

The Inequity of America's Standardized Testing System

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The Inequity of Standardized Testing

Should the outcome of your life depend on one test score you receive as a teenager? After all, high school is meant to explore your passions and interests, not achieve high scores on particular tests. America's standardized testing culture is stressful and often an essential factor for the college admissions process. As parents and students dedicate increasing amounts of time and resources towards preparation for the SAT and ACT, they simultaneously undermine our education system's value by exposing inequalities and creating unhealthy competition. Standardized tests are a harmful and unfair evaluation of a student's educational value to a college because they lead to the manifestation of mental health issues, fail to predict future success, and worsens economic and racial inequalities in American testing culture.

The American standardized testing culture makes students prioritize their "competitiveness" over taking care of themselves, which manifests into mental health issues. Often, this is a direct result of borrowing from cultures with a different value system. According to Alexandra Robbins, who conducted an ethnographic study of high school students in her book Title The Overachievers, "East Asian educational systems have come to be known for two things: first, what called 'an almost fanatical belief in the value of education,' and second, the unyielding emphasis on grades and test scores primarily blamed for the soaring suicide rate among teens" (Robbins 35). The growth of this trend has become more serious recently, as America's testing culture is increasingly resembling that of East Asia, which is problematic because America is

adopting methods from cultures that value grades and scores more than holistic well-being. An imbalance of priorities results in students suffering from mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, and in rare cases, can lead to suicide. Rather than overvaluing the importance of education, US society needs to promote a culture that focuses on students' health and well-being in addition to the education they receive. A new study by the Harvard Graduate Education states, "Changes in levels of cortisol, a hormone associated with stress, during weeks of standardized testing hurt how students in one New Orleans charter school network performed — and kids coming from more stressful neighborhoods, with lower incomes and more incidents of violence, were most affected" (Tatter). The effects of increased cortisol levels on the body include higher levels of stress, anxiety, blood pressure, and chances of getting a stroke. The stress hormone induces the fight-or-flight response system from the body, which triggers an acute stress response that often leads to low test performance. Students already face enough stressors in their everyday lives, including school, family, and personal affairs. Standardized tests are only exacerbating the issue and ultimately hurting the performance of schools as an entirety. These tests are stressful, breed unhealthy competition among peers, and create mental health issues such as anxiety and depression among teenagers.

Standardized testing is economically unequal because it disadvantages low-income students and favors the wealthy who have access to test preparation. An example of such disparities is the claim made by The College Board, the same organization responsible for administering standardized tests to millions of students across the United States admits that if you have access to test preparation, you are at an advantage. They admit there are benefits associated with test prep on the SAT. However, receiving high-quality test preparation is expensive, and several students can't afford the fees associated with these prep classes (Elsesser).

This is crucial because low-income students who lack access to quality test preparation tutoring are at a severe disadvantage compared to their wealthy counterparts. A report by CNBC stated, "A 2015 analysis from Inside Higher Ed found that in each of the three parts of the SAT (reading, writing and language and math), the lowest average scores were among students from families who make less than \$20,000 in family income, while the highest averages were among students from families who make more than \$200,000" (Hess). When students can afford a proper standardized test preparation plan, they learn specific strategies that help them score higher on each standardized test section. Test prep tutors create tailored academic schedules for each student to maximize their SAT or ACT scores. Academies like Elite Prep and AR Academics cost thousands of dollars for a handful of lessons on each subject in a standardized test. For most test-takers, this is unaffordable and, thus, inequitable in comparison to those with accessibility. Economic inequality results in students from wealthier families scoring significantly better than students from lower-income families because they have access to coveted test prep academies and tutors.

Not only are standardized tests economically biased, but are also culturally biased. In recent years, Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans are disproportionately scoring lower. Elsesser adds, "Stereotypes, like those that suggest certain racial groups are good at math and others, are not, raise self-doubts and increase anxiety during high-pressure exams and result in worse scores for those who are negatively stereotyped" (Elsesser). Individual races like Whites and Asians are positively stereotyped to perform better on standardized tests' math section. On the other hand, other minority groups in society are stereotyped to perform worse and are seen as less intelligent. This can affect students' mentality who are taking these tests and result in negative thoughts and anxiety that can hinder their overall performance. Additionally, the tests

are designed in unfair ways to specific groups of people from particular socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, one study cited from NextGen Learning says, "Test designers rely on questions which assume background knowledge more often held by White, middle-class students. It's not just that the designers have unconscious racial bias; the standardized testing industry depends on these kinds of biased questions to create a wide range of scores" (Choi). Minorities are entering these tests at a disadvantage because questions may be biased towards a middle-class audience. As a result, students may not score as highly as they would have, simply because standardized test preparation companies designed questions to favor particular types of races. These tests expose racial inequalities at greater levels than ever before, leading to lower scores by specific races.

