The PAT test explained for parents: what it is, how to read the report, what to ask

PAT is ACER's Progressive Achievement Tests, the school-based tests of maths, reading and other areas that most Australian schools sit once or twice a year from Year 1 to Year 10. It is a teacher-facing tool, not an exam: ACER designs the questions so that a well-targeted test is one the student gets about half right.

Test	Years	Questions	Time
PAT Maths 5th Edition (replaced the 4th in 2026)	Tests 1 to 10 = end of Year 1 to end of Year 10	30 (Tests 1, 2), 35 (3 to 6), 40 (7 to 10)	40 min
PAT Maths Adaptive	Years 1 to 10, five entry levels	about 30 to 42, chosen as the student answers	40 min
PAT Reading 5th Edition	Tests 1 to 10, broadly one per year	14 (Test 1), 29 to 35 (Tests 2 to 10)	25 min (Test 1), 40 min
PAT Reading Adaptive	Years 1 to 10	chosen as the student answers	45 min
Early Years Maths and Reading; Early Literacy	first two years of school; Foundation and Year 1	four short assessments each	20 to 45 min
Spelling; Spelling Skills; Vocabulary; Vocabulary Skills	primary and secondary		20 / 20 / 25 / 35 to 45 min
Grammar and Punctuation; Science 2nd Edition; Critical Reasoning	primary and secondary		30 / 60 / 35 min

Times are recommendations, not lock-outs. From Term 1 2026 the online tests run full-screen; if the child leaves the window the screen blurs and a warning appears. Calculator use in PAT Maths is set by the school.

The four numbers on the report

Number	What it is	How to use it
Scale score	the raw score converted to the PAT scale for that subject, so that any test level and any year can be compared; the one number to track	compare with the previous scale score 9 to 12 months earlier; growth over two years or three sittings is the reliable reading
Achievement band	a 10-point slice of the scale (Reading: 70-79 up to 150 and above) with a written description of what students in it can typically do	ask the teacher for the band description: it says what to work on next
Percentile rank	the percentage of Australian students in the same year level who scored below this scale score (2026 norms, from October-November 2024 testing)	a position, not a mark; the 50th percentile is the national average
Stanine	the percentile rank in nine bands, 1 lowest, 5 the middle, 9 highest	ACER: only a difference of two or more stanines is a real difference

Stanine	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Percentile	96+	89-96	77-89	60-77	40-60	23-40	11-23	4-11	0-4
Students	4%	7%	12%	17%	20%	17%	12%	7%	4%
Described as	very high	high	above av.	average	average	average	below av.	low	very low

Sources: ACER PAT pages and School Support articles, ACER 'Interpreting ACER Test Results', ACER 'PAT Maths Australian norms' and 'PAT Reading Australian norms' (January 2026). From sciencewithshobha.com · 1-on-1 online maths and English, Years 3 to 12, in Australian after-school hours, free 30-minute first class.

The 2026 Australian norms year by year, what a normal year of growth is, and what to ask

PAT Maths scale score by year level (ACER 2026 norms, 1,249,411 students)

Percentile	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
95th	119	128	136	141	146	150	153	156	158	161
75th	108	117	124	130	134	138	141	143	145	147
50th (average)	100	109	116	122	126	129	132	134	136	138
25th	91	100	108	114	118	121	123	126	127	129
5th	80	89	96	102	106	109	111	113	114	115

PAT Reading scale score by year level (ACER 2026 norms)

Percentile	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y10
95th	112	127	138	146	147	149	152	154	156	160
75th	96	112	123	131	134	136	139	141	143	146
50th (average)	85	101	112	120	125	128	130	131	133	136
25th	74	90	102	109	116	119	121	122	123	126
5th	58	75	86	94	103	107	107	108	110	112

Rounded to whole points from ACER's tables; the published values have one decimal place. Read the average row across: a typical year of growth in maths is about 9 points from Year 1 to Year 2, 6 points from Year 3 to Year 4, and about 2 points a year from Year 7 on. A Year 9 student who gained 3 points had a normal year; a Year 2 student who gained 3 points did not. The spread (standard deviation) is about 12 to 14 points in maths and 13 to 17 in reading, so one band is about one year of average growth in upper primary and more than two years in secondary.

Questions for the parent-teacher meeting

[ ] What was the scale score this time and last time, and how many months apart were the two sittings?
[ ] Which achievement band, and what does its description say the child can do and is learning to do?
[ ] Which strand was weakest: in maths, number and algebra, measurement and space, or statistics and probability; in reading, retrieving, interpreting explicit or implied information, or reflecting on the text?
[ ] Was the test well targeted (about half right)? If the child got nearly everything right or wrong, the score has a wide margin of error
[ ] Is the percentile against the 2026 norms or an older set? (The same scale score gives a different percentile under each)
[ ] What is the plan between now and the next sitting?

Preparing honestly: there are no official PAT practice tests

[ ] ACER's questions are never released, so any 'PAT practice test' for sale is not one. Preparing means the skills in the strands, which are the Australian Curriculum
[ ] Maths: number facts and fractions to automatic; reading a table, a graph and a scale; one worded problem a day with the working written
[ ] Reading: twenty minutes of reading daily across text types (story, information, instructions, a table or diagram) and one 'what does the writer want you to think?' question
[ ] On the day: a good night's sleep, read every question twice, expect the questions to get hard (in the adaptive tests that means it is working), never leave the test window

Scale score last time / this time: _____

Band and weakest strand: _____

Plan to the next sitting: _____