

## Chapter 1

# Getting to Know You: Meet the HSPT, TACHS, and COOP

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Figuring out why you have to take a Catholic high school entrance exam in the first place
- ▶ Familiarizing yourself with the format and scoring of the HSPT, TACHS, and COOP

**I**f you're planning to attend a Catholic high school, you need to be prepared to pass a special entrance exam. Just what is a Catholic high school entrance exam? And why on earth do you have to take one aside from the fact that most Catholic high schools require it? We enlighten you on that and more in this chapter. Prepare to discover why Catholic high schools want you to take an entrance exam, how they use your scores, and what the particular exam you're facing looks like.

## *Understanding How Schools Use Your Score*

What a Catholic high school does with your entrance exam score really depends on the policies of that particular school. Many schools consider the exam a way to weed out applicants for the incoming freshman class, but some schools also use your score to determine what classes you should be placed in and whether you deserve a scholarship. The following sections delve into these uses of Catholic high school entrance exams in greater detail.

### *The entrance exam as an admissions requirement*

Before you apply to any Catholic high school, you and your parents should research its admissions requirements. You can usually find the most up-to-date information by browsing the high school's Web site or by calling the admissions office or school official in charge of admissions. Read the admissions requirements carefully to find out what entrance exam the high school requires and how the school uses your score. **Note:** Most Catholic high schools require an entrance exam for new freshmen only; transfer students are usually exempt.

Here are some of the degrees to which Catholic high schools may consider your entrance exam for admissions purposes:

- ✓ Some actually don't consider your entrance exam score at all. (They do, however, use it as a placement tool for honors classes; see the next section.)
- ✓ Some may consider your entrance exam score with the same weight as they do your sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade report cards.
- ✓ Other schools put more emphasis on your previous grade point average but do use your entrance exam score for additional admissions consideration (along with letters of recommendation and lists of extracurricular activities).

Most Catholic high schools require more than just your entrance exam score and grade records from the previous three years. Depending on the school, you may also have to submit letters of recommendation, write an essay (some schools even ask your parents to write an essay, too), and participate in an interview. So, there's a good chance your entrance exam score is just one of several admissions requirements you must fulfill to be considered.



Find out how your high school of choice evaluates your entrance exam score by calling the admissions office. Knowing just what's at stake when you walk into the exam is always a good idea.

## *The entrance exam as a placement tool*

Some Catholic high schools actually use your entrance exam score to figure out what classes to place you in during your freshman year. For instance, your score may indicate that you're qualified to take honors courses, such as an advanced math class, or it may let the school's faculty know that you should stick with basic algebra to start.

The number of Advanced Placement (AP) or honors classes you take in high school may influence your chances of being accepted to certain colleges. Some colleges give you college credit as a result of your successful completion of AP courses and AP exams, which means qualifying for and taking AP courses could lessen your college course load and tuition payments down the road. So, scoring your best on your Catholic high school entrance exam can result in big-time future benefits. (See Chapter 2 for tips on how to maximize your entrance exam score.)

## *The entrance exam as a source of scholarships*

Your entrance exam score may also make you eligible for scholarship money, which no doubt would make your parents happy. This extra help toward tuition can be based on your overall score or on how well you do in a specific test section. Perhaps a generous donor who has made a fortune in selling top-of-the-line hole punches has allocated funds designed specifically for freshmen who excel at figuring out those clever holes-in-the-folded-paper questions on the TACHS. Hey, it could happen!

# *Covering Most of the Country: The HSPT*

HSPT stands for High School Placement Test. The exam is produced by the Scholastic Testing Service and is designed for eighth-graders interested in attending a Catholic high school practically anywhere in the country (the New York City area and parts of New Jersey have their own tests, as you find out later in this chapter). The individual high schools that require the HSPT have a lot of control over when it's given, but the test is often held on a Saturday in early December. Usually, you take the test at the high school you're applying to. (**Note:** If you're considering more than one school, it's best to take the test at the high school you like the most.) Whether you're charged a fee to take the exam is up to the high school that administers it. Contact the school official in charge of admissions to get more information on fees and other exam administration policies.

