

# **ASVAB Testing**

## **What Students and Educators Should Know about Military Testing in our High Schools**

Questions and Answers About the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)

### **What Is ASVAB?**

About 14,000 high schools nationwide give a test to students (sponsored by the US military) - the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB). The ASVAB is the admissions and placement test for the US military. All persons enlisting in the US military are required to take ASVAB. It determines whether a potential recruit is qualified for the military and for certain military jobs. Military recruiters also claim that it will help a person choose a civilian career, but that is not what it was designed for.

ASVAB is a three-hour test that consists of 10 sections: Word Knowledge; Paragraph Comprehension; Arithmetic Reasoning; Mathematics Knowledge; General Science; Auto and Shop Information; Mechanical Comprehension; Electronics Information; Numerical Operations; and Coding Speed. The ASVAB is supposed to look for talent and natural skills in subject areas that are considered important for different military jobs.

Scores from selected individual sections of the test are combined according to a certain formula to come up with a measure known as AFQT - Armed Forces Qualifying Test. Congress has established minimum AFQT scores for admission to the military. Standards vary according to whether a person has a high school diploma, a GED, or has not graduated from high school.

ASVAB is part of a larger program, the Department of Defense Testing Program (commonly known as the "Career Exploration Program"), through which students can take surveys about their interests, identify personal characteristics, and use ASVAB scores to match their backgrounds to possible careers.

### **How do recruiters use the ASVAB?**

The military uses ASVAB to do targeted recruitment of young people. Recruiters give special attention to students in the 11th or 12th grade who meet minimum standards - what they refer to as "pre-qualified leads." They use test information (scores, name, address, etc.) to identify and reach young people they hope to sign up. Recruiters contact these young people by letters, phone calls, and visits to home and school. Students may

receive calls from recruiters even if they say they are not interested in joining the military. One often-used tactic is to leave a message for a student telling him/her of an appointment with a recruiter, even if the student didn't ask for one. Just remember, there is no law that requires a student to join the military or to talk to recruiters.

ASVAB is not the only way recruiters get personal information about students. Typically recruiters obtain contact information (such as name, address, phone number, courses taken, and extracurricular activities) from the school administration or district office, but the ASVAB gives them much more personal information about potential recruits.

## **Are schools required to give the ASVAB test?**

No. One of the main reasons schools give ASVAB is that it is offered by the Pentagon at no charge to the school.

## **Are students required to take the ASVAB?**

No. While the military has encouraged schools to have all students take the ASVAB, students cannot be forced to give this kind of personal information to the military. Unfortunately some schools tell students that they must take the test or may try to coerce them (harassment, ridicule, counselors telling students they won't help them in other ways if they don't take the ASVAB). While schools may require their students to take an assessment test approved by the state, there is no legal requirement that students take the ASVAB.

## **Do students have to give personal information on the test form?**

Yes, if the student wants the test to be scored. Before taking the test, students are required to sign a form (known as a "waiver") that allows the military to keep any information provided on the form (contact information and scores) and to use it in various ways. If the student does not include all the information asked for and sign the waiver, the test won't be processed.

## **Who gets test scores?**

The military grades the test. They will send a copy of the scores to the student and the school counselor. In most cases - unless a school decides not to allow the release of any scores to military recruiters - local military recruiters are automatically given a copy of scores and the other information provided on the forms. Local recruiters receive a form known as the ASVAB Recruiter Service Printout. It contains a list of students who took the test, their scores, contact information (name, grade, sex, address, and phone number), and information about the students' plans after graduation.

## **Can a school give the ASVAB test without having scores released to local military recruiters?**

Yes. Schools have eight options regarding the release of test information. At one end of the spectrum is "Option 8. No release to recruiters." Recruiters would not receive a printout of students' scores. The default option for schools is known as "Option 1. No special instructions." Under this option, recruiters are free to obtain scores and use them however they wish. In between these two extremes are a number of options specifying when recruiters may receive full information or whether they will be given access to phone numbers. Unfortunately, school officials are usually not made aware of options other than the default (Option 1).

## **Will the ASVAB help a student find the job that is best for him or her?**

Because the skills needed for military jobs are often different from those needed for civilian jobs, the ASVAB test may not really tell a student what he or she is qualified to do outside the military.

In some subject areas the ASVAB may test what a person already knows how to do, not what he or she could learn to do after receiving training. Because of this, a student might be told not to try for some careers that he or she could do well in and would like. The test does not measure interests.

## **Does ASVAB discriminate against certain groups of people?**

Yes. Many service members are automatically assigned to non-technical military jobs because of poor ASVAB scores. As a result, many African-American service members are assigned to low-skill jobs when they might have been able to be trained for more technical jobs. Government reports question whether ASVAB is a good measure of how well a person might do in technical training program if given the chance.

Women are also less likely to get good scores on the mechanical sections of the ASVAB test because most haven't done much mechanical work in the past. Even if they would enjoy mechanical work and could learn the skills, they might be counseled to look for other types of jobs.

Also, the ASVAB relies heavily on a person's English skills, even when it is testing for how well they would do in mechanical jobs. People who have had problems with their English skills will get lower scores and could be told not to try for well-paying mechanical jobs that he or she could do.

## **Options for Students and Educators**

- **Organize a campaign to educate students and school staff about how recruiters use the ASVAB.**
- **If your school gives the ASVAB, ask that students be clearly told that they don't have to take it. The school should be asked to provide students with some other place to go if classrooms are being used for testing.**
- **Ask your principal to protect students' privacy by keeping the test results from recruiters. This means that the school must tell the military before the test is given that it is choosing "ASVAB Option 8." If a school chooses this option, students who want their scores to go to the military can still permit them to go to recruiters on an individual basis. (The military provides a special permission form for such requests.) However, it doesn't work the other way around. If a school chooses to release information to recruiters, this information will be handed over for all students.**
- **Even if a student doesn't take the ASVAB, he or she may be contacted by recruiters. Many schools release student directory lists to the military. Students may ask that their names not be included in the student directory distributed to recruiters or outside organizations and companies. This must be done at the beginning of the school year, and sometimes schools require that a student turn in the request by a certain date.**
- **Ask your counseling office to look into other aptitude or vocational tests. Unless you insist on other tests, your school may continue using the ASVAB.**
- **If the ASVAB is going to be given at your school, or if the military visits your school at other times, demand that school officials let students hear other perspectives on military recruitment and service.**