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## Chapter 1

# Countdown to Taking the ASVAB

**T**he ASVAB is a battery of tests (ten in all) designed to tell the military where you'll shine as a service member based on your current knowledge and your aptitude for learning more. The military uses a combination of direct scores, line scores, and composite scores to determine what jobs it's willing to offer you in the branch of service you choose. If you don't earn at least the minimum scores required for the job you want, the military says, "Too bad — how about this job instead?" But even if you want a job that requires the absolute minimum scores, it pays to study; your ASVAB scores are practically written in stone for your entire military career. If you want to change jobs in the future but don't have the scores to qualify for the field you want, you have to retake the entire test.

Before you decide what (and when) to study, know that four subtests — Word Knowledge, Paragraph Comprehension, Mathematics Knowledge, and Arithmetic Reasoning — determine whether you even qualify to join the military. Those subtests make up the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), and if you don't pass muster on those, you aren't eligible to enlist. Each branch sets its own AFQT score requirements.

This chapter gives you a blank study plan that helps prepare you for test day. You can personalize your plan based on how much time you have before you take the test by using the tips in the following sections.

# Determining How Much Time You Have

Whether you need to brush up on a lot of knowledge or you just need to refresh your memory in a few areas, creating an action plan can help ensure you cover all your bases. Your recruiter will call the Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS) to find out when you can take the ASVAB, but ultimately, you control when you take the test. If you don't feel ready, let your recruiter know — if you don't take the time to study areas that are important to you, you could end up being offered jobs you aren't that excited about.

Though you may need more (or less) time to prepare, plan to dedicate at least a few weeks to studying important areas. Research has shown that the best way to study isn't to cram; it's to use repetition. That means you should focus, then focus twice more, on subjects you know you need to improve. If you review new material (or old material that feels new) the day after you learn it, then again about a week later, and one more time a couple weeks after that, it may be easier for your brain to hang on to the information.

## Checking Your Baseline

If you want to go on a three-mile run (which is another thing you should probably practice before you join the military), you don't start counting the miles at an arbitrary point along the way; you start when you step outside your front door. If you want to see your improvement over time, you also keep track of how long it takes you to cover three miles each time you lace up your running shoes.

The same is true with ASVAB prep: You can't get an accurate picture of your skills — or track your future progress — without establishing a baseline first. The best way to figure out how much you already know (and which areas you need to work on) is to test yourself. Start by attempting ten questions in each chapter and then checking the answers in Chapter 11. If you get more than seven or eight right in one subject, you most likely have a healthy amount of knowledge on that topic. If you get fewer than five or six right in one subject, you almost certainly need to bookmark that chapter for extra practice. You may also need to do a little extra research in that area.



TIP

Even if you think you don't need to study for a particular subtest, it's a good idea to tackle at least a few practice questions in that area. Doing so will familiarize you with that subtest's question formats, and it may prove that you already have solid skills (or show you that you don't remember as much as you thought you did).



REMEMBER

If you know you'd never survive a day as a mechanic, you may want to skip the Auto and Shop subtest; if you'd hate working as an electrician or with machinery, you probably don't need to practice for the Electronics Information subtest. And most people — except the few who are going for a handful of Navy ratings (jobs) that require it — don't need to spend much time studying for the Assembling Objects subtest. But remember: It's better to get the highest score possible on every subtest. That way, if you want to change jobs in the future, you won't have to retake the ASVAB. (In case you were wondering, it's not possible to retake only one or two subtests; you have to retake the whole thing. Also, your new scores replace your old ones, even if they're lower than they were the first time around.)

# Planning Your Approach

As soon as you get a date from your recruiter, create a study timeline. As long as you stick to it (and absorb the information you learn), you'll position yourself for success when test day arrives. Use the following as a guideline for how frequently you need to hit the books:

- » **12 weeks:** Study at least **two times** per week, focusing on one or two topics at a time.
- » **8 weeks:** Study at least **three times** per week, focusing on two or three topics if necessary.
- » **4 weeks:** Study at least **four times** per week, focusing on all necessary topics.
- » **2 weeks:** Study at least **five times** per week, focusing on all necessary topics.
- » **1 week:** Study **each day** until the day before the test, focusing on all necessary topics. In this case, you may want to take all the practice questions in one chapter in one day; then, study only the questions and concepts you got wrong. Take all the practice questions in another chapter the next day, following the same routine of studying what you answered incorrectly.



TIP

This book comes with free online practice, which means you can spice things up. See the Introduction for instructions to sign up for your free one-year subscription.

## Tracking your successes

Fill in Table 1-1 with your plan's details; if you don't need to study for a particular subtest, cross it out. Then, come back to this chapter to track how many questions you got right during each study session.