The sections that follow introduce you to the ins and outs of the HSPT, from format to scoring.

## Figuring out the format of the HSPT

The HSPT has nearly 300 multiple-choice questions that you're expected to answer in just over two hours. The questions are numbered from 1 to 298, which is nice because you'll never see a question with the same number as one in a different section. To see what a full-length HSPT test looks like, check out the two practice tests in Chapters 17 and 19.

The content of the HSPT is broken down into five sections called Verbal Skills, Quantitative Skills, Reading, Mathematics, and Language. The different sections have roughly 60 questions each, but the time allotted for each section varies. Except for a few questions in the Verbal Skills and Mathematics sections, each question has four answer choices designated (A), (B), (C), and (D).



Even though we're pretty sure the question types won't change from HSPT to HSPT, make sure you read the directions for each section just to be safe.



The creators of the HSPT have also made available to Catholic high schools three optional multiple-choice tests in the specific areas of Catholic religion, mechanical aptitude, and science. High schools choose whether to require one of these tests in addition to the HSPT, and only a few use them. To find out whether you have to take one of the optional exams, contact the official who's in charge of admissions at the school where you plan to take the HSPT.

### The Verbal Skills section

The HSPT's Verbal Skills section contains 60 questions that you must answer in 16 minutes. If you just did the math on that one, you realize that you have about 15 seconds to answer each question. Relax! That should be enough time because you don't have to do a bunch of reading to answer these questions. Here's what you find in the Verbal Skills section:

- ✓ **Synonyms and antonyms:** These questions give you a word and ask you to choose the answer that's either most similar to it or most opposite. We explain how to answer synonym and antonym questions in Chapter 3.
- ✓ **Grouping words questions:** Expect to see two question types that ask you to categorize words. One type is the analogy question, which we cover in Chapter 4; the other is the type that asks you to find the word that doesn't belong, which we cover in Chapters 3 and 8.
- ✓ **Verbal reasoning:** This question type gives you some statements as well as a conclusion based on those statements. You have to determine whether the conclusion is true, false, or uncertain, which means there are only three answer choices. We show you how to answer these babies in Chapter 8.

### The Quantitative Skills section

The Quantitative Skills section features 52 questions that ask you to complete a sequence, compare values, and create equations. You have 30 minutes to answer all the questions, which means you should spend no more than about 30 seconds per question. Three kinds of questions appear in this section:

- ✓ **Sequence questions:** The HSPT gives you a sequence of numbers and tells you to find the answer that completes the missing number or numbers in the sequence. Flip to Chapter 14 for help answering these questions.
- ✓ **Comparing values:** These questions give you three values and ask you to figure out their relationship. One may be greater than another, or they may all be equal. You choose the answer that describes the correct relationship. See Chapter 15 for insight into how to answer these questions.
- ✓ **Creating equations:** This question type expresses a quantity in words. Your mission is to translate the problem into an equation and solve it. You can find the mathematical equivalents to words in Chapter 13.

### ***The Reading section***

The HSPT's Reading section provides you with 62 questions to answer in 25 minutes, which gives you less than 30 seconds per question. Approximately 40 of the questions are based on a series of about five or six reading passages. The remaining questions are more vocabulary questions. To discover how to answer reading comprehension questions, head to Chapter 5. You can improve your performance on vocabulary questions with the pointers in Chapter 3.



Because reading comprehension questions take more time to answer than vocabulary questions, you may want to jump ahead and answer the vocabulary questions at the end of the Reading section before you answer the reading comprehension questions. Just make sure you mark the answers in the proper places on your answer sheet!

### ***The Mathematics section***

The Mathematics section is broken down into two subsections: Concepts (with 24 questions) and Problem Solving (with 40 questions). The problem-solving questions are mostly word problems (which you can find out more about in Chapter 13). To improve your score in both sections, be sure to review Chapters 10, 11, and 12.

