

LSAT – Law School Admission Test

General Information

The LSAT is a half-day standardized test required for admission to all 197 law schools that are members of the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). It provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills that law schools can use as one of several factors in assessing applicants. The test is administered four times a year at hundreds of locations around the world.

Many law schools require that the LSAT be taken by December for admission the following fall. However, taking the test earlier—in June or October—is often advised. Go to www.lsat.org (or www.lsac.org) for more information on how to register, how to prepare for the test, how to choose a law school, and how to manage the entire application process. You can also download a free sample test, and order former tests and preparation books. The site is very comprehensive.

Description of the Test

The test currently has six 35-minute sections. Five are multiple choice sections, one of which is unscored (see below); one section is a writing sample. Several different test forms are used for each exam, each presenting the multiple choice sections in a different order; this is intended to make cheating more difficult.

Logical Reasoning: The test contains two logical reasoning sections, commonly known as "arguments" or "LR". Each question begins with a paragraph which presents either an argument or a short set of facts. The paragraph is followed by a prompt asking the examinee to find the argument's assumption, an alternate conclusion, logical omissions or errors in the argument, to choose another argument with parallel reasoning, or to identify a statement that would either weaken or strengthen the argument. Most paragraphs are followed by only one prompt, although a few are followed by two.

In its official LSAT Superprep, the LSAC scores questions on a difficulty scale from 1-5. Most logical reasoning sections contain 2 or 3 level-5 questions. Questions in the section are generally arranged in order of difficulty, with some exceptions. The first 10 often contain one or no question above difficulty level 3.

Reading Comprehension: The test contains one reading comprehension ("RC") section. Through the February 2007 administration of the exam, the RC section consists of four passages of 400-500 words, one passage each related to law, arts and humanities, physical sciences, and social sciences, with 5-8 questions per passage. The questions ask the examinee to determine the author's main idea, find information in the passage, draw inferences from the text, and describe the structure of the passage. Starting in the 2004-05 testing year, the reading comprehension section increased in difficulty, with the average passage length and question set length increasing slightly.

LSAC has stated that, starting with the June 2007 administration, it intends to replace one of the four passages with a new passage type called "comparative reading". Comparative reading presents the examinee with two short passages with differing perspectives on a topic. The passages combined will be approximately the same length as the removed passage. Comparative reading has a parallel on the SAT, which contains a set of paired passages in its critical reading sections, and on the ACT, which does the same in its science section.

Analytical Reasoning: The test has one analytical reasoning section, informally known as the "logic games" section. The material generally involves grouping, matching, and ordering of elements. The examinee is presented with a setup ("there are five people who might attend this afternoon's meeting") and partial set of rules that govern the situation (e.g. "if Amy is present, then Bob is not present; if Cathy is present, then Dan is present..."), and is then asked to deduce conclusions from the statements (e.g. "What is the maximum number of people who could be present?"). Individual questions often add rules and occasionally modify existing rules, requiring the examinee to reorganize information quickly.

Starting in the 2004-05 testing year, in parallel with the changes to the reading comprehension section, analytical reasoning decreased slightly in difficulty.

Unscored section: Each exam includes one experimental section, used to test new questions for future exams. The performance of the examinee on this section is not reported as part of the final score. The examinee is not told which section of the exam is experimental, since to do so could skew the data. To reduce the impact of examinee fatigue on the experimental results, this section is always one of the first three sections of any given test. Because multiple versions of the exam are issued, alert examinees who have two different versions of the test can identify the experimental section by noting which sections they had in common.

There is a controversy about the fairness of this section. The student does not know which section is ungraded. Examinees can determine which type of section was unscored as soon as they run into an extra section of a given question type. For example, if the student has already done two arguments sections and runs into a third one, then one of those three was the experimental section. Some examinations will include three arguments sections; others will have two games or reading sections. Because the section order is unpredictable, sections of the same type can occur consecutively. Depending on ordering and where a given examinee's weaknesses lie, an examinee could underperform (or overperform) on one specific testing. No formal examination of the impact of the experimental section has ever been done, and examinee scores tend to steadily rise with practice regardless. Critics of the experimental section charge that it also amounts to unpaid research being done on LSAC's behalf by examinees who are already paying for the testing.

Writing sample: The writing sample is always the final section of the test. The examinee is given one of two types of prompt: a decision prompt or an argument prompt (as of the June 11, 2007 administration of the test, all examinees will be given a decision prompt). The decision prompt provides the examinee with a problem and two criteria for making a decision. The examinee must then write an essay favoring one of two provided options over the other. The decision generally does not involve a controversial subject, but rather something mundane about which the examinee likely has no strong bias. For the argument prompt,

the examinee is given an argument similar to a logical reasoning prompt and then asked to critique that argument. The decision prompt has been used continually since the addition of the writing sample, while the argument prompt was added in June 2005. In June 2007, however, LSAC will retire the argument prompt.

