

# How to Take the LSAT

\*\*Most of the information that follows is drawn from the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) Frequently Asked Questions list, which can be found [here](#)\*\*

## **The Basics**

The following information answers the basic questions surrounding the LSAT, regarding its structure, content, scoring, and registration rules. The next section will focus more on strategy and preparation.

### What is the LSAT?

According to the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC), the body that administers the LSAT, the LSAT is a half-day, standardized test that is “designed to measure skills that are considered essential for success in law school.”

The test is administered four times a year (June, September/October, December, and February). The test consists of five thirty five minute sections of multiple-choice questions and a thirty five minute writing section. The final score is determined by four out of the five multiple-choice sections.

The LSAT ranges in score from 120-180. The national median is approximately 151. However, law schools vary significantly in LSAT score ranges for admitted students.

For general information about the LSAT or to register for the exam, please visit <http://www.lsac.org>.

### What is on the LSAT?

There are five multiple-choice sections and one writing section on the LSAT. Only four out of the five multiple-choice sections count towards your final score. The writing section and one experimental multiple-choice section do not count towards your final score. However, the test taker does not know which section is the experimental one and some admissions office actually read the writing section.

The scored sections include one **reading comprehension** section, one **analytical reasoning** section, and two **logical reasoning** sections.

The unscored section, also known as the variable/experimental section, is used to pretest new test questions or to pre-equate new test forms.

The writing sample is not scored by LSAC, but the LSAC sends copies to all law schools to which you apply.

The LSAT measures skills that are considered essential for success in law school:

- the reading and comprehension of complex texts with accuracy and insight;
- the organization and management of information and the ability to draw reasonable inferences from it;
- the ability to think critically;
- and the analysis and evaluation of the reasoning and arguments of others.

#### Where can I take the LSAT?

The LSAT is administered at various locations throughout the world. There are [established test centers](#) at undergraduate schools, law schools, military bases, embassies, and educational centers. The LSAT is not administered at every test center on all testing dates, and there is limited center availability for each test administration. Test centers are open to every registered candidate regardless of race, color, creed, or national origin. If it is impossible for you to travel to an established test center and you are located more than 100 miles from an open center, you may request that LSAC establish a [nonpublished test center](#).

#### When is the best time to take the LSAT?

You should take the LSAT as early as possible before law school application deadlines. In recent years, many law schools have requested that applicants take the test by December for admission in the following fall's entering class. If you think you may want to repeat the test after getting your initial score, plan to take the LSAT first in either June or September. This will give you time to access your score on your [LSAC.org account](#) and register for the test again in December.

#### What is the quickest way to register for the test?

[Registering online](#) is the quickest and easiest way to register. You can also call 215.968.1001 or use the registration forms located in the current LSAC Registration Packet.

Once you have registered for a test during the regular registration period, you may not withdraw or cancel your registration and reregister for that same test during the late registration period.

#### What is the best way to prepare for the LSAT?

The LSAT measures skills and knowledge that develop over a period of time. Thus, you cannot prepare for the test by making a last-minute effort to master specific subject areas. However, persons who have thoroughly familiarized themselves with test directions and

questions types, who have practiced on available sample tests, and who have studied information available on test-taking techniques and strategies, may feel more secure on the day of the test. Question types and sample questions are included at no charge in the [Law School Admission Information Book](#) , which also includes information about additional nominally priced LSAT preparation materials. Candidates may also purchase the [preparation materials](#) and download the [sample test](#).

## The Meaning of the LSAT Score

After understanding the basic contours of the test and registering, it is time to think *strategy*, which focuses on how to maximize one's potential to get a desired score. Before engaging in such a discussion, it is important to illuminate a couple of more facts about the test. Like other standardized tests, the LSAT is scored on a curve. This scoring system means that you are scored *relative* to your fellow test takers.

### Three Important Numbers

When you receive your LSAT score, you get three important numbers. The first number is your set of *raw scores*. Your raw scores tell you how many questions you answered correctly in each section and how many questions you answered correctly overall (out of approximately 101 questions). This number provides an indication of your absolute performance on the exam.

