

Join the national conversation!



## Focus Words

standardized | assess | criteria | correspond | formulate



## Weekly Passage

In many states high school students must pass a standardized test to graduate. For example, Massachusetts law requires the MCAS. The law was passed to make sure high schools are challenging their students. Businesses often complain that high school graduates cannot read and do math needed on the job. Colleges worry that not all high school graduates can do college work. The tests are used to see who has the skills expected by employers and colleges.

Tests like MCAS assess students' ability to write, read critically, and do difficult math. The tests are geared to the skills people need in jobs and in college. Supporters say standardized testing is fair because all students are graded using the same criteria. For example, writing might be graded by how many examples the students give.

Some people think graduation tests are unfair to students who are learning English. These students might know the information but have trouble with the test questions. Other students might have

trouble focusing their attention. Their test scores might not show what they really know.

Students in different schools learn different things. The standardized test might not correspond to what some students were taught in a particular school. Students in another school, however, might find the test matched what they learned in class. People argue this isn't fair. Some people also worry that standardized tests make teachers just cover what is on the test. Teachers might not formulate lessons that will be interesting to their students.

Other people think that standardized testing is valuable, but that there should be different ways for students to show that they are ready to graduate.

Do standardized tests hold all students to high standards? Or do they unfairly keep some students from graduating?

# Unit 2.01

## Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement? Focus Word Chart

Word	Meaning	Forms	Examples of Use	Notes
standardized	(adj.) - the same for everyone			
assess	(v.) - judge the quality of; evaluate			
criteria	(n.) - standards or rules used to make a decision			
correspond	(v.) - match			
formulate	(v.) - invent by thinking about			

# Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement?



## Problem of the Week

We want high school graduates to meet important **criteria**. They should read well. They should **formulate** ideas logically and express them clearly. They should understand basic ideas about math, science, and social studies. What is the best way to **assess** whether students meet these criteria? Is a **standardized** graduation test too harsh? In Massachusetts in 2010, several thousand students failed to graduate because they failed one or more of the state tests.

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**Option 1:** Of the 69,008 Massachusetts 2010 high school seniors, 2,556 failed the MCAS math exam. Which answer **corresponds** to the percentage of the class that failed the exam?

- A) about 2.4%
- B) about 3.7%
- C) about 4.1%
- D) about 6.7%

**Option 2:** Under a new Massachusetts state rule, students must pass all three MCAS exams to graduate: the Science exam, the English exam, and the Math exam.

Of the 69,008 Massachusetts high school seniors in 2010:

- 1,958 failed the English MCAS
  - 2,556 failed the Math MCAS
  - 2,933 failed the Science MCAS
- a) Based on these numbers, what is the smallest possible number of students who could not graduate because of the tests? (Hint: Remember that students could have failed all three exams, so the amounts could overlap.)
- b) Based on these numbers, what is the largest possible number of students who could not graduate because of the test? (Hint: Remember that each student could have failed only one exam, so the amounts could not overlap at all.)

**Discussion Question:** **Standardized** tests must change each year to prevent cheating. Each year testing companies **formulate** new exams. Teachers and experts review each question. A good exam question meets these **criteria**: it **corresponds** to what students should be learning in class, and it fairly **assesses** what students know. These carefully prepared exams are expensive. For example, the state of Massachusetts spends \$35 million each year on making its standardized test. Is this a good use of state money? Why or why not?

# Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement?



## I. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

**A** Students should be required to pass a standardized test to graduate from high school. This is the best way to make sure that all students are ready for jobs and college.

**B** Students should not be required to pass a standardized test to graduate from high school. Tests can't show everything they know.

**C** Schools should give students standardized tests, but formulate other ways to assess students who speak another language or who have other educational needs.

**D** Schools should require different kinds of student work instead of standardized tests. This will show more about what students know and are able to do.

**E** \_\_\_\_\_  
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# GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

*I believe that...*

*I agree with you because. . .*

*You make a good point, but have you considered...*

*Can you show me evidence in the text that supports what you said?*

## 2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

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# Should passing a standardized test be a high school graduation requirement?

## Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

At a staff meeting, teachers are debating a new graduation requirement: a **standardized** test.

“We need strict **criteria** for deciding who graduates,” says Professor Kahn. “All of our students should be able to read, write, and do basic math. We should **formulate** a graduation exam that **assesses** those skills.”

“Actually, a graduation exam that tests simple skills could hurt our students,” says Professor Seemy. “Teachers want students to graduate, so they may limit their teaching to the skills that **correspond** to the test. Will they stop teaching other skills, like critical thinking and creative problem solving?”

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### Question:

Do graduation exams have a negative effect on SAT scores? (The SAT Reasoning Test assesses critical thinking and creative problem solving. Most colleges require SAT scores.)

### Hypothesis:

Schools with graduation exams will have lower SAT scores.

### Materials:

- ▶ School A (which has a graduation exam)
- ▶ School B (similar to A, but no graduation exam)
- ▶ SAT scores from both schools

**Procedure:**

1. Collect SAT scores from all students at School A.
2. Collect SAT scores from all students at School B.

**Data:**

	<b>School A Average SAT Scores</b>	<b>School B Average SAT Scores</b>
Critical Reading	470	500
Writing	450	510
Math	460	500

**Conclusion:**

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

standardized | assess | criteria |  
correspond | formulate

[illegible]

- ☐ Stated my own position clearly
- ☐ Included 1-2 arguments
- ☐ Included 1 counterargument
- ☐ Used 2-5 focus words

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