LSAC does not score the writing sample; instead, the essay is photocopied and sent to admission offices along with the LSAT score. The writing sample is essentially an extemporaneous essay, hand-written in pencil at the conclusion of a four-hour examination. Between the quality of the handwriting and that of the photocopy, some admissions officers regard the readability and usefulness of the writing sample as marginal. Additionally, schools require that applicants submit a "personal statement" of some kind. These factors sometimes result in admission boards ignoring the writing sample. However, only 6.8% of 157 schools surveyed by LSAC in 2006 indicated that they "never" use the writing sample when evaluating an application. In contrast, 9.9% of the schools reported that they "always" use the sample; 25.3% reported that they "frequently" use the sample; 32.7% responded "occasionally"; and 25.3% reported "seldom" using the sample.

Scoring

This is a standardized test; that is to say, the LSAC adjusts raw scores to fit an expected norm. This is intended to overcome the likelihood that some administrations may be more difficult than others. Normalized scores are distributed on a scale from a low of 120 to a high of 180. (Prior to 1991, the scale was from 10 to 48.)

Scores resemble a standard deviation curve and taper off significantly at the extremes and tend to congregate near the median score. That is, an examinee who scores a 175 may have missed only 4 questions more than an examinee with a 180. However, the number of uncredited responses that separates a 155 from a 160 could be 9 or more. Although the exact percentile of a given score will vary slightly between examinations, there tends to be little variance. The 50th percentile is typically a score of about 150; the 90th percentile is around 163 and the 99th is about 172. A 178 or better usually places the examinee in the 99.9th percentile.

Examinees have the option of canceling their score within six calendar days of the exam (well before they learn their score.) LSAC still reports to law schools that the student registered for and took the exam, but releases no score. There is no appeals process for examinee complaints (e.g., proctor called time early, a cell phone went off, a question has ambiguous wording, etc); and, on rare occasion, a specific question may be omitted from final scoring.

The LSAT is generally considered a critical part of the law school admissions process, along with GPA. All or nearly all law schools receive far more applicants than they can accommodate; the examination offers an easy way to eliminate many applicants.

Most admission boards use an admission index: a mathematical formula that applies a different weight to the LSAT and undergraduate GPA and adds the results. This composite statistic can have a stronger correlation to first year performance than either GPA or LSAT score alone, depending on the weighting used. The amount of weight assigned to LSAT score versus undergraduate GPA varies from school to school, as almost all law programs employ a different admission index formula. At present, there do not seem to be any studies correlating LSAT to performance as a lawyer.

Value of Multiple Scores: In June 2006, the American Bar Association (ABA) revised a rule that mandated law schools to report their matriculants' average score if more than one test was taken. The new ABA rule now requires law schools to report only the highest LSAT score for matriculants who took the test more than once. In response, most (but certainly not all) law schools will now consider only the higher score in admissions, for applicants with more than one score. Students may take the test only three times in a two-year period. The overwhelming majority of students take the test only once.

Test Fee and Registration

US FEES (All US fees are in US dollars.)

Basic Fees

LSAT \$123

LSDAS \$113

Auxiliary Fees

Late Registration \$62

Test Center Change \$32

Test Date Change \$32

Handscoring \$39

Former Registrant Score report \$39

Telscore (scores by phone) \$10

Law School Reports \$12

Returned Check Charges \$32

One time fee for optional paper copies of LSAT Ticket, LSAT Score, Activity Updates, and Master Law School Report for online account holders \$25

Nonpublished Test Centers

Domestic \$228

Foreign \$304

Refund

LSAT Registration Refund \$44

LSDAS Subscription Refund \$44

CANADIAN FEES

(All Canadian fees are in Canadian dollars.)*

Basic Fee

LSAT \$144

Auxiliary Fees

Late Registration \$72

Test Center Change \$37

Test Date Change \$37

Handscoring \$46

Telscore (score by phone) \$12

Former Registrant Score report \$46

Returned Check Charges \$37

One-time fee for optional paper copies of LSAT Ticket, LSAT Score, and Activity Updates for online account holders \$29

Nonpublished Test Centers

Domestic \$266

Foreign \$355

Refund

LSAT Registration Refund \$51

You can register online or by phone (with a credit card) at: 215-968-1001. To register by mail, first obtain a registration booklet, by calling 215-968-1001 between 8:30 A.M. and 8 P.M. (ET), September-March, and between 8:30 A.M. and 4:45 P.M. (ET), April-August. You can pay with a credit card, check, or money order.

LSAC Fee Waiver

Fee Waivers for the LSAT and LSDAS

The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) established the fee waiver program in 1968 to assure that no person is denied access to law school because of the absolute inability to pay for the LSAT and other essential applicant services.

