6) The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees the separation of church and state, which makes the discussion of religion in public schools seem problematic to some school districts and teachers. (7) The First Amendment also states that the government cannot obstruct religious freedom in the United States. (8) A 2010 survey by Pew Research Center found that more than half of those polled thought teachers were prohibited from teaching classes about religions.

(9) An understanding of different world religions enriches a student’s education in several ways. (10) The politics, economics, and laws of countries are often a by-product of religious ideas, and literary and cultural references are better understood through the context of religion. (11) The benefits of this knowledge extend beyond the classroom. (12) Students who get world religions do better when they start working with people who come from different backgrounds. (13) They can appreciate the traditions and values of their neighbors and co-workers and can form educated opinions regarding current events and world issues. (14) A comprehensive study of world religions will help students become informed adults.

1. Which edit is needed to correct sentence 3?
 - A. change *are not allowed* to **had not been allowed**
 - B. change *should understand* to **should have understood**
 - C. change *was* to **is**
 - D. change *needs* to **will need**

2. What is the best way to combine sentences 4 and 5 to clarify the relationship between ideas?
 - A. It is impossible to deny the role that religion plays in history, literature, and current events, although some schools and teachers are hesitant to educate students about world religions.
 - B. Because it is impossible to deny the role that religion plays in history, literature, and current events, some schools and teachers are hesitant to educate students about world religions.
 - C. Even though it is impossible to deny the role that religion plays in history, literature, and current events, some schools and teachers are hesitant to educate students about world religions.
 - D. It is impossible to deny the role that religion plays in history, literature, and current events; therefore, some schools and teachers are hesitant to educate students about world religions.

3. Which sentence would best follow sentence 6 to support the argument presented in the passage?
 - A. Some educators avoid the topic altogether, therefore, many students are not studying the founding ideas of culture and society.
 - B. Teachers should avoid the risk of introducing ideas or concepts that may lead to controversy.
 - C. Schools tend to spend more resources teaching mathematics and the physical sciences than teaching the humanities.
 - D. As classrooms become more diverse, many teachers believe that they should teach only limited ideas about world religions.

4. Which sentence would best follow and support sentence 8?
- A. Therefore, classes in religion are often taught in other settings, where families make decisions about what they want their children to learn and how it should be approached.
 - B. However, it is certainly fair to assume that this number has declined, and fewer people today would suggest that the discussion of religion is not appropriate in a public school setting.
 - C. To clarify, Pew Research Center is an agency that was designed to inform the public about the attitudes, issues, and trends that are currently shaping cultures in the United States and the world.
 - D. Additionally, some educators worry that teaching about religion may be perceived as promoting one religion over another, which could make students or parents feel uncomfortable or offended.
5. Which transition should be added to the beginning of sentence 11?
- A. For that reason
 - B. In contrast
 - C. Of course
 - D. Moreover
6. Which revision of sentence 12 uses the most precise language?
- A. Students who are clued into world religions are likely to get along better with the people they work with who are from different places.
 - B. Students who know about world religions are likely to understand more about doing business with new people.
 - C. Students who understand world religions are better equipped to work with diverse colleagues and customers from around the world.
 - D. Students who are familiar with world religions may be more aware of how to do business with acquaintances from other countries.
7. Which sentence is irrelevant to the argument presented in the passage and should be deleted?
- A. sentence 2
 - B. sentence 7
 - C. sentence 10
 - D. sentence 13

8. Which concluding sentence should be added after sentence 14 to support the argument presented in the passage?
- A. Students deserve an opportunity to learn about all world religions, not just the major world religions.
 - B. State officials and school districts should make an effort to ensure that students are exposed to the study of world religions in their social studies courses.
 - C. It is important to ensure that students understand that many aspects of history, literature, and current events are related to ideas found in major world religions.
 - D. Although there is hesitation to teach about religions in school, the benefits of students becoming familiar with the main ideas and tenets of world religions are essential in today's world.

Revising/Editing Standalone Items

DIRECTIONS: Read and answer each of the following questions. You will be asked to recognize and correct errors in sentences or short paragraphs. Mark the **best** answer for each question.

9. Read this sentence.

Because Larissa's dad has a new position that requires him to make weekly trips to Albany, he is currently looking for an inexpensive reliable vehicle.

Which edit should be made to correct this sentence?

- A. insert a comma after *position*
- B. insert a comma after *trips*
- C. insert a comma after *inexpensive*
- D. insert a comma after *reliable*

10. Read this paragraph.

(1) By area, the People's Republic of China is the third-largest country on Earth, covering close to 4 million square miles. (2) Bordering fourteen other countries, the main languages spoken in China are Mandarin and Cantonese. (3) With more than 1.3 billion citizens, China has the world's largest population today. (4) The country is also home to a diverse assortment of mountains, plateaus, deserts, forests, and rivers.