The second number is your overall *curved LSAT score* (a score between 120 and 180). This number gives you a score based on your *relative* performance on the exam (relative to the other thousands of test takers taking the same exam). This curved LSAT score must be compared to a third number in order to have meaning.

The third number is your *LSAT percentile*. The percentile tells you exactly how you did relative to your fellow test takers. For example, if you scored a 170 on the exam, you are approximately in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile (see next chart). This means that you did better than 98% of the test takers on the exam.

### Scores and Percentiles

LSAT scores generally correspond with certain percentiles from test to test though some variation does exist. The following table approximates corresponding raw scores, curved LSAT score, and percentile rank. Note that the table is a general approximation as these numbers vary from test to test, depending on a whole host of factors, such as the difficulty of the exam and the distributions of raw scores.

Raw Score	Scaled Score	Percentile Rank	Raw Score	Scaled Score	Percentile Rank
98-101	180	99.90%	53-54	150	46%
97	179	99.90%	51-52	149	42%
96	178	99.90%	50	148	38%
94-95	177	99.80%	48-49	147	34%
93	176	99.80%	46-47	146	29%
92	175	99.70%	45	145	27%
91	174	99.60%	43-44	144	24%
90	173	99.40%	42	143	20%
88-89	172	99.10%	40-41	142	17%
87	171	98.80%	38-39	141	15%
86	170	98%	37	140	13%
84-85	169	98%	35-36	139	11%
83	168	97%	34	138	10%
81-82	167	96%	33	137	8%
80	166	95%	31-32	136	7%
78-79	165	94%	30	135	50%
77	164	92%	29	134	5%
75-76	163	91%	28	133	4%
73-74	162	89%	27	132	3%
72	161	87%	26	131	3%
70-71	160	84%	25	130	2%
68-69	159	81%	24	129	2%
67	158	78%	23	128	1%
65-66	157	75%	22	127	1%
63-64	156	70%	21	126	0.90%
61-62	155	67%	20	125	0.80%
60	154	63%	19	124	0.60%
58-59	153	59%	18	123	0.50%

56-57	152	55%	17	122	0.40%
55	151	51%	16	121	0.40%
			0-15	120	0.00%

Now, the next question that comes up is: what do these scores mean in terms of getting into law school? It's one thing to score in the 95<sup>th</sup> percentile on the exam, but is that score *good enough* to get you into your top choice school? Well, like most answers in law school, *it depends*.

You must keep in mind that admissions committees make decisions looking at the entire application- not just the LSAT. In other words, the LSAT is a significant component of that package but not the total package. Other factors such as undergraduate academic performance, recommendations, personal statements, and experiences all matter.

However, your LSAT score (usually in conjunction with your GPA) can give you a reasonable estimate of where you stand in terms of a particular law school's applicant and admitted student pools. Check individual law school websites for the most up-to-date information on these statistics (usually under the Entering Class Profile section of a website). Also, the [Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools](#) provides a searchable database of schools where you can attain important information relating to entering class LSAT and GPA score ranges. You can also enter your scores and GPA and see which schools fit within your score ranges. Finally, the following table gives you a general idea of what scores certain schools are looking at. For instance, to get into a top five law school, a reasonable scoring goal should be 170 or better.

Law School/University	25th-75th Percentile LSAT Scores
	LSAT Average Score Range
American University (Washington) (DC)	161-163
Boston College (MA)	162-165
Boston University (MA)	164-166
Columbia University (NY)	169-174
Cornell University (NY)	166-168
Duke University (NC)	167-170
Emory University (GA)	162-166
Fordham University (NY)	163-167
George Washington University (DC)	163-168
Georgetown University (DC)	167-171
Harvard University (MA)	170-175
New York University (NY)	169-173
Northwestern University (IL)	166-172

Stanford University (CA)	167-172
University of California (Hastings) (CA)	160-165
University of California--Berkeley (CA)	163-170
University of California--Davis (CA)	159-165
University of California--Los Angeles (CA)	163-169
University of Chicago (IL)	169-173
University of Georgia (GA)	159-165
University of Michigan--Ann Arbor (MI)	167-170
University of Minnesota--Twin Cities (MN)	163-167
University of North Carolina--Chapel Hill (NC)	157-164
University of Pennsylvania (PA)	166-171
University of Texas--Austin (TX)	163-168
University of Virginia (VA)	159-165
Vanderbilt University (TN)	164-168
Yale University (CT)	170-177
Yeshiva University (Cardozo) (NY)	162-166

\*\*25<sup>th</sup>-75<sup>th</sup> percentile range means that 25 percent of the entering class scored at or below the lower number in the range and 25 percent of the class scored at or above the higher number in the range.