Each approved LSAC fee waiver will entitle you to:

- two LSATs per testing year (June through February)
- an LSDAS registration, which includes the letter of recommendation service and the electronic

law school application service

- four free LSDAS Law School Reports —available only after LSDAS registration is complete
- one free copy of the Official LSAT SuperPrep®.

Because the cost of these services is only a fraction of the cost of a legal education, the need criterion is considerably more stringent than for other financial aid processes. Only those with extreme need should apply. Note: No other fees will be waived. Services covered by a 2007–2008 fee waiver must be ordered by March 1, 2008.

Eligibility to Be Considered for a Fee Waiver

You must be a US or Canadian citizen, a US national, or a permanent resident alien of the United States with an Alien Registration Receipt Card (I-151 or I-551) to be considered for a fee waiver. LSAC will not accept fee waiver applications for foreign candidates.

The basic criterion for granting a waiver is the absolute inability to pay for the service. Your inability to pay will be validated via the LSAC Fee Waiver Application Form US or Canadian version supported by tax forms and other documentation as requested by LSAC or the law school.

US Citizens

In the United States, only LSAC or ABA-approved law schools can approve a fee waiver. Fee waivers cannot be granted by financial aid offices of undergraduate institutions, non-ABA-approved law schools, prelaw advisors, or any other individual or organization.

Canadian Citizens

Canadian citizens who need a fee waiver must submit a Canadian LSAC fee waiver application to a Canadian LSAC-member law school even if they plan to apply for admission to a US law school. Fee waivers for Canadian citizens cannot be granted by financial aid offices of undergraduate institutions, US ABA-approved law schools, non-ABA-approved law schools, prelaw advisors, or any other individual or organization. Canadian LSAC-member law schools will consider the fee waiver request for Canadian citizens only. Canadian fee waiver applications can be obtained at any Canadian member law school.

Requesting a Fee Waiver

LSAC recommends that you submit your completed fee waiver application at least four weeks prior to the regular registration deadline for a particular test date. There are three ways to request a fee waiver.

Use the online fee waiver application. This is the fastest and easiest way to apply for an LSAC fee waiver. You must be a US resident, a US national, or a permanent resident alien of the United States and have an LSAC online account or create an online account to use this option. (View a demonstration of the online Fee Waiver Application Process.)

Download the fee waiver packet or obtain a paper fee waiver packet from LSAC by calling 215.968.1001 at least four to six weeks before the regular registration deadline for a particular test date. Please specify whether you are a US or Canadian citizen so that you receive the appropriate packet.

Obtain a paper fee waiver packet from a United States or Canadian law school admission office, or a prelaw advisor, at least six weeks prior to the regular registration deadline for a particular test date. US residents can complete the application and either send it to LSAC for consideration for a fee waiver or take the completed application to an ABA-approved law school for consideration. Canadian citizens must take the completed fee waiver application to a Canadian law school for consideration of an LSAC fee waiver.

Note: If you download the packet from the website or obtain one from a US or Canadian law school admission office, or a prelaw advisor and you intend to register for our services by paper you must contact LSAC at the phone number above to obtain a paper LSAT & LSDAS Registration Form.

How to Prepare

LSAC recommends that students prepare beforehand, due to the importance of the LSAT in law school admissions and because scores on the exam respond to preparation. The structure of the LSAT and the types of questions asked are generally known ahead of time, which allows students to practice on question types that show up frequently in examinations and avoid wasting time on question types that may appear only once or twice.

Because most students experience improvement with preparation, students wishing to qualify for a particular law school will usually improve their odds of success with LSAT preparation. Many companies currently offer LSAT classroom courses, one-on-one private tutoring, and online tutoring.

For preparation purposes, only tests after 1990 are considered "modern tests" because the LSAT underwent many significant changes before the early 1990s.

The best way to prepare for the exam is to find out information about the exam such as:

- Ask the test center if they have any preparation materials, like books or CDs you can borrow.
- Find out what the sections on the exam are?
- What is the style of the exam: essay, multiple choice, short answer, true/false, etc?
- How long is the exam?
- Take a preparation course before the exam
- Take practice exams

- Look for information on their website

More Information

Law schools in the United States offer three-year programs and are very expensive. Contact the financial aid offices of the universities to which you are applying for advice on how you can fund your studies. You must already have a B.A. or B.Sc. degree to apply to law school.

Go to www.lsat.org for more information on the LSAT and a free sample test, as well as for information on law schools and financial aid.

Test Sites

Canada and the US numerous locations, check www.lsat.org for the location nearest you.

In Asia:

Malaysia

0681 SE Langor (Kuala Lumpur) IDP Education PTY Limited

Philippines

0659 Quezon City, University of the Philippines

Singapore

0771 Singapore, U.S. Education Information Center

Thailand

0053 Nonthaburi, International School Bangkok