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Chapter 1

Taking a Closer Look at the AFQT

If you're thinking about joining the U.S. military, your Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) score may well be the most important score you earn on any military test. It determines whether you even qualify for enlistment in the branch you choose. Without a qualifying AFQT score, your recruiter will tell you to go home, study, and try again in a few months. You could be a young Avenger in the making, in perfect health, and able to run 3 miles in 15 minutes, but none of that matters if you don't have a qualifying AFQT score.

The Armed Services have years and years of research to back up their policy of using the AFQT score as an enlistment qualification. Dozens of studies have shown that a person's AFQT score is one of the most significant factors in determining whether they'll make it through basic training and their first enlistment period. As of 2018, the latest year for which data is available, it cost between \$55,000 and \$74,000 to process a new recruit for enlistment and send that person through basic training and job-specific schooling, so you can see why the services want to maximize their chances of getting their money's worth.

Thankfully, with a little review, you should be able to score well on the AFQT. The score is, after all, composed of four areas that you studied intensely during your high-school years: basic math, math word problems, vocabulary, and reading. That's where this new edition of *ASVAB AFQT For Dummies* comes in. Other test-prep books, such as *ASVAB For Dummies* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), try to prepare you for the entire Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) and may be a great addition to your review, but this book is specifically designed to help you boost the most important ASVAB score of all: the AFQT score.

Viewing the AFQT Close-Up

The military uses four of the ASVAB subtests to compute your AFQT score. This score determines whether you're qualified to join the military service of your choice. Each branch of military service has its own minimum AFQT score standards.

Here are the four subtests that make up your AFQT score:

- » **Arithmetic Reasoning:** The Arithmetic Reasoning subtest consists of math word problems. The subtest is multiple-choice. On the computerized-adaptive test (the CAT version or CAT-ASVAB), which most applicants take, you get 39 minutes to correctly solve 16 questions. If you're taking the paper version, you get 36 minutes to solve as many of the 30 problems as you can. Chapter 10 leads you step-by-step through solving math word problems. Take a look at Chapter 11 for some tips on doing well on this subtest.
- » **Word Knowledge:** The Word Knowledge subtest is a vocabulary test plain and simple. You have to find words that are "closest in meaning" or "most opposite in meaning" to underlined words in the question stem. You have to define 16 words in 8 minutes on the CAT-ASVAB or define 35 words in 11 minutes on the paper version. You can boost your vocabulary knowledge by following the advice in Chapter 4 and get an idea of what the subtest is all about in Chapter 5.
- » **Paragraph Comprehension:** The Paragraph Comprehension subtest requires you to read a paragraph and then answer one to four questions about information contained in that paragraph. The computerized version has 11 questions in all, and you're expected to complete the subtest in 22 minutes; the paper version has 15 questions you have to power through in 13 minutes. Chapter 6 can help you sharpen your reading comprehension skills, and you can get a little practice with the Paragraph Comprehension subtest in Chapter 7. (**Note:** Many other standardized tests refer to this type of question as "reading comprehension." The military likes to do things its own way, so it refers to them as "paragraph comprehension" questions. Different name, same thing.)
- » **Mathematics Knowledge:** This subtest measures your ability to solve high-school level math problems. You have to solve 16 basic math problems in 20 minutes on the CAT-ASVAB or 25 questions in 24 minutes on the paper version. Like the other subtests of the AFQT, all the questions are multiple-choice. To make sure your math skills measure up, see Chapter 8. Chapter 9 gives you an idea about the test format as well as a little extra math practice.

If you have a high AFQT score, you can expect your recruiter to be wining and dining you, offering you all kinds of enlistment incentives, and telling everyone in the office that you're a rockstar. On the other hand, if your AFQT score is below the minimum standards set by that service, you can expect your recruiter to say, "Don't call us. We'll call you." If you have a qualifying AFQT score that's mediocre, you can probably still enlist, but you'll most likely miss out on the extras, such as enlistment bonuses. (Maybe you'll get a free T-shirt.)