Note that the schools listed above are only a sample of the accredited schools in the country. The list is skewed towards the top-ranked schools in the country. For information about other law schools, visit the Official Guide to Law Schools page linked above.

## Test-Taking Strategy: 5 Easy Steps

### Step 1: Give yourself plenty of time.

Unlike many tests that you have taken in your life, this is not one to pull an all-nighter- or even an “all-monther.” The LSAT requires three P’s: patience, practice, and persistence. The LSAT is a unique test that whose content, for the most part, is unfamiliar to most college students. Did you really know what a “logic game” was before reading about the LSAT?

Set aside at least *six weeks* to prepare for the exam. Eight to ten weeks would be ideal. More important than the amount of time you set aside, however, is the priority you assign to the LSAT. During the weeks and months heading into the LSAT, make sure that you reserve *several hours almost every day* dedicated towards LSAT preparation. The type of preparation (see next step) is important but so is the amount and quality of that preparation. Do not get distracted when you are studying for the LSAT. Think

about going to a library or quiet place where you can go through workbooks, test packets, and actual exams.

A practice exam alone will take up about 5 hours of your time (taking the exam and reviewing it). Going through practice questions and reading strategy guides and/or attending prep courses can add anywhere between 15-20 hours of preparation time per week. If your coursework is burdensome or you are currently working full-time, you may want to consider taking the LSAT on a date that will allow you to have several weeks off preparing for the exam. For some college students who end in early May, the June test is attractive because it offers three or four weeks of uninterrupted study time.

### Step 2: Decide on a preparation method

Should you take an LSAT preparation course? Or should you go it alone? Once again, it depends on a variety of factors and requires a bit of self-assessment.

LSAT preparation courses provides four main benefits:

- A compendium of practice tests, guidebooks, and problem sets
- Live classroom instruction
- A structured scheduled complete with lessons, assignments, and practice exams
- Online resources, homework hotlines, etc.

However, LSAT preparation courses come with some shortcomings:

- Cost: some programs can cost up to \$1,500 and one on one tutoring can cost upwards of \$150 an hour
- Inflexibility: most of the programs adhere to a fixed routine of classroom time, administered practice tests, and an expectation of outside preparation. You must make sure that your schedule can accommodate these set times.
- Quality: the quality of preparation programs can vary (often significantly). Make sure you ask around before committing to a program. Look at the curriculum, ask your school's career services office if they have reviews about a particular company, look at online reviews, and ask your friends.

The cost/benefit analysis of signing up for a structured LSAT course needs to be compared against the option of individual preparation. If you are highly motivated, well-organized, and dedicated, then you may well have the personality traits of someone who can succeed on the LSAT without an expensive prep course. Self-motivation, however, is a difficult thing to achieve- not to mention sustain for an extensive period of time. You know yourself- including your weaknesses- the best.

Deciding to take a prep course or not requires a focused self-assessment of personality traits, time constraints, budgetary issues, and other factors. I would recommend making a simple chart of the advantages and disadvantages of taking a prep course versus studying alone based on these factors. This will be the first major decision you make after deciding to take the LSAT (and to apply to law school).

If you do decide to study alone, remember the three Ps: patience, practice and persistence. You need to devote large amounts of your day to practice for the exam and you need to sustain this commitment for at least six weeks.

In addition, make sure to purchase helpful study materials for individual preparation. I would recommend some guides that address the various sections of the exam. For example, the [Logic Games Bible](#) and the [Logical Reasoning Bible](#) are two really helpful guides that can help crack some of the mysteries surrounding the two most unfamiliar section types on the exam. Finally, purchase sets of *actual* LSAT exams that were administered by the LSAC in past years. Taking authentic exams under timed conditions is probably the best way to familiarize yourself with the exam and be ready to tackle the exam on test day. The LSAC publishes [bundled sets](#) of ten actual exams every few years. Purchase a couple of these sets to work through actual test questions.