Those supporting standardized testing claim that these tests are the only way to properly evaluate a student at a fairly and equally distributed benchmark. However, these tests are racially and economically unequal because studies revealed that wealthier populations score higher on standardized testing due to the supplementation of elite test preparation and tutoring. Also, stereotype threats and racial bias in standardized testing questions disadvantage select racial groups. A unique learning report by the [New York Times](#) advocates that "[t]he essay is monumentally important. It is your chance to get a college to know you beyond numbers. Remember, we'll see your transcripts and recommendation letters. Here you can describe — in your voice — your goals, passions, and experiences like no one else" (Mandell). A counterproposal to the current admissions process would be to emphasize the holistic admissions process. This way, a college can evaluate application components like essays, extracurricular activities, and teacher recommendations with greater scrutiny. Arguably, these college application segments are much more valuable to determining an applicant's whole personality

than just the standardized test score. They let the applicant communicate their thoughts and ideas directly to an admissions officer without any predispositions. Ultimately, it is up to the universities and colleges to evaluate students fairly and holistically. Standardized tests fail to meet these two criteria.

Above all, standardized tests aren't the best indicator for graduation rates from college and future success in life. Rather than standardized tests, "Each incremental increase in GPA is associated with an increase in the odds of graduating college, according to the study, published by the American Educational Research Association" (Morrison). Assessing a student's performance on school subjects tends to be a much more accurate representation of their educational value because teachers have a chance to evaluate a student's abilities, strength, and raw academic potential. This evaluation cannot come from a non-classroom setting because it is challenging to capture a student's entire academic profile from a single standardized test. While "parents and educators insist to students that their success as adults now would depend largely on their teenage grades, test scores, and single-minded devotion to school rather than life" (Robbins 38), this could not be further from the truth. A child's skill sets that they develop through real-life interaction are arguably much more critical in the workforce and life. A parent's priority should be to raise their child to educate them about the importance of life, not overwhelm them with the stress of grades and test scores. In the stage of adolescence, students are meant to use this time in their lives to explore the world around them and educate themselves on necessary life skills and normal teenage activities like dating, driving, holding jobs, and doing chores. The administration of standardized tests in high school doesn't accurately measure a student's raw academic talent: "Standardized tests measure an inert form of intelligence -- one that may exist in your head somewhere but is rarely actually put into real-world use" (Sternburg). As we know, intelligence

is not just about an inert ability to take tests; it is about deploying these skills to solve problems of everyday life. Since the skills that a standardized test requires are rarely used, they do not assess things like creativity and critical thinking skills, which are essential to success in one's adult life.

Ultimately, the college admissions process should not use standardized tests as an indicator to measure a student's academic value because they do not correlate with future success in colleges. Furthermore, there exist racial and economic inequalities that cannot be ignored in America's testing culture. Consequently, a holistic admissions process that emphasizes more integral parts of an applicant rather than just their SAT or ACT score can make an enormous difference in high school students' lives. Furthermore, it ensures equal opportunity for all races and classes in the college admissions process by eliminating socioeconomic inequalities in America's testing system.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

100 / 100

Instructor

Arya, you did an excellent job on this argumentative research paper. You maintained a clear line of reasoning based on a compelling position, supported it with ample evidence, and provided meaningful and relevant commentary that flows smoothly.

PAGE 1

QM

Title

You have a mistake in using a title. Either it is missing, not capitalized, or not noted properly with italics or quotation marks. (Short works like articles, songs, and short stories have "Titles." Long works like novels, albums, and magazines have their Titles in italics.)

PAGE 2

QM

Missing ","

Missing comma:

Though it may not always be grammatically necessary, a comma can often help to prevent a misreading. When a sentence opens with an introductory element (a phrase, clause or word that is logically related to another phrase or clause in the same sentence), it is a great help to your reader to place a comma after that introductory element. Such phrases will often begin with words like "because," "while" or "although," as in the following example: "While everyone was fighting, the bear wandered away." As you can see, without the comma, the sentence would be confusing.

QM

adj. clause

insert that/which/who/whom/where/in which to connect the adjective clause.

Additional Comment

which admits...

QM

Missing ","

Missing comma:

Though it may not always be grammatically necessary, a comma can often help to prevent a misreading. When a sentence opens with an introductory element (a phrase, clause or word that is logically related to another phrase or clause in the same sentence), it is a great help to your reader to place a comma after that introductory element. Such phrases will often

begin with words like "because," "while" or "although," as in the following example: "While everyone was fighting, the bear wandered away." As you can see, without the comma, the sentence would be confusing.