The AFQT isn't a stand-alone test. You can't just walk into a recruiter's office and say you want to take the AFQT. You have to take the entire ASVAB, which consists of nine separate subtests. Your AFQT score determines whether you're qualified to join the service of your choice. (Turn to the section "Scoring the AFQT" later in this chapter for more on the qualifying scores for each service.)



REMEMBER

The AFQT isn't the only qualifying standard the military uses. You have to meet all set standards in order to qualify for enlistment, including age, height and weight, number of dependents, medical history, education level, and criminal history.

Reaping the Benefits of the Highest Possible Score

The services put great stock in your AFQT score. Not only does a high AFQT score give you a greater chance of enlistment, but it also means you may have access to special incentives, such as the following:

- » **Enlistment bonuses and benefits:** Depending on current recruiting needs, individual services often tie the AFQT score to enlistment incentives, such as monetary bonuses or education benefits. For example, the Army often requires a minimum AFQT score of 50 to qualify for a bonus or to qualify for the Student Loan Repayment Program and other programs and benefits.
- » **More access to desirable jobs:** Most military jobs are tied to individual line scores derived from the entire ASVAB, but certain enlistment programs sometimes require a minimum AFQT score that is significantly higher than the minimum score needed for a regular enlistment. For example, some Navy jobs (such as those in the nuclear field) require a higher AFQT score.
- » **Education level:** You have to have a high-school diploma in order to join any of the services. The services can, however, take a limited number of applicants with high-school equivalency certificates each year. To qualify with one of these certificates, you must often score higher on the AFQT than a qualified high-school diploma holder.
- » **Quotas:** When the services are doing well meeting their recruitment goals, they run out of space before they run out of applicants. At these times, the services get to pick and choose whom they let join and whom they don't. Branches commonly raise their AFQT minimum scores temporarily to separate the best-qualified applicants from the rest. Sometimes enlistment gets so competitive that the services require a minimum score of 50 just to consider you. As of this writing, minimum scores for the services tend to rest in the 30s.
- » **Waivers:** One past study indicated that only three out of ten people who walked into a recruiter's office were qualified for enlistment. Certain factors — such as criminal history, age, education level, number of dependents, or medical history — made them ineligible. Some of these eligibility criteria can be waived (sometimes with difficulty and processing delays). However, when the military grants a waiver, it's taking a chance on an otherwise ineligible recruit. For example, if you have criminal misdeeds in your past and require a waiver to enlist, a service is much more likely to grant the waiver if you score 85 on the AFQT than it is if you score 45.



WARNING

Enlistment standards, programs, quotas, and incentives change — sometimes on a week-by-week basis — depending on the service's current recruiting needs. For the latest information, check with a military recruiter.

The AFQT is scored as a percentile. That means, for example, that if you score 70, you've scored as well as or higher than 70 percent of the people whose knowledge yours was measured against. The highest possible score on the AFQT is 99.



TIP

The AFQT isn't a one-shot deal. If you don't achieve a qualifying score, you can retest. After your first test, you have to wait at least 30 days to take a second test. After the second test, in most cases, you have to wait six months before you can test again. Keep in mind the age requirements and needs of the service. Although you can retest, getting a qualifying score upfront is the best way to keep your recruiter happy and your training and placement on schedule.

Understanding the ASVAB from 30,000 Feet

Depending on where and why you take the test, you may encounter two different versions of the ASVAB: the computerized version and the pencil-and-paper version.

The computerized version of the ASVAB (CAT-ASVAB) contains nine separately timed subtests. On the CAT-ASVAB, Auto Information and Shop Information are separated into two different tests, whereas they're combined on the paper version. In Table 1-1, I outline the nine ASVAB subtests in the order that you take them; the bolded subtests are used to calculate the AFQT score.