### Step 3: Execute your preparation strategy

Whether you've decided to take a course or go it alone, the next step is to make sure that you are actively taking the steps to prepare for the test. For those taking a course, this process entails attending prep courses, doing the homework, asking questions, and taking practice exams (both in class and on your own). You should devote several hours a week outside of class to work through homework problems, honing in on the question types that are confusing or take up too much time.

For those studying individually, you must create a schedule and stick to it. For example, for the first three weeks of preparation you will study from 5pm to 9pm every Monday through Thursday and take a practice exam every Saturday morning. For the final three weeks leading up to the exam you will study from 2pm to 9pm every Monday through Thursday and Saturday, including three practice exams a week.

The first few weeks of preparation (in either course of action) will likely be spent on familiarizing yourself with the exam, recognizing question types, learning test strategies, and taking a few practice exams. The second half of your preparation in the weeks leading up to the actual exam will mostly be focused on taking full-length practice exams, working on timing, and reviewing sections and question types that have been causing difficulties.

#### Step 4: Practice, practice, practice

Only a handful of people (read: likely not you) can study minimally for this exam and do well. The LSAT is a serious exam that requires serious preparation. While the material may be difficult, unfamiliar, and time-pressurized, it can be mastered with enough practice.

In conjunction with going over test-taking strategies (either through a course or reading guidebooks), taking full-length exams ensures that you are familiar with all of the question types on the LSAT. While each test is different in terms of scenarios surrounding questions, each exam pretty much covers the same basic question types in each section.

For example, the logical reasoning section will include questions that test your ability to identify assumptions made in an argument, find parallel fact patterns, apply additional information to arguments, and locate flaws and weaknesses in arguments. The analytical reasoning (“logic games”) section will test your ability to engage in spatial reasoning (linear, stacked patterns, etc.), deduce patterns implied from a set of facts, and evaluate relationships between multiple variables. Finally, the reading comprehension section tests your ability to understand the main idea of a passage, compare and contrast differing points of view, identify strengths and weaknesses of an argument, and apply new information to a passage.

Not everyone possesses all of these skills off the bat. Some of them require weeks of diligent practice to hone. Make sure you practice enough to feel comfortable with these skills and can apply them to solve the common question types that show up on actual exams.

#### Step 5: Remain confident, relax, and take care of business

You are a two or three days away from test day. You have spent the past eight weeks preparing for the exam. You are a little worn out but ready to tackle the exam on test day and set aside this consuming portion of your law school application. You are looking forward to returning to normalcy.

All of the above are thoughts you are likely to have in the immediate days before the actual exam. The key is to remain confident in your abilities. In these last few days don't let the last slightly low practice score bring you down (judge your preparation status according to an average of your past three, full-length, timed practice exams). Don't take on stress. Wind down your preparation. I would strongly advise against taking any practice exam on the day before your actual exam. Instead, watch a favorite movie, hang out with friends, or just spend time doing something that you enjoy.

On the night before the test, make sure you have everything in order: your ID, your pencils, your wallet, your Admission ticket, etc. [Take a look](#) at what items are

required, permitted, and prohibited on the day of the test. You do not want a stressful morning on the day of the exam.

Finally, walk into your test center confident, energized, and ready to tackle the exam. You've invested the past months of your life preparing for this test. Now, it's time to make your goals into reality. Stay focused, be vigilant of your time, and don't allow others to influence how you're feeling.

## **Conclusion**

The LSAT is a demanding and rigorous test that requires weeks (if not months) of preparation. Make sure you have prepared to the best of your ability- going through strategy guides, doing practice problems, and taking several full-length exams. This is not the time to sell yourself short.

Lastly, remember that, at the end of the day, this is a *test*. It does not define who you are or what you will become. During the course of your study, always remember that there are other aspects of your life that deserve- and demand- attention: your faith, your family, your friends, etc.

From all at NMLSA, we wish you the best in your LSAT preparation.