Which sentence should be revised to correct a misplaced modifier?

- A. sentence 1
- B. sentence 2
- C. sentence 3
- D. sentence 4

Solutions for ELA Sample Items

Revising/Editing in a Passage Studying Religions

1. **(C)** Sentence 3, as well as the rest of the passage, is written in the present tense. The change in Option A would change the verb to the past perfect tense. Option B would change the verb to the present perfect tense, and Option D would make the verb future tense. Only Option C presents an edit that will change the verb to the present tense.
2. **(C)** The passage explains that many are aware of the significance of studying religion but that the subject is often not studied explicitly for fear of negative reaction or legal troubles. Option A uses the concessive conjunction “although,” but it appears with the wrong clause. Option B suggests a causal relationship between the ideas, and Option D suggests that the second clause is a result of the first clause. Option C is the only option that accurately uses a concessive conjunction (“even though”) to show the connection between the ideas.
3. **(A)** Sentence 6 states the constitutional foundation for the separation of church and state in the United States and suggests that because of this separation, some educators are unsure of how to treat religion in classrooms. The question asks for a sentence that both follows and furthers sentence 6 and relates to the main claim in the passage. Option B and Option D address the risks of teaching controversial ideas but also make statements that do not support the main argument in the passage. Option C addresses how schools are shifting resources away from humanities education, but it does not connect to the idea that teaching religion may be seen as controversial. Option A is the only option that explains and makes a connection between educators avoiding the topic of religion and subsequent impact on a student’s education.
4. **(D)** Sentence 8 provides evidence that some people incorrectly believe that it is illegal to teach religion in public schools. The question asks for a sentence that follows and supports this sentence. Option A explains that religious education is often the responsibility of the family, which supports the idea of separation but does not support sentence 8. Option B continues the discussion of the survey, but it does not offer support for sentence 8. Option C also connects to the survey, but it does not address the issue of teaching religion in schools. Option D provides support for Sentence 8 by giving additional results from the survey that strengthen the connection between the information given in Sentence 8 and the main argument in the passage.
5. **(D)** Sentence 11 is leading into another benefit of having an understanding of world religions. Option A suggests that sentence 11 is an effect of sentence 10. Option B suggests that sentence 11 is in opposition to sentence 10. Option C suggests that the idea in sentence 11 should be known or obvious to the reader. Option D is the only option that establishes sentence 11 to be an addition to the ideas expressed in sentence 10.

6. **(C)** Sentence 12 uses vague and imprecise language and needs to be corrected. The words choice (A: “clued into,” “get along better”; B: “know about,” “more about doing,” “new people”; D: “more aware of how to,” “acquaintances”) and grammatical constructions in Options A, B, and D lack precision. Option C is the only sentence that uses precise and specific language (“understand,” “better equipped,” “diverse colleagues and customers”).

7. **(B)** The question asks for a sentence that is irrelevant to the development of the argument in the passage. Option A is relevant to the passage because it highlights that the study of religion is included in most social studies curricula at the state level and is, therefore, considered important to students’ education. Option C is relevant to the passage because it explains the relationship between a country’s religion and the formation of the country’s society/government. Option D is relevant because it continues the discussion of the benefits of being familiar with world religions. Option B, while related to the general topic of religion, introduces the idea of a person’s freedom to practice a religion but does not relate to the discussion about the treatment of the study of religion in schools. This sentence should be removed from the passage.

8. **(D)** The question asks for a sentence that would follow sentence 14 and also provide a conclusion statement for the passage. Option A suggests that students should learn about all religions, but the passage mainly focuses on the understanding of major religions. It also does not address concerns about discussing religion. Option B urges school officials to make sure students study religion, but it does not address the benefits of learning about religion or ways of alleviating concerns about teaching religion. Option C restates the benefits of studying religions, but it does not address the details from the first two paragraphs from the passage. Option D is the only sentence that logically follows sentence 14 and provides a conclusion for the passage because it restates both the concerns with and benefits of studying religion in school.

Revising/Editing Standalone Items

9. **(C)** The sentence in the box needs a comma to separate coordinating adjectives. Option A, Option B, and Option D would each add a comma that would incorrectly break up ideas and clauses. Option C is the only option that places a comma where it is needed between the adjectives “inexpensive” and “reliable.”

10. **(B)** The question asks for the identification of a sentence with a misplaced modifier. In sentence 3, the modifying phrase “With more than 1.3 billion citizens” is correctly modifying “China.” Sentences 1 and Sentence 4 do not have participial or prepositional phrases as modifiers. In sentence 2, the phrase “Bordering fourteen other countries” is incorrectly modifying “the main languages.” This sentence should be revised so that the modifying phrase “Bordering fourteen other countries” modifies “China.”