TABLE 1-1 Details about the ASVAB Subtests

Subtest	Questions/Time (CAT-ASVAB)	Questions/Time (Paper Version)	Content
General Science	15 questions, 10 minutes	25 questions, 11 minutes	General principles of biological and physical sciences
Arithmetic Reasoning	15 questions, 55 minutes	30 questions, 36 minutes	Math word problems
Word Knowledge	15 questions, 9 minutes	35 questions, 11 minutes	Correct meaning of a word and best synonym or antonym for a given word
Paragraph Comprehension	10 questions, 27 minutes	15 questions, 13 minutes	Questions based on paragraphs (usually a few hundred words) that you read
Mathematics Knowledge	15 questions, 23 minutes	25 questions, 24 minutes	High-school math
Electronics Information	15 questions, 10 minutes	20 questions, 9 minutes	Electricity and electronic principles and terminology
Auto and Shop Information	10 Auto Information questions, 7 minutes; 10 Shop Information questions, 6 minutes	25 questions, 11 minutes	Knowledge of automobiles, shop terminology, and tool use
Mechanical Comprehension	15 questions, 22 minutes	25 questions, 19 minutes	Basic mechanical and physical principles
Assembling Objects	15 questions, 17 minutes	25 questions, 15 minutes	Spatial orientation

You can't take just the four AFQT subtests of the ASVAB. You have to take all nine subtests in order to get a qualifying AFQT score. The military isn't set up to give *partial* ASVAB tests. For example, if you take the ASVAB and get line scores that qualify you for the military job you want but your AFQT score is too low to join, you have to retake the entire ASVAB — not just the four subtests that make up the AFQT — to get a higher AFQT score.



REMEMBER

During the initial enlistment process, your service branch determines your military job or enlistment program based on the minimum *line scores* it has established. Line scores are computed from the various subtests of the ASVAB. If you get an appropriate score in the appropriate areas, you can get the job you want — as long as that job is available and you meet other qualification factors.

The following sections examine the computerized ASVAB and the pencil-and-paper ASVAB and explain what you need to know.

The computerized ASVAB (CAT-ASVAB)

Nobody really cares about the AFQT score except the military — but the military cares *a lot!* Because you're reading this book, I'm willing to bet that you're interested in joining the military. And if you're interested in joining the military, you'll most likely take the computerized version of the ASVAB. That's because most people taking the ASVAB for the purpose of joining the military take it at a Military Entrance Processing Station (MEPS), and all these places use the computerized test.



REMEMBER

The computerized version of the ASVAB — called the *CAT-ASVAB* (*CAT* stands for Computerized Adaptive Testing) — has the same questions as the paper version. The main difference: The *CAT-ASVAB* adapts the questions it offers you based on your level of proficiency. (As you may have guessed, that's why it's called *adaptive*.) The first test question is of average difficulty. If you answer this question correctly, the next question is more difficult. If you answer the first question incorrectly, the computer gives you an easier question. (By contrast, on the pencil-and-paper ASVAB, easy, medium, and hard questions are presented randomly.) On the ASVAB, harder questions are worth more points than easier questions are, so you want to get to them sooner to maximize your score.

Pros of taking the CAT-ASVAB

Maybe it's because most people are more comfortable in front of a computer than they are with paper and pencil, but military recruiters have noted that among applicants who've taken both the paper-based version and the computerized version of the ASVAB, recruits tend to score slightly higher on the computerized version of the test.

When you take the *CAT-ASVAB*, the computer automatically calculates and prints your standard scores for each subtest and your line scores for each service branch. (If you're interested in line scores, which are used for military job-classification purposes, you may want to pick up a copy of *ASVAB For Dummies* [John Wiley & Sons, Inc.].) This machine is a pretty smart cookie; it also calculates your AFQT score on the spot. With the computerized version, you usually know whether you qualify for military enlistment on the same day you take the test and, if so, which jobs you qualify for.

Cons of taking the CAT-ASVAB

Unlike the pencil-and-paper version, you can't skip questions or change your answers after you enter them on the *CAT-ASVAB*. This restriction can make taking the test harder for some people. Instead of being able to go through and immediately answering all the questions you're sure of and then coming back to the questions that require you to do some head scratching, you have to answer each question as it comes. Also, judging how much time to spend on a difficult question before guessing and moving on can be tough. Finally, if you have a few minutes at the end of the test, you can't go back and check to make sure you marked the correct answer to each question.

