

# Choosing Standardized Tests

## An Overview of Testing Options

Standardized test publishers regulate the use of their tests closely in order to protect the reliability of their norms. Thus, they usually do not sell tests directly to the public, including homeschool parents. Standardized tests are available to homeschools in a variety of ways. However, they must guarantee the test publishers that certain conditions are met.

### Which Test Should I Use?

See below for a description of several different tests. The Virginia homeschool law allows homeschoolers to use any nationally standardized achievement test, not just the ones used by the local school district. Your choice will most likely depend upon what is most available to you. The scores are more helpful if you consistently use the same test from year to year. The different tests vary somewhat in the sub-scores they give you. One test may give language sub-scores in mechanics, spelling, and expression. Another may give scores in capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and usage. If you prefer one set of categories over another, you can choose which test you want to use on this basis. The actual content (the subject matter and skills) covered by the tests in the elementary grades is quite standardized. The selection procedures, involving input and consensus from curriculum specialists and teachers, tend toward uniformity. Content is checked against widely used textbooks. Textbooks have the same standardizing pressures and don't change much either, therefore, the major tests are not much different from one another in content.

### Basic Achievement Skills Inventory (BASI)

This is a nationally normed test available for grades 3-12. There are not any requirements as to who can give it, so parents may administer it to their children. The BASI covers math, reading, and language (it does not cover science, social studies, or study skills). It is a timed test, and takes about two hours to administer.

### Brigance Diagnostic Inventories

While anyone can use this test, it is especially valuable for students with special needs. The test is a long, in-depth test, but very thorough and helpful in goal setting. Public and private schools routinely use these tests to develop an IEP; parents can use them to develop objectives for the next year and to develop their own student evaluation plan. Parents are allowed to administer the test. The Yellow Brigance covers birth to developmental age 7; the Green Brigance covers grade levels Pre-K through 9.

### California Achievement Test (CAT)/Terra Nova

This test is popular among Christian schools and homeschools because it contains more traditional values and because there are no qualifications necessary to administer it. Parents can administer the test and return it to the company for scoring. The CAT is a timed test. Some test suppliers no longer carry the CAT/5 version of the California Achievement test because it is considered an older test—first published in the 1970s. The CAT/5 has outdated vocabulary and pictures to which many young students cannot relate. The demand for the CAT/5 is now so low that the publisher no longer prints and scores that particular version of the CAT. Some test suppliers have purchased the license for the CAT/5 and provide their own scoring. The test is normed every two years. They have also converted it to a timed and untimed online version. Computer-generated score reports are provided soon after the test is completed online. Be sure to follow the ordering instructions for this older CAT/5 test since they differ from newer tests. **For this test only, you should order the test level for the grade your child will be going into next year, not the grade he is completing.** Many suppliers have changed to the CAT/6, normed in 2005 and now known as the TerraNova 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. It is the same test as the CAT/6. You can expect to see fewer references to the CAT (California Achievement Test) since the TerraNova name is replacing the CAT name. There is also a TerraNova 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, normed in 2011. The CAT/5, CAT/6, and TerraNova tests are used by homeschoolers and accepted by superintendents. The law does not refer to specific norming dates.

### **Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)**

The CTBS, like the many of the other tests, has the option to test science, social science, and reference skills for grades 1-12. With the CTBS scores, you will also receive a professional critique.

### **Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS; High School Version – ITED)**

This is a top-rated, nationally standardized test designed to evaluate thinking skills. It is very similar to the Stanford Achievement Test, except that it is a timed test, permits greater flexibility for students taking a test out of grade level, and permits a wider grade range of students to be tested at the same time. Administrators must hold a bachelor's degree. The "Directions for Administering" come with the test and should be returned with the test after testing is complete. The Iowa takes 2-3 days to administer. While there are some restrictions on who may proctor the test that vary by company, they are not as stringent as for the Stanford. This test can be given to grades K-12 and can be coupled with a cognitive test called the CogAT. The ITBS tests listening skills through grade 2, and has the option to cover science, social science, and reference skills for grades 1-12. Grades 8-12 can also take the Interest Explorer, a test that asks about 180 questions. This information is combined with the test results to suggest several fields of study for higher learning and/or employment that would be most appropriate for that student.

