



Basic Skills Test FAQ

Why do I have to take a basic skills test as part of an initial teacher licensure program?

Passing a test of basic skills is a requirement set by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) for all teacher preparation programs and school support personnel.

What tests are required to meet the basic skills requirement?

Candidates may submit evidence of passing, either the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP), ACT Plus Writing OR SAT to meet this requirement.

How will I know if I have met the passing score?

Information on the minimum passing score for each of these tests is located at <https://www.neiu.edu/academics/college-of-education/teacher-licensure-policies-information-and-entitlementsendorsements>

When should I take the test?

The Goodwin College of Education strongly advises candidates to take the test prior to admission to the College. However, a passing score is required by the start of the semester prior to student teaching. In addition, candidates will be required to provide evidence of having registered to take one of the tests as part of the clinical experience application.

I can wait until later in my program to take the test, right?

We do not recommend that candidates wait until later in their program to take one of these tests for several reasons. First, candidates must schedule their test well in advance and are limited to the schedule offered by the particular testing company. Second, it can take up to 8 weeks for candidates' scores to be released and additional time to have the scores mailed directly to the candidate. Third, many candidates do not pass the test the first time they take it. Therefore, the time it takes to learn that the test was not passed and for the candidate to register for another test session and await those results will most certainly prevent the candidate from meeting the required deadline for student teaching. Fourth, candidates also need to take and pass their content exams. Therefore, this additional testing time must factor into the candidate's timeline.

Passing these tests is easy, right?

Contrary to what you may have heard, passing the TAP, ACT with writing or SAT is not easy for everyone. In fact, there are many, many stories of students' taking one of these tests several times and still not earning the required passing score.

If I have not passed the test after several attempts, does this mean I am not smart enough to be a teacher?

Absolutely not! Often students take and retake the test without the appropriate preparation, which is why they are repeatedly unsuccessful.

What if I take the test but do not pass it?

Candidates who do not earn a passing score by the GCOE established deadline will not be allowed to student teach during the semester for which they originally applied. However, the candidate may complete an application to student teach for a subsequent semester one year from the point of the originally established deadline (i.e., a candidate who did not meet a passing score by the September deadline can apply to student teach for the following Fall semester). The candidate will be required to submit evidence of having passed the basic skills test by the new deadline.

What resources are available at the university to help me pass the test?

Northeastern offers the following resources to help you.

- TRIO Student Support Services, located on the 4th floor of the Library, offers ongoing TAP workshops in the area of math. These workshops also help students who want to take the ACT. Any student enrolled or accepted for enrollment at Northeastern who is a citizen or legal resident in the U.S. or meets residency requirements for federal student financial aid **and** one of the following: (a) first generation college student, (b) qualifying taxable income, or (c) individual with a documented disability, may receive **free tutoring**. Contact TRIO at trioss@neiu.edu
- The Goodwin College of Education, in collaboration with TRIO but supported by a separate funding source, also offers free tutoring and occasionally free ACT/TAP workshops for students who do not meet the eligibility requirements for TRIO Student Support Services. Contact the Goodwin College of Education for additional information about this possibility.
- The Grow Your Own (GYO) Teachers program may provide one-on-one tutoring support for candidates. For more information contact: Luis Meza (L-MezaJr@neiu.edu)
- Community and Professional Education (CAPE) offers ACT Test Preparation sessions, typically on Saturdays in September. For more information, contact cape@neiu.edu.
- The Learning Success Center on the 4th floor of the Library also offers ongoing tutoring in reading, mathematics and writing. Contact lsc@neiu.edu.
- Longsdale Test Preparation (accessed from any computer with internet connection by visiting: <http://www.longsdalepub.com/icts/>) also provides test preparation support. New users need to register for an account. The password/key is SUCCEED and the school number is 28433.

What resources are available other than those offered at the University?