Trying on tryout questions

I hate to break it to you, but if you take the computerized version of the ASVAB, you also get tryout questions. *Tryout* questions are new questions that ASVAB designers are testing to see if they're good or bad. Luckily, they don't count toward your score; unluckily, everyone who takes the computerized version of the test gets 15 extra questions in two to four of the ASVAB subtests. That means you'll answer 30 to 60 additional questions that don't count toward your score — but you do get extra time to complete each subtest that comes with tryout questions attached.

Your total time to complete each subtest that has tryout questions is as follows:

- » General Science: 20 minutes
- » Arithmetic Reasoning: 113 minutes
- » Word Knowledge: 18 minutes
- » Paragraph Comprehension: 75 minutes
- » Mathematics Knowledge: 47 minutes
- » Electronics Information: 21
- » Auto Information: 18 minutes
- » Shop Information: 17 minutes
- » Mechanical Comprehension: 42 minutes
- » Assembling Objects: 36 minutes



REMEMBER

Tryout questions only appear on the computerized version of the test, and they don't count toward your score. They appear on two, three, or four of your subtests, not all of them.

The pencil-and-paper test

Most people who take the pencil-and-paper version of the ASVAB do so under the *ASVAB Career Exploration Program*, a cooperative program between the Department of Education and the Department of Defense at high schools all across the United States. Although the results of this version can be used for military enlistment purposes (if taken within two years of enlistment), its primary purpose is to serve as a tool for guidance counselors to use when recommending possible careers to high-school students.

You can also take the pencil-and-paper version for purposes of enlistment through a recruiter, but that's not done very often these days. In unusual circumstances, when it's impractical for an applicant to travel to a MEPS location, recruiters can arrange for applicants to take the pencil-and-paper version at a Military Entrance Test (MET) site.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Another version of the ASVAB is the Armed Forces Classification Test (AFCT). This version is used by folks already in the military who want to improve their ASVAB scores for the purposes of retraining for a different military job. Except for the name of the exam, the AFCT is exactly the same as the other versions of the ASVAB.

Pros of taking the paper-and-pencil test

The paper-based test allows you to skip questions that you don't know the answer to and come back to them later. You can't do that on the CAT-ASVAB. This option can be a real help when you're racing against the clock and want to get as many answers right as possible. You can change an answer on the subtest you're currently working on, but you can't change an answer on a subtest after the time for that subtest has expired.

You can mark up the exam booklet as much as you want. If you skip a question, you can circle the number of the question in your booklet to remind yourself to go back to it. If you don't know the answer to a question, you can cross off the answers that seem unlikely or wrong to you and then guess based on the remaining answers.

THE MINI-AFQT

You may take a sort of “mini-AFQT” in the recruiter’s office. This test is called the Computer Adaptive Screening Test (CAST). Another version in use is called the Enlistment Screening Test (EST).

The CAST and EST aren’t qualification tests; they’re strictly recruiting tools that recruiters may use at their discretion. The CAST and EST contain questions similar (but not identical) to questions appearing on the ASVAB. They help estimate an applicant’s probability of obtaining a qualifying AFQT score. If you take one of these mini-tests and score low, you probably don’t want to take the actual ASVAB until you’ve put in some extensive study time. In fact, many recruiters won’t even schedule you for the ASVAB unless you score well on the CAST or EST.

Cons of taking the paper-and-pencil test

On the pencil-and-paper version, harder questions are intermingled with easier questions, so you may find yourself spending too much time trying to figure out the answer to a question that’s too hard for you, and you may miss answering some easier questions at the end of the subtest because you ran out of time. The result: Your overall score will be lower.

The paper answer sheets are scored by an optical scanning machine. The machine has a conniption when it comes across an incompletely filled-in answer circle or stray pencil marks and will often stubbornly refuse to give you credit for these questions, even if you answered correctly.

