



MAJOR FIELD TESTS

Colleges and universities use the Major Field Tests to measure student academic achievement and growth and to assess the educational outcomes of their major programs. In addition, academic departments use the Major Field Tests to evaluate their curricula and to measure the progress of their students. The tests also provide students with an assessment of their own level of achievement within a field of study compared to that of students in their program and to national comparative data.

Background

Development of the Major Field Tests began in 1989, modeled on the development of the Graduate Record Examinations® (GRE®) Subject Tests. However, unlike the GRE Subject Tests, the Major Field Tests do not serve as a predictor of graduate school success, but are designed to measure the basic knowledge and understanding achieved by senior undergraduates in their major field of study. Each test is revised approximately every five years. Experienced teaching faculty members representing all the relevant areas of a discipline participate in determining test specifications, questions, and types of scores reported. ETS assessment experts subject each question to rigorous tests of sensitivity and reliability. In addition, every effort is made to include questions that assess the most common and most important topics and skills within each major field of study.

Test Content

The Major Field Tests are designed to assess mastery of concepts, principles, and knowledge expected of students at the conclusion of an academic major in specific subject areas. In addition to factual knowledge, the tests evaluate students' abilities to analyze and solve problems, understand relationships, and interpret material. The tests may contain questions that require interpretation of graphs, diagrams, and charts based on material related to the field. Academic departments may add up to 50 additional locally written questions to test areas of a discipline that may be unique to the department or institution.

Test Length

All Major Field Tests are multiple-choice exams lasting two hours (three hours for MBA), and administered in a proctored environment. However, the addition of optional locally developed questions may result in a longer testing period.

Test Administration

Departments or schools choose when and where to give the tests; however, the tests are normally administered during the senior year when students have completed the majority of courses in the major. Many institutions administer the tests as part of the requirements of a capstone course.

National Comparative Data

A Comparative Data Guide, published each year, contains tables of scale scores and percentiles for individual student scores, departmental mean scores, and any subscores or group assessment indicators that the tests may support. The tables of data are drawn from senior-level test takers at a large number of diverse institutions. More than 500 colleges and universities employ one or more of the Major Field Tests for student achievement and curriculum evaluation each year.

Scores

Major Field Test score reports are sent directly to the office within an institution that purchases them, such as a department chairperson, dean, or director of testing. Results of the tests are reported for the entire group of test takers, as well as for individual students. Overall student scores are reported on a scale of 120–200; subscores (which many of the tests include) are reported on a scale of 20–100. Another score reported for most of the tests is based on group-level achievement in subfields of the discipline. These “assessment indicators” report the average percent of a subset of test questions answered correctly by all students tested. On Major Field Tests, only correct answers are scored, so students are not penalized for omissions or guesses.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE (4BMF)

(Current form introduced in 2005)

The Major Field Test in Criminal Justice consists of 150 multiple-choice questions, some of which are grouped in sets and based on such materials as diagrams, graphs, and statistical data. Most of the questions require knowledge of specific information about the criminal justice system, but the test also draws on the student's critical thinking ability; that is, the ability to interpret data, to apply concepts and ideas, and to analyze data, theories, and relationships, deductively and inductively.

The broad field of criminal justice encompasses many subfields and specialties; this test covers the skills and subject matter included in most undergraduate programs. The distribution of the content areas with some examples of the topics covered is as follows:

I. The Law (about 20 percent of the questions)

- A. Civil *vs.* criminal law
- B. Defining a crime (elements of a crime)
- C. Defenses
- D. Constitutional law
- E. Major alterations to the law
- F. The sociology of law
- G. The philosophy of law
- H. Criminal liability

II. Law Enforcement (about 20 percent of the questions)

- A. Social function of the police
- B. Role of the community in defining the police role
- C. History of the police in the United States
- D. Critical issues including corruption
- E. Investigative techniques
- F. Police subculture (informal)
- G. Police organization and management (formal)
- H. International issues and terrorism

III. Corrections (about 20 percent of the questions)

- A. History and philosophy of corrections
- B. Juvenile *vs.* adult systems
- C. Probation and parole
- D. Theories of punishment
- E. Prison organization and management
- F. Issues and trends (including privatization)
- G. Community corrections

IV. The Court System in the United States (about 20 percent of the questions)

- A. History of the court system in the United States
- B. Pre-trial issues
- C. Plea bargaining
- D. Courtroom culture (the actors)
- E. Sentencing
- F. Organization and management
- G. Judicial decision-making

V. Theories of Criminal Behavior (about 20 percent of the questions)

- A. Classical theories
- B. Positivist theories
- C. Conflict theories
- D. Integrated theories

VI. Critical Thinking

Critical thinking and research methods and statistics questions are integrated into the entire test. About 25 percent of the questions address one of the topics above in a way that requires critical thinking skills. About 10 percent of the questions above address one of the topics in a way that focuses on research methodology and statistics.

Critical thinking questions require students to:

- Draw inferences from theories and data
- Recognize unstated assumptions
- Deduce conclusions from information presented in statements or premises

- Interpret and weigh evidence as to whether asserted conclusions are warranted
- Evaluate the strengths of comparable arguments regarding a specific issue
- Apply knowledge to new problems
- Read and interpret tables of data and graphs
- Recognize the strengths and limitations of both quantitative and qualitative data
- Compare and contrast subjects and ideas

VII. Research Methodology and Statistics

Research methodology and statistics questions require students to understand:

- Quantitative and qualitative methods
- Research design (including basic and applied approaches and ethics in research)
- Statistics with application to criminal justice subject matter
- Sampling
- Statistical software
- Hypothesis testing

Scores on the Major Field Test in Criminal Justice are reported as follows:

Total Score:

Reported for each student and summarized for the group.

Assessment Indicators (Mean Percent Correct):

Reported for the group* only.

- Theory (30)
- The Law (30)
- Law Enforcement (30)
- Corrections (30)
- The Court System (30)
- Critical Thinking (37)
- Research Methodology and Statistics (15)

Numbers in parentheses are approximate number of questions in each category.

*A minimum of five students is required for assessment indicators to be reported.



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