### **Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement (KTEA-II Brief Form)**

The KTEA-II is an individually administered, normed, and standardized assessment of academic achievement for ages 4 through 90+. It is not a timed test. A qualified administrator must administer the test; contact the [publisher](#) for qualifications. The Brief Form (also called the Achievement Battery) is part of a comprehensive battery for cognitive and achievement

measurement widely used by many professionals and school systems. The Brief Form measures reading ability with word reading and passage comprehension, and math ability with applied problems and computation. It also contains a spelling and written language assessment. Like the Woodcock-Johnson, the KTEA-II does not have multiple-choice items. Most questions are asked orally, with the examiner recording student responses. Unlike the Woodcock, the KTEA-II allows students to refer back to reading content when answering questions. This test format is often easier for students above grade two with expressive-language or vocabulary delays.

### **Stanford Achievement Test (SAT; High School Version – TASK)**

This is also a top-rated, nationally standardized test. The Stanford tests listening skills through grade eight, and includes the scores from science/social studies in the Complete Composite score. This test is unique in that it is not timed. It can be administered in a group or individual setting. The proctor must adhere to certain criteria such as holding a degree and there may be certain limitations as to whom they can test in a specific setting. The test should take 2-4 days to administer depending on the student, and students should be given all the time they need as long as they are working productively. This test may be given to grades K-12 and may also be coupled with a cognitive test called the OLSAT. The Stanford 10 is the newest Stanford Test. Bob Jones makes this test available to homeschoolers; the restrictions on the test are to keep non-homeschoolers from using it as a practice test. The SAT gives the option to cover science, social science, and reference skills for grades 1-12. Note: This test is not to be confused with the Scholastic Achievement Test, which is something different.

### **Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)**

Although this test can be completely administered in 30-45 minutes, it is extremely accurate and qualifies as a test for those homeschooling under the Virginia homeschool statute. No special qualifications necessary to administer, although you must order in bundles of 25, making it nice if you can find someone who has the test already. Since the test is so short, it works especially well for children with ADD.

### **Woodcock-Johnson Test Tests Of Achievement (WJ3)**

The Woodcock-Johnson must be administered one-on-one (no group testing). It is used widely in school systems to determine eligibility for learning disabilities as well as for gifted programs. The test must be administered by someone who owns the test—it is not a test a parent can rent and administer. This test provides flexibility; the proctor has 20+ subtests to choose from and can combine these various subtests to meet any special testing needs. The test has oral sections, written sections, and timed and untimed sections—it is not a multiple choice test. The WJ3 can be used for ages 4 through adult.

### **Practice Tests**

Many people ask, “Should we order practice tests?” About half of homeschoolers use them and half do not. It is up to individual families to choose what is best for them. Some families feel that practice tests reveal problem areas that can be dealt with in a timely manner before the student

takes the actual achievement test. Other families feel the practice tests are a waste of time because they already know their child's weak areas. View more details about specific practice tests as well as ordering information on the [Testing Resources](#) page.

## **Other Assessment Options**

There are other ways to show educational growth and progress besides using a nationally normed standardized achievement test. View more information on other [assessment options](#).

## **How Should You View the Results?**

Keep in mind that there may be only three questions on a particular skill and on the basis of those few questions a child is scored as average, below average, or above average on that skill. If you spend any time at all helping your child with his studies, you already have a more insightful assessment than such a test score gives. Parents may get upset or depressed because their "brilliant" child did not score "brilliantly" on a test. They may have even considered taking their child out of the home-study situation and placing him back in school, all because of one test! You may rest assured that no school would change the course of a child's education over such an incident. On the other hand, there is a danger in trying to down-play the value of tests. If the parent decides to regard test scores as meaningless, he may, in the process, overlook a learning problem. A balance is necessary. Be sure to praise your child for the strong areas and to work on the weak areas. Academic weaknesses may determine your priorities for your next year. When you have to skip some classes because of a time crunch, consider skipping the stronger areas. There may also be areas you have not covered because you didn't realize they were basic skills. Standardized test scores can help you choose curricula for the following school year. — Our thanks to [Sarah Olbris](#) for providing this information.