Scoring the AFQT

The military uses some pretty complicated calculations to determine applicants’ AFQT scores. Because harder questions carry more weight than easy questions do, the military can’t give you a letter grade or a percentage of questions that you answered correctly; that wouldn’t tell the armed forces exactly how much you know about each subject.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Lots of people (mistakenly) call the AFQT score their “ASVAB score.” You commonly hear someone say, “I got a 67 on the ASVAB,” or “My ASVAB score was 92.” That’s not correct; it implies that the AFQT is derived from all nine subtests of the ASVAB, and it’s not. The AFQT score is computed from just four of the ASVAB subtests — the four subtests of the ASVAB that measure your math and vocabulary and reading skills (refer to the section “Understanding the ASVAB from 30,000 Feet” earlier in this chapter).

In this section, I explain how the AFQT is scored.

Comprehending raw scores

The military scores each subtest of the ASVAB by using a raw score. A *raw score* is the total number of points you receive on each subtest of the ASVAB. You don’t see your raw scores on the printout you receive from your recruiter after completing the test. The recruiter walks you back to the waiting area and retrieves two or three copies of your scores on a printout that includes all your line scores for each branch, your AFQT percentile, and some other information.



REMEMBER

You can’t use the practice tests in this book (or any other ASVAB or AFQT study guide) to calculate your probable ASVAB scores. ASVAB scores are calculated using raw scores, and raw scores aren’t determined simply from the number of right or wrong answers. On the actual ASVAB, harder questions are worth more points than easier questions.

Computing the verbal expression score

The military uses the verbal expression (VE) score to measure your ability to communicate. The score goes toward computing the AFQT score as well as many of the military's line scores. The military brass (or at least their computers) determine your VE score by first adding the value of your Word Knowledge (WK) raw score to your Paragraph Comprehension (PC) raw score. The result is then converted to a scaled score ranging from 20 to 62.

Getting the AFQT score formula

To get your *AFQT raw score*, the computer doubles your VE score and then adds your Arithmetic Reasoning (AR) score and your Mathematics Knowledge (MK) score to it. Here's the formula:
$$\text{AFQT raw score} = 2\text{VE} + \text{AR} + \text{MK}$$

You don't get to see what your AFQT raw score is on your ASVAB scoresheet. Instead, the computer converts it into a percentile that shows you how you stack up against a baseline testing group.

Normalizing the percentile score

Your AFQT raw score is converted to an *AFQT percentile score*, ranging from 1 to 99. How does that work? In 1997, the Department of Defense conducted a "Profile of American Youth" study, which examined the AFQT raw scores of a national sample of 18- to 23-year-olds who took the ASVAB during that year.

Your AFQT percentile score is derived by comparing your AFQT raw score to those of the people who took part in the study. For example, an AFQT percentile score of 50 means that you scored as well as or better than 50 percent of the individuals included in the 1997 study.

Making Sense of Minimum Qualifying Scores

The primary purpose of the AFQT percentile score is to determine whether you qualify for the military service of your choice. Each of the branches has its own priorities, so they all have different minimum qualifying scores.

Considering the AFQT tier categories

AFQT scores are grouped into five categories based on the percentile score ranges shown in Table 1-2. People who score in Categories I and II tend to be above average in trainability; those in Category III, average; those in Category IV, below average; and those in Category V, markedly below average.

If your AFQT percentile score falls into Category I, all the military services want you — probably very badly. They also want you if your score falls into Category II or Category IIIA.

If your score falls into Category IIIB, you may or may not be able to enlist, depending in large part on how your chosen branch is currently doing on making its recruiting goals.

TABLE 1-2 AFQT Tiers

Category	Percentile Score
I	93–99
II	65–92
IIIA	50–64
IIIB	31–49
IVA	21–30
IVB	16–20
IVC	10–15
V	0–9

**REMEMBER**

Congress has directed that the military can't accept Category V recruits or more than 4 percent of recruits from Category IV. If you're in Category IV, you must have a high-school diploma to be eligible for enlistment; you can't do it with a high-school equivalency certificate. Even so, if your score falls into Category IV, your chances of enlistment are very small.