- TAP student guides are available from the Illinois Licensure Information System (ELIS) website
(https://www.il.nesinc.com/TestView.aspx?f=HTML_FRAG/IL400_TestPage.html)
- The ACT Academy offers personalized, free practice for the ACT
(<http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation.html>)
- SAT offers free practice tests online
(<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/practice/full-length-practice-tests>)
- ACT and SAT resources are also available on Amazon or at local public libraries.
- Many companies also provide specialized test preparation for a fee.

How can I determine which test is the right one for me? We do have some information on the differences between the TAP and the ACT that may be helpful in determining the test that best suits you. Here are some important differences:

TAP	ACT Plus Writing
Allows individuals with a first language other than English to apply for an additional 2 hours when taking the test	Does not allow this accommodation
	Extends time to take the test up to 7 hours to students who can document that they have special learning needs
Each subtest is scored independently; all must be passed	The score is determined as a total average of all 4 subtests
Once a passing TAP score is achieved in an area, the test-taker does not have to take that subtest again. That is, students can bank their scores from a previous subtest.	Students with potential for scoring over 22 in areas like math and science can have lower than a score of 22 in reading and English and still meet the passing score. However, students who do not have strengths in any particular area may have difficulty earning a passing score of 22. For example, a test taker who earns a 22 in reading, a 21 in math, a 19 in English and a 20 in science will have to retake the entire exam.
	Recently the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) approved of Superscoring. That is, if a test-taker does not have an overall passing composite score, it is possible to add the highest subject scores from each test and divide by the total number of tests to obtain a composite score. ISBE can do the final calculation of a super score. Please refer to a document about Super Scoring available on the Goodwin College of Education website: https://www.neiu.edu/academics/college-of-education/admission-requirements

SAT	ACT plus writing
Has 5 reading passages	Has 4 reading passages
No Science subtest	Has science section testing critical thinking, not specific science knowledge
Math section covers: Arithmetic, Algebra I and II, Geometry, Trigonometry, and Data Analysis	Math section covers : Arithmetic, Algebra I and II, Geometry, Trigonometry, and Probability and Statistics
Some math questions do not allow you to use a calculator	You can use a calculator on all math questions

If I am close to obtaining a passing score, what are my chances for passing the test the next time I take it?

We have learned that candidates who are within 2 points of passing the ACT (e.g., 20 points for a passing score of 22 on the ACT) may meet a passing score within one semester provided they take advantage of test preparation. Candidates must attend support sessions on a regular basis (e.g., 3-4 times a week), and complete any homework/practice materials in order to improve their score. Candidates should not expect to pass the test without engaging in this preparation. We do not currently have information on the TAP or SAT in terms of how close to a passing score a candidate would need to be in order to achieve the passing score within one semester.

If I am not close to obtaining a passing score the first time I take the test, what should I do?

If a candidate’s initial score is below the 2-point gap, it is highly unlikely the candidate will earn a passing score when taking the test again without intensive, continuous remediation and support (i.e., regular one-on-one tutoring sessions 4-5 times per week). Currently, the Goodwin College of Education is not able to offer one-on-one tutoring services.

Wouldn’t it be easier to switch to a different major?

Teaching is a deeply satisfying and meaningful profession that provides opportunity to make a positive difference in a young person’s life. The emotional reward for persistence is worth the effort.

What are my options if I take the test repeatedly and still do not pass?

Candidates are free to study and retake the test as many times as they desire (and can afford). Additionally, some candidates have found that if they have taken one test several times without passing, they have been able to pass on a different test.

Undergraduate candidates may decide to graduate without a teaching license through NEIU’s Interdisciplinary Studies program and can subsequently apply to

one of our graduate teacher preparation programs. However, passing the basic skills test will remain a requirement for student teaching.

Undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Arts in Physical Education program can pursue the Bachelor of Science in Community Health major.

Graduate students in our Master of Arts in Special Education licensure program may contact the Department of Special Education to pursue graduation through the Master of Arts in Special Education-Disabilities Studies degree option.

Graduate students in other teacher licensure programs (i.e., Elementary Education, Early Childhood Education, Middle Level Education, Secondary Education) may transfer to another graduate program. Unfortunately, it is likely that few if any courses taken in their teacher licensure program will apply to another graduate program.