### ***The Language section***

The 25 minutes the HSPT gives you to complete the Language section should be sufficient to answer all 60 questions. Those 60 questions are broken down into 50 questions that ask you to find errors in punctuation, capitalization, usage, and spelling and 10 questions that test your knowledge of sentence construction and written composition. Help for how to recognize punctuation and spelling errors lies in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 offers a refresher on basic grammar, and Chapter 5 helps you figure out how to answer written composition questions.

## ***Scoring the HSPT***

The Scholastic Testing Service (STS) computes how many questions you answer correctly on your HSPT and converts that score to a scaled score that ranges anywhere from 200 to 800. (Yes, you get 200 points just for taking the test. How awesome is that?) The STS then compares you to all the other HSPT test-takers and gives the high school you're applying to a report that shows where you rank both nationally and locally. From there it's up to the high school to figure out what to do with that information. If you have questions, talk to the admissions office at your high school of choice. And if you want to find out your HSPT score, ask the school about that as well, but be prepared for it to pass on sharing your score with you.

### **HSPT-takers beware: The optional essay**

Some Catholic high schools like to see how you write without outside help from parents, siblings, teachers, or your best friend's cousin. So on test day they may ask you to write an essay before taking the HSPT. The topic will be fairly general, along the lines of "Why do you want to attend our school?" Ask a school official in charge of administering the HSPT whether or not you're expected to write an essay. If the answer is yes, prepare

ahead of time by coming up with three reasons that you want to attend that particular high school, such as the school athletic program, its academic reputation, acting opportunities, or other areas that interest you. Just make sure your answer doesn't include the phrase "because my parents are forcing me" and take care to spell the name of the school correctly.

## *For New Yorkers Only: The TACHS*

The TACHS is more formally known as the Test for Admission into Catholic High Schools, and it's exclusively required of eighth-graders who want to go to Catholic high schools in the Diocese of Brooklyn/Queens and the Archdiocese of New York. It's usually given on a November morning at Catholic high schools in the New York City area.

When you sign up for the TACHS, you have to pay an examination fee (which is currently \$49, although that can change), which includes the registration materials, a student handbook, test materials, and score reports to three high schools of your choice and the Catholic elementary school you attend (or your home if you don't go to a Catholic elementary school). The TACHS has a very informative Web site ([www.tachsinfo.com](http://www.tachsinfo.com)) where you can download a handbook and see a sample practice test. Or you can just head to Chapters 21 and 23 for the two TACHS practice tests you already have right here in your hot little hands.

Following is some information on the format of the TACHS's various sections and how the exam is scored.

### *Deciphering the format of the TACHS*

The TACHS varies a bit from year to year, but generally it contains around 200 multiple-choice questions. Plan for a total testing time of around three or four hours, including the time it takes for you to fill in the preliminary test sections and for the proctor to explain the directions. The odd-numbered questions designate the answers as (A), (B), (C), and (D), and the even-numbered questions mark the answer choices as (J), (K), (L), and (M). Each section of the test begins with question number 1, so make sure you're marking your answers on the right section of your answer sheet.

Most of the four sections of the TACHS break down into subcategories. The Reading section has subsections on vocabulary and comprehension. The Language section has one part for spotting errors in usage and mechanics and another for testing your knowledge of written composition. The Math section features standard math problems and an entire section dedicated to estimating. Finally, the unusual questions in the Ability section test your reasoning skills. The creators of the TACHS change the test's format a little bit every year, so the number of questions of each type vary.

#### *The Reading section*

The approximately 10 to 20 vocabulary questions in the TACHS's Reading section are mere synonym questions (find out more about these in Chapter 3). You have about 5 to 10 minutes to answer them all. Standard reading comprehension passages and questions make up the rest of this section. Expect to encounter around 20 to 30 questions based on several passages and have about 25 minutes to answer them. (We cover how to answer reading comprehension questions in Chapter 5.)

#### *The Language section*

To study for the approximately 40 capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and usage questions in the Language section, read Chapters 6 and 7. Assistance for the remaining 10 questions (which, by the way, deal with written composition) can be found in Chapter 5. The TACHS gives you about 23 minutes to spot the errors and around 7 minutes to correct the sentence composition.