Making the military cut

Each of the services has established minimum AFQT qualification scores within its respective recruiting regulations. Keep in mind that minimum scores can change instantly when the needs of the services change, so getting a high score is your best bet in order to remain competitive.

» **Army (including Army National Guard and Army Reserves):** The Army requires a minimum AFQT score of 31 for those with a high-school diploma and a score of 50 for those with a high-school equivalency certificate. When the Army is experiencing high recruiting and reenlistment rates, it has been known to temporarily increase its qualifying AFQT score minimum to as high as 50.

» **Air Force (including Air National Guard and Air Force Reserves):** Air Force recruits must score at least 36 points on the AFQT to qualify for enlistment. In actuality, the vast majority (over 70 percent) of those accepted for an Air Force enlistment score 50 or above. For those who have a high-school equivalency certificate rather than a high-school diploma, the minimum is 65.

You're more likely to be struck by lightning than to enlist in the Air Force without a high-school diploma. Only about 0.5 percent of all Air Force enlistments each year hold high-school equivalency certificates.

» **Navy:** Navy recruits must score at least 31 on the AFQT to qualify for enlistment. For those with high-school equivalency certificates, the minimum score is 50. Only between 5 and 10 percent of recruits can actually enlist with a high-school equivalency certificate, and those who do must also be at least 19 years old and show that they have a work history.

» **Marine Corps:** Marine Corps recruits must score at least 32. Candidates with a high-school equivalency certificate must score a minimum of 50 on the AFQT to be considered. The Marine Corps limits high-school equivalency enlistments to 5 to 10 percent per year.

» **Coast Guard:** The Coast Guard requires a minimum of 40 points on the AFQT. A waiver is possible for applicants with prior service if their ASVAB line scores qualify them for a specific job and they're willing to enlist in that job. For the very few people (less than 5 percent) who are allowed to enlist with a high-school equivalency certificate, the minimum AFQT score is 50.

**WARNING**



REMEMBER

Meeting the minimum qualifying score for the service of your choice is no guarantee of enlistment. During good recruiting times, each branch gets more qualified applicants than it has room for . . . and that means the military can pick and choose which applicants to accept and which ones to turn away. Usually, rejections are based on ASVAB scores, physical fitness, and what the military calls *medical readiness* (they're not going to pick you if they'll need to patch you up before shipping you out).

Also, enlistment incentives such as enlistment bonuses and college loan repayment deals are often tied to minimum AFQT scores. As with quotas, this situation is subject to change at any time based on each service's current recruiting needs.

Retaking the Test

You can't actually "fail" the AFQT, but you can fail to achieve a high enough score to enlist in the service you want. If your AFQT score is too low, you need to work on one (or more) of four areas: Math Knowledge, Arithmetic Reasoning, Paragraph Comprehension, or Word Knowledge. The military uses your scores in these areas to calculate your AFQT score. Parts 2 and 3 of this book are specifically designed to help you improve your scores on these four subtests. When you're sure you're ready, you can apply (through your recruiter) for a retest.

ASVAB tests are valid for two years, as long as you aren't in the military. In most cases, after you join the military, your ASVAB scores remain valid as long as you're in. In other words, except in a few cases, you can use your enlistment ASVAB scores to qualify for retraining (getting a different job) years later.

After you take an initial ASVAB test (taking the ASVAB in high school doesn't count as an initial test), you can retake the test after 30 days. After the retest, you must wait at least six months before taking the ASVAB again. There's no lifetime limit on how many times you can retest as long as you still meet the other requirements and a recruiter is still willing to work with you.



REMEMBER

When you retake the ASVAB, the score on your *most recent* test is what counts. If you score lower on the retest, that's the score that's used for your military enlistment.

The bad news is that you can't retake the ASVAB on a whim or whenever you feel like it. Each of the services has its own rules.

Army

The Army allows a retest only if

- » Your previous ASVAB test has expired. (**Remember:** Test scores are valid for two years.)
- » You failed to achieve an AFQT score high enough to qualify for enlistment.
- » Unusual circumstances occur. For example, if you're called away from the test because of an emergency, you can retake the test.

