

PCAT Blueprint Changes: 2004–2018

In 1973, the AACCP established the PCAT Advisory Committee to work with The Psychological Corporation (now Pearson) to develop a norm-referenced standardized test. Following experimental administrations in 1973, the first PCAT norms were established, and the PCAT was administered for admissions purposes in the fall of 1974.

Over the ensuing years, requests by the PCAT Advisory Committee periodically resulted in revisions being made to the contents and structure of the test. Prior to 2004, two PCAT published test forms were administered one at a time during alternating test dates during an annual summer through spring testing cycle. Each test form consisted of five multiple-choice subtests—Verbal Ability, Biology, Chemistry, Reading Comprehension, and Quantitative Ability—each with 50–60 operational items (60 for Quantitative Ability only), and a separate experimental item subtest with items for one of the five content areas. All test administrations were paper-based and were conducted at college and university testing centers.

June 2004

- For the 2004–05 testing cycle, at least one new test form was administered for each test date.
- 8 experimental items were embedded within each content area subtest.
- The Quantitative Ability subtest was shortened to 50 operational items.
- The experimental item section was used to field-test writing prompts for the first time.
- New percentile norms were introduced

June 2005

- The sixth section of the test became an operational Writing subtest, with a single score reported that represented each candidate's command of conventions of language.
- The scaled score range was changed to the current 200–600.

June 2007

- For the 2007–08 testing cycle, the length of each multiple-choice subtest was shortened to 40 operational and 8 experimental items.
- Separate Writing scores were reported for Conventions of Language and Problem Solving, along with mean scores indicating the averages of all Writing scores earned by candidates during a given test administration.
- A second Writing subtest was added to field-test new prompts without changing the overall length of the test.
- Changes to the Quantitative Ability subtest were introduced to include items on basic math (replacing geometry items) and to increase the proportions of probability/statistics and pre-calculus items.

June 2008

- For the 2008–09 testing cycle, new percentile norms were introduced.

- Since the 2008–09 testing cycle, all test forms have been in computer-based format (changed from paper-and-pencil), and all test administrations have been conducted at Pearson VUE test centers

July 2012

- For the 2012–13 testing cycle, new percentile norms were introduced.
- The Biology subtest was changed to include a greater proportion of items on genetics, health, and human anatomy and physiology (changed from “anatomy and physiology”).
- The Chemistry subtest was changed to include items on basic biochemistry processes.
- Since the 2012–13 testing cycle, a single earned Writing score has been reported on a 6-point scale, based on an assessment of a candidate’s ability to apply conventions of language and problem-solving skills in the composition of an essay.

July 2014

- Changed the Verbal Ability to be 40 questions instead of 48 (dropped 8 experimental)
- Removed 5 minutes from Verbal Ability.
- All experimental items field-tested for Biological Processes and Chemical Processes were passage-based rather than stand-alone.
- All experimental items field-tested for Critical Reading were based on humanities or social science passage content (rather than science-based).
- All experimental items field-tested for Quantitative Reasoning were scenario-based (word problems, rather than strictly calculation-based).
- The testing time was increased by 5 minutes for the Biological Processes, Chemical Processes, and Quantitative Reasoning subtests.
- Since the 2014–15 testing cycle, the mean Writing score has been based on scores earned by all candidates during the 12 months prior to a given test administration window.

July 2016

- For the 2016–17 testing cycle, new percentile norms were introduced, which are still in effect.
- The Verbal Ability subtest was removed.
- The four remaining multiple-choice subtests were renamed as Biological Processes, Chemical Processes, Critical Reading, and Quantitative Reasoning to more accurately reflect the content assessed.
- The testing time was increased by 5 minutes for the Biological Processes and Chemical Processes subtests.
- The Composite scaled score was changed to an unweighted average of 4 multiple-choice subtests (rather than 5, with the Verbal Ability subtest removed).
- In addition to the traditional stand-alone items, 30% of the Biological Processes and Chemical Processes operational items were associated with passages.
- In addition to passages on science-related topics, 40% of the Critical Reading operational items were associated with passages on humanities and social science topics.

- Operational items on ratios were added to the Quantitative Reasoning subtest, the proportions of pre-calculus and calculus items were reduced, and about 50% of the operational items were word-problem type items.
- Since the 2016–17 testing cycle, candidates are provided with a nonscientific online standard calculator for the Biological Processes, Chemical Processes, and Quantitative Reasoning subtests, and a periodic table of the elements for the Chemical Processes subtest.

July 2018

- Beginning with the 2018–17 testing cycle, 50% of the operational items for the Biological Processes and Chemical Processes items will be passage-based.
- 50% of the operational Critical Reading items will be based on humanities or social science content.
- 50% of the operational Quantitative Reasoning will be word-problem type items.
- The testing time was increased by 5 minutes for the Biological Processes, Chemical Processes, and Quantitative Reasoning subtests.