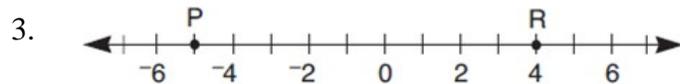
Math Section

Grid-In Sample Items

Directions: Solve each problem. On the answer sheet, write your answer in the boxes at the top of the grid. Start on the left side of each grid. Print only one number or symbol in each box. **DO NOT LEAVE A BOX BLANK IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ANSWER.** Under each box, fill in the circle that matches the number or symbol you wrote above. **DO NOT FILL IN A CIRCLE UNDER AN UNUSED BOX.**

1. $\frac{4.5}{0.1} \times 0.22 =$

2. Maria is now 16 years old. In 6 years, she will be twice as old as her brother will be at that time. How old is her brother now?



Point Q is to be placed on the number line one-third of the way from point R to point P. What number will be at the midpoint of segment \overline{PQ} ?

4. $|x - 1| < 3$
 $|x + 2| < 4$

How many integer values of x satisfy both inequalities shown above?

3. First, find the length of \overline{PR} $4 - (-5) = 9$ units. Point Q is located $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way from R to P, so calculate where Point Q would be:

$$9 \times \frac{1}{3} = 3 \text{ units}$$

Point Q is located at $4 - 3 = 1$. Finally, calculate the midpoint of \overline{PQ} :

$$\text{Midpoint of } \overline{PQ}: \frac{-5+1}{2} = -2$$



4. First, determine which integer values of x would make each inequality true:

$$|x - 1| < 3 \text{ can also be written as } -3 < x - 1 < 3$$

$$\text{Add 1 to each term to simplify the inequality: } -2 < x < 4$$

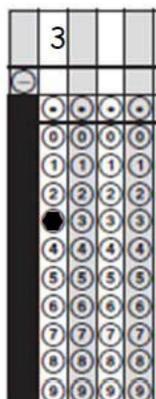
Since these are only “less than” and not “less than or equal to,” the possible values of x for this inequality are -1, 0, 1, 2, and 3.

$$|x - 2| < 4 \text{ can also be written as } -4 < x + 2 < 4$$

$$\text{Subtract 2 from each term to simplify the inequality: } -6 < x < 2$$

The possible values of x for this inequality are -5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, and 1.

The possible values in common between the two inequalities are -1, 0, and 1, so the answer is 3.



Examples of Acceptable and Unacceptable Gridded Math Grid-In Items

Directions: Solve each problem. On the answer sheet, write your answer in the boxes at the top of the grid. Start on the left side of each grid. Print only one number or symbol in each box. **DO NOT LEAVE A BOX BLANK IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ANSWER.** Under each box, fill in the circle that matches the number or symbol you wrote above. **DO NOT FILL IN A CIRCLE UNDER AN UNUSED BOX.**

ACCEPTABLE COMPLETED RESPONSE GRIDS

The following are five examples of acceptable completed response grids:

- Problem: 5. Grid: 5 in the first box, 5 in the first circle of the first column.
- Problem: 308. Grid: 3 in the first box, 0 in the second box, 8 in the third box. Circles: 3 in the first column, 0 in the second column, 8 in the third column.
- Problem: -1.5. Grid: - in the first box, 1 in the second box, . in the third box, 5 in the fourth box. Circles: - in the first column, 1 in the second column, . in the third column, 5 in the fourth column.
- Problem: .78. Grid: . in the first box, 7 in the second box, 8 in the third box. Circles: . in the first column, 7 in the second column, 8 in the third column.
- Problem: 0.78. Grid: 0 in the first box, . in the second box, 7 in the third box, 8 in the fourth box. Circles: 0 in the first column, . in the second column, 7 in the third column, 8 in the fourth column.

UNACCEPTABLE COMPLETED RESPONSE GRIDS

The following are three examples of unacceptable completed response grids, each crossed out with a large X:

- Problem: 418. Grid: 4 in the first box, 1 in the second box, 8 in the third box. Circles: 4 in the first column, 1 in the second column, 8 in the third column. (Note: The 8 is in the third column, but the 1 is in the second column, which is acceptable. However, the 4 is in the first column, which is acceptable. This grid is marked as unacceptable, possibly due to a misinterpretation of the problem or a specific rule regarding the placement of the 8.)
- Problem: 18. Grid: 1 in the first box, 8 in the second box. Circles: 1 in the first column, 8 in the second column.
- Problem: 0009. Grid: 0 in the first box, 0 in the second box, 0 in the third box, 9 in the fourth box. Circles: 0 in the first column, 0 in the second column, 0 in the third column, 9 in the fourth column.

Note: A complete numerical response that is correct will be scored as correct, even if you accidentally begin recording in the wrong column.