Army recruiters aren't allowed to schedule a retest for the sole purpose of increasing scores so applicants can qualify for enlistment incentives, meet line score requirements for specific jobs, or qualify for special enlistment programs.

Air Force

The Air Force doesn't allow you to retest after you've enlisted in the Delayed Entry Program (DEP). Current policy allows retesting of applicants who aren't in the DEP but already have a qualifying AFQT score. Retesting is authorized when the applicant's current line scores limit the service's ability to match an Air Force skill with his or her qualifications.



These days, you can't just take the ASVAB, undergo a medical examination, and head straight out to basic training. You have to wait your turn. The military has only so many basic training slots each month, and it has to reserve a slot for you (often several months in the future). To ensure your commitment, the services enlist you in the DEP. Under this program, you're enlisted in the inactive reserves or in the ready reserves while waiting for your basic training date to arrive.

Navy

The Navy allows you to retake the test if your previous ASVAB test has expired or you've failed to achieve a qualifying AFQT score for enlistment in the Navy.

Recruits in the Navy's DEP can't retest.

Marine Corps

The Marine Corps will authorize a retest if your previous test is expired. Otherwise, recruiters can request a retest as long as the initial scores don't appear to reflect your true capability (considering your education, training, and experience).

Additionally, the retest can't be requested *solely* because your initial test scores didn't meet the standards prescribed for specific military job qualification.

Coast Guard

For Coast Guard enlistments, six months must elapse since your last test before you may retest for the sole purpose of raising scores to qualify for a particular enlistment option. The Coast Guard Recruiting Center may authorize retesting after 30 days have passed since an initial ASVAB test if substantial reason exists to believe that your initial AFQT score or subtest scores don't reflect your education, training, or experience.

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS NO AFQT

When you start basic training, you learn about military history. Why not start a little sooner and find out where this whole testing thing came from?

The Army began general testing of draftees during World War I. In order to provide a method for classifying these soldiers, the Army developed the Army Alpha Test, which consisted of 212 multiple-choice and true/false questions, including common-sense questions and vocabulary and arithmetic problems. But many of the draftees couldn't read or write, so the Army developed the Army Beta Test, which required little word knowledge and relied on pictures and diagrams. Nearly 2 million soldiers took one of these tests during World War I.

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During World War II, the Army General Classification Test (AGCT) replaced the Alpha and Beta tests. The new test had 150 questions — mostly vocabulary and arithmetic. The AGCT was used by the Army and Marine Corps to assign recruits to military jobs. Of the 9 million soldiers and Marines who took this test during World War II, just over 60 percent could read and write above a third-grade level. During this time, a completely separate aptitude test was given to Navy recruits; it was called the Navy General Classification Test (NGCT). (The Air Force didn't have a test because the United States technically didn't have an Air Force as you know it today; the Air Force was part of the Army back then.)

In 1948, Congress required the Department of Defense to develop a uniform screening test to be used by all the services. In 1950, the Department of Defense came up with the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT). This test consisted of 100 multiple-choice questions in areas such as math, vocabulary, spatial relations, and mechanical ability. The military used this test until the mid-1970s. In addition to the AFQT, service-specific tests classified prospective recruits into jobs. The Army Classification Battery, the Navy Basic Test Battery, and the Airman Qualification Examination (to name a few) were used for classification purposes from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s.

In the 1960s, as military jobs became more diverse and technical, the Department of Defense decided to develop a standardized military selection and classification test and administer it in high schools. That's where the ASVAB entered the picture. The first ASVAB test was given in 1968, but the military didn't use it for recruiting purposes for several years. In 1973, the draft ended and the nation entered the contemporary period, in which all military recruits are volunteers. That year, the Air Force began using the ASVAB; the Marine Corps followed in 1974. From 1973 to 1975, the Navy and Army used their own test batteries for selection and classification. In 1976, the ASVAB became the official military job-classification test used by all services, and the AFQT score became the official entry standard.