### ***The Math section***

The first 30 questions or so in the TACHS's Math section ask you standard math questions about numbers, basic operations, charts and graphs, and problem solving. The remaining questions (approximately 18) ask you only to estimate the answers to simple math problems. Brushing up on your math by reading Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13 will help you fly through this section in the approximately 40 minutes you're given.

### ***The Ability section***

The TACHS presents you with a few question types you may not have seen before. Depending on the whims of the test-makers, the TACHS's Ability section features about 10 to 30 questions that you must answer in roughly 5 to 15 minutes. The majority of them have you evaluate the similarities and differences in shapes and figures. Reading Chapter 15 on quantitative comparisons and Chapter 4 on analogies can help you answer these questions. The last approximately 10 questions in this section provide you with pictures of a folded piece of paper with holes punched in it. Your charge? To use your powers of reasoning to choose the answer choice that displays the proper pattern of holes when the page is unfolded. (We share tips for answering this very distinct question type in Chapter 15.)

## ***Scoring the TACHS***

The TACHS administrators calculate your score based on how many of the questions you answer correctly. They then report your score to up to three high schools of your choosing and to your Catholic elementary school if you attend one. If you don't, they send your scores directly to you. Scores are usually sent to the high schools in December, but you won't receive your report until January. From there the high schools can interpret and use your score as they see fit. To get more information on how the high school you're interested in attending uses your TACHS score, contact its admissions office.

## ***Strictly for the Garden State: The COOP***

The COOP exam (or the Cooperative Admissions Examination Program) is administered to eighth-graders who want to attend a Catholic high school in New Jersey's Archdiocese of Newark or Diocese of Paterson. The test is usually held in November at participating Catholic high schools. The COOP test changes a little bit every year, but the tested concepts remain the same. To find out exactly what questions will appear on your exam, visit the helpful COOP Web site at [coopexam.org](http://coopexam.org). In the summer before the exam date, the COOP powers-that-be present a practice test there that gives a sampling of the question types they'll use that year. In the meantime, check out the two practice COOPs we include in Chapters 25 and 27.

The COOP charges an application fee (which is currently \$40). It reports your score to up to three high schools of your choice in January; it also sends a score report to your Catholic elementary school (you'll receive your report at your home if you're home-schooled). Want to find out more about the COOP's format and scoring? Check out the following sections.

### ***Walking through the COOP's format***

Though the format varies a little bit, the nearly 200 test questions on the COOP usually have four answer choices designated (A), (B), (C), and (D) for odd-numbered questions and (F), (G), (H), and (J) for even-numbered ones. The roughly two-and-a-half-hour test covers sequences, analogies, quantitative reasoning, verbal reasoning, reading and language arts, and mathematics.

### ***The Sequences section***

The approximately 20 sequence questions in the first section of the COOP involve figures, shapes, numbers, and letters. You have about 15 minutes to evaluate the given information and find the answer choice that completes the sequence. Chapter 14 gives you tips on how to cruise through this section on exam day.

### ***The Analogies section***

The 20 analogy questions on the COOP are a little different from some of the others you may have seen — they compare pictures rather than words. To find out how to work through these questions in the approximately 7 minutes allotted, read through Chapter 4.

### ***The Quantitative Reasoning section***

The Quantitative Reasoning section gives you 15 minutes to answer about 20 questions that ask you to deal with numbers in unusual ways. Following is a rundown of the question types (find out how to answer them in Chapter 15):

- ✓ **Finding the quantitative relationship:** These questions feature a series of three number relationships joined by the same mathematical operation. Your job is to find the operation and use it to pick an answer choice that completes the last relationship.
- ✓ **Calculating shaded areas:** Several questions present you with a shape that has a shaded portion. You must choose the fraction that indicates how much of the shape is shaded.
- ✓ **Balancing the scale:** This unusual question type tells you what quantity of squares equals a certain number of triangles. Based on this information, you have to choose an answer that balances the scale.