**TABLE 1-1** Personalized Study Timeline

Subject	Study Days	Correct Answers
Word Knowledge (Chapter 2)	1.	Session 1:
	2.	Session 2:
	3.	Session 3:
Paragraph Comprehension (Chapter 3)	1.	Session 1:
	2.	Session 2:
	3.	Session 3:
Mathematics Knowledge (Chapter 4)	1.	Session 1:
	2.	Session 2:
	3.	Session 3:
Arithmetic Reasoning (Chapter 5)	1.	Session 1:
	2.	Session 2:
	3.	Session 3:

(continued)

**TABLE 1-1** (continued)

Subject	Study Days	Correct Answers
General Science (Chapter 6)	1. 2. 3.	Session 1: Session 2: Session 3:
Auto and Shop Information (Chapter 7)	1. 2. 3.	Session 1: Session 2: Session 3:
Mechanical Comprehension (Chapter 8)	1. 2. 3.	Session 1: Session 2: Session 3:
Electronics Information (Chapter 9)	1. 2. 3.	Session 1: Session 2: Session 3:
Assembling Objects (Chapter 10)	1. 2. 3.	Session 1: Session 2: Session 3:



REMEMBER

When you learn (or relearn) information, it's best to review it the next day, again the next week, and at least one more time a couple of weeks later. Repetition is one of the best ways to ensure facts are built into your long-term memory.

## Kicking off your first study session

After you establish your baseline by trying your hand at ten practice questions from each subtest, focus on the areas where you performed the worst. Review the questions you got wrong *and* the questions you got right. Chapter 11 contains many answers that explain the processes you need to use to solve problems or extra information that can help you remember important points. Then, spend time studying the principles behind those problems. For example, if you performed poorly on the Mathematics Knowledge subtest, particularly in questions that involved algebra, head to your favorite math website and brush up on the basics before you attempt your next set of questions. You may also want to check out *ASVAB For Dummies* (Wiley), which gives you in-depth details on every topic the ASVAB covers.



TIP

When it's time to dig in and start studying, block off an hour or two. Take a five-minute break every half hour to clear your head and stretch your legs. If your mind starts to wander, take another break.

After you study, dive back into the practice questions. As you check your answers, make note of those you got wrong and jot down the concepts you need to study for next time. Record your performance in Table 1-1 so you can track your improvement over time.

## Diving into subsequent study sessions

Review all your answers from your last batch of practice questions. Give yourself a quick refresher on everything you learned during your last study session first. Then incorporate some new material based on the questions you answered incorrectly during your last practice. As with your first study session, spend an hour or two taking deep dives into information you didn't get quite right while you were answering practice questions.

After you wrap up a study session, answer as many practice questions as you'd like. If you have several weeks before you take the test, you may want to answer as few as ten questions in one sitting; if you're short on time, you may want to try several more questions to get a quicker look at where you need to focus your efforts.



WARNING

The practice questions you see in this book, or in any other study guide, aren't on the actual ASVAB. Test materials are highly controlled items — they're kept under lock and key (seriously) to prevent people from cheating. Don't memorize the answers to your practice questions; learn the concepts behind them instead.

## Digging into Additional Learning Resources

You may find that you need a push in the right direction when it comes to the concepts behind ASVAB questions. If that's the case, there's probably a *For Dummies* book for you! Here are a few of my favorite resources (all published by Wiley) to get you started:

- »» *ASVAB For Dummies* by Angie Papple Johnston
- »» *ASVAB AFQT For Dummies* by Angie Papple Johnston and Rod Powers
- »» *1,001 ASVAB AFQT Practice Questions For Dummies* by Angie Papple Johnston
- »» *Vocabulary For Dummies* by Laurie E. Rozakis
- »» *Basic Math & Pre-Algebra for Dummies* by Mark Zegarelli
- »» *Algebra I For Dummies* by Mary Jane Sterling
- »» *Geometry For Dummies* by Mark Ryan
- »» *Biology For Dummies* by René Fester Kratz
- »» *Chemistry For Dummies* by John T. Moore
- »» *Physics I For Dummies* by Steven Holzner
- »» *Electronics For Dummies* by Cathleen Shamieh
- »» *Auto Repair For Dummies* by Deanna Sclar
- »» *Woodworking For Dummies* by Jeff Strong

# Coming to Grips with Retesting Policies

If you don't perform well enough to enlist or to qualify for the job you want, you may be able to retest — but only under certain circumstances, which each branch determines on its own. Usually, ASVAB scores remain valid for enlistment purposes for two years. In most cases, you can't simply retake the test if you're not happy with your scores, and in *all* cases, you must wait at least one month before retesting.

You may retest if you were unable to complete the test thanks to unusual circumstances, such as being called away from testing due to a personal emergency or MEPS catching on fire in the middle of a test. But unusual circumstances aside, the following policies govern retesting in the five military branches that accept new enlistees:

- » **Army:** You may retest only if your previous ASVAB score has expired or you fail to get a high enough AFQT score to qualify for enlistment. Recruiters can't schedule you for a retest if you simply want to increase your scores.
- » **Air Force:** You may retest only if your current line scores limit the Air Force's ability to find a job you qualify for *and* the recruiting flight chief approves. You can't retest if you've already enlisted in the Delayed Entry Program or you already hold a job or aptitude area reservation.
- » **Navy:** You may retest only if your previous ASVAB score is expired or you fail to achieve a qualifying AFQT score.
- » **Marine Corps:** You may retest only if your previous ASVAB score is expired or your recruiter requests that you get another shot because your current scores don't seem to reflect your true capabilities.
- » **Coast Guard:** You may retest to raise your scores only if at least six months have passed since your last test. However, your recruiter may request a retest after one month has passed if they have a substantial reason to believe your original scores don't truly reflect your education, training, or experience.