PAGE 3



Insert:

Insert word

Additional Comment

SAT and ACT tests are



Comment 1

math tests.

PAGE 4



Prep. You may be using the wrong preposition.



Title

You have a mistake in using a title. Either it is missing, not capitalized, or not noted properly with italics or quotation marks. (Short works like articles, songs, and short stories have "Titles." Long works like novels, albums, and magazines have their Titles in italics.)

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

CLAIM (20%)

10 / 10

The text introduces a clear, arguable claim that can be supported by reasons and evidence.

**EXCEPTIONAL
(10)**

The text introduces a compelling claim that is clearly arguable and takes a purposeful position on an issue. The text has a structure and organization that is carefully crafted to support the claim.

**SKILLED
(9)**

The text introduces a precise claim that is clearly arguable and takes an identifiable position on an issue. The text has an effective structure and organization that is aligned with the claim.

**PROFICIENT
(7.50)**

The text introduces a claim that is arguable and takes a position. The text has a structure and organization that is aligned with the claim.

**DEVELOPING
(6.50)**

The text contains an unclear or emerging claim that suggests a vague position. The text attempts a structure and organization to support the position.

**INADEQUATE
(5)**

The text contains an unidentifiable claim or vague position. The text has limited structure and organization.

DEVELOPMENT (20%)

10 / 10

The text provides sufficient data and evidence to back up the claim as well as a conclusion that supports the argument.

**EXCEPTIONAL
(10)**

The text provides convincing and relevant data and evidence to back up the claim and effectively addresses counterclaims. The conclusion strengthens the claim and evidence.

**SKILLED
(9)**

The text provides sufficient and relevant data and evidence to back up the claim and addresses counterclaims fairly. The conclusion effectively reinforces the claim and evidence.

**PROFICIENT
(7.50)**

The text provides sufficient data and evidence to back up the claim and addresses counterclaims. The conclusion ties to the claim and evidence.

**DEVELOPING
(6.50)**

The text provides data and evidence that attempts to back up the claim and unclearly addresses counterclaims or lacks counterclaims. The conclusion merely restates the position.

**INADEQUATE
(5)**

The text contains limited data and evidence related to the claim and counterclaims or lacks counterclaims. The text may fail to conclude the argument or position.

AUDIENCE (20%)

10 / 10

The text anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns about the claim. The text addresses the specific audience's needs.

**EXCEPTIONAL
(10)**

The text consistently addresses the audience's knowledge level and concerns about the claim. The text addresses the specific needs of the audience.

SKILLED (9)	The text anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns about the claim. The text addresses the specific needs of the audience.
PROFICIENT (7.50)	The text considers the audience's knowledge level and concerns about the claim. The text addresses the needs of the audience.
DEVELOPING (6.50)	The text illustrates an inconsistent awareness of the audience's knowledge level and needs.
INADEQUATE (5)	The text lacks an awareness of the audience's knowledge level and needs.

COHESION (20%)

10 / 10

The text uses words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, creates cohesion, and clarifies the relationships between the claim and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claims and counterclaims.

EXCEPTIONAL (10)	The text strategically uses words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text explains the relationships between the claim and reasons as well as the evidence. The text strategically links the counterclaims to the claim.
SKILLED (9)	The text skillfully uses words phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text identifies the relationship between the claim and reasons as well as the evidence. The text effectively links the counterclaims to the claim.
PROFICIENT (7.50)	The text uses words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text connects the claim and reasons. The text links the counterclaims to the claim.
DEVELOPING (6.50)	The text contains limited words, phrases and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text attempts to connect the claim and reasons.
INADEQUATE (5)	The text contains few, if any, words, phrases and clauses to link the major sections of the text. The text does not connect the claims and reasons.

CONVENTIONS (20%)

10 / 10

The text presents a formal, objective tone that demonstrates standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).

EXCEPTIONAL (10)	The text presents an engaging, formal and objective tone. The text intentionally uses standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).
SKILLED (9)	The text presents an appropriate and formal, objective tone. The text demonstrates standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).
PROFICIENT (7.50)	The text presents a formal, objective tone. The text demonstrates standard English conventions of usage and mechanics along with discipline-specific requirements (i.e. MLA, APA, etc.).

DEVELOPING
(6.50)

The text illustrates a limited awareness of formal tone. The text demonstrates some accuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.

INADEQUATE
(5)

The text illustrates a limited awareness or inconsistent tone. The text illustrates inaccuracy in standard English conventions of usage and mechanics.