### ***The Verbal Reasoning sections***

A glutton for your punishment, the COOP boasts two Verbal Reasoning sections: One deals with word relationships, and the other deals with logic problems. Each section has around 20 questions for you to answer within 15 minutes. The first Verbal Reasoning section features several different question types:

- ✓ **Finding the necessary part:** These questions give you a word and then ask you to choose the answer that's necessary to the given word. In other words, they want you to pick the answer that conveys something that must be present for the given word to exist. For instance, a necessary part of the word *dentist* is *teeth*. Without teeth, dentists wouldn't exist. See Chapter 8 for more on this question type.
- ✓ **Examining series of analogies:** You may see a question that gives you two rows of words. The words in the top row have a relationship to one another, and the words in the bottom row are related similarly. After you've figured out the relationship in the top row, you must choose the answer that properly completes the analogy in the second row. Chapters 4 and 8 can help you with series-of-analogies questions.
- ✓ **Eliminating the word that doesn't belong:** Yes, technically you want the word that doesn't fit with the others, but the way to find it is to find the words in the answer choices that *are* alike. Check out Chapter 8 for more on this question type.
- ✓ **Choosing the word that *does* belong:** Just when you get comfortable eliminating words that don't belong, the COOP asks you to pick a word that *does* belong. It gives you three words that are similar, and you have to choose the answer that has a similar meaning. These are really just fancy synonym questions; head to Chapters 3 and 8 for tips.

The second Verbal Reasoning section requires you to examine a bunch of statements and draw the most logical conclusion. Expect to face about 20 of these questions. We show you how to pick the best answer (and avoid the wrong ones) in Chapter 8.

## Introducing the ISEE and SSAT

Not all Catholic high schools require the HSPT, COOP, or TACHS. A few may examine your scores on tests you've already taken in elementary or middle school, such as the Iowa Basics or SRA tests, or they may rely on other standardized entrance exams, such as the ISEE (Independent School Entrance Exam) and SSAT (Secondary School Admission Test). Private schools generally rely on these two tests for admitting freshmen and placing them in classes, but neither test is used specifically by Catholic high schools. Some Catholic high schools, however, may require you to take one of them, or you may wind up deciding to apply to a private high school that isn't Catholic. In either case, you should know that both of these exams test concepts that are very similar to those found on the HSPT, TACHS, and COOP. In fact, preparing for the three tests covered in this book gives you an excellent preparation for the ISEE and SSAT too.

You'll see questions on math, reading, verbal reasoning, and vocabulary on all five exams, but one of the big differences between the ISEE and SSAT and the three tests covered in this book is that the ISEE and SSAT require you to write an essay. (That makes your Catholic high school entrance exam seem lots better all of a sudden, doesn't it?) Another thing you don't have to worry about that SSAT test-takers do is a penalty for a wrong answer. The SSAT takes off a quarter of a point for every wrong answer, which gives you a whole guessing philosophy to master.

If you need to take one of these other tests, you can find out more about it by contacting the high school that requires it. The SSAT also has a very informative Web site; check it out at [www.ssat.org](http://www.ssat.org). You can find information about the ISEE at [www.erbtest.org](http://www.erbtest.org); choose ISEE where it asks you to select the test you want to know about.

### *The Reading and Language Arts section*

The COOP combines reading comprehension questions and questions about proper English usage and writing in the same section. The passages you see in this section draw on the concepts we review in Chapters 5, 6, and 7 to provide you with a combination of questions that test your ability to understand what you read and evaluate sentences for all sorts of errors. Luckily, the test gives you about 40 minutes to answer the 40 questions in this section, so you have a lot of time to take on this task.

### *The Mathematics section*

You have 35 minutes to complete the approximately 40 questions in the COOP's Mathematics section. The variety of concepts tested in this section spans everything from basic operations and inequalities to geometry, charts, and graphs. Make sure you understand what's covered in Chapters 10, 11, and 12 if you want to ace this section.

## *Scoring the COOP*

The COOP test-makers scale your raw score of total questions answered correctly and convert that scale to a percentage. They then send your report to the three (or fewer) Catholic high schools of your choice. The schools get to decide how to interpret and use your score. To find out just how your scores will be interpreted and used, contact the high school you're interested in attending.