

Chapter 1

Examining the AFQT

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If you're thinking about joining the U.S. military, your AFQT score may well be the most important score you achieve on any military test. Sure, other tests determine which military jobs you may get or whether you get promoted, but what good are those if you can't get into the military in the first place? You need a qualifying score on the AFQT, or your plans for enlistment come to a dead end. The military is not flexible on this point. You could be a young Rambo in the making, in perfect health, able to run 3 miles in 3 minutes, and it wouldn't matter if you didn't have a qualifying AFQT score.

The services have years and years of research to back up their policy. Study after study has shown that an individual's AFQT score is the single most significant factor in determining whether a recruit will make it through basic training and the first enlistment period.

Considering the fact that it costs the military more than \$25,000 to process a new recruit for enlistment and send that person through basic training, you can see how the services want to maximize their chances of getting their money's worth.

But, with a little review, there is absolutely no reason that you shouldn't 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 *ASVAB AFQT For Dummies* comes in. Other preparation books try to prepare you for the entire Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), but this book is specifically designed to help you boost the most important ASVAB score of all — the AFQT score.

A Close-Up View of the AFQT

The AFQT is not 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. Four of those subtests make up the score that's known as the AFQT score. The AFQT score determines whether you're qualified to join the service of your choice. (Turn to Chapter 2 for the minimum qualifying scores for each service.)

In the beginning, there was no AFQT

When you start basic training, you'll 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.

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, there were service-specific tests required to classify 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 began getting 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 enters 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.

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

- ✔ **Arithmetic Reasoning:** The Arithmetic Reasoning subtest consists of 30 math word problems. The subtest is multiple choice. You're given 36 minutes to correctly 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" to underlined words in the question stem. There are 35 words to define in 11 minutes. 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. There are 15 questions in all, and you're expected to complete the subtest in 13 minutes. Chapter 6 can help you improve 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 25 basic math problems in 24 minutes. 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 added math practice.



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



Some standards can be waived, depending on the service's current recruiting needs. However, the minimum AFQT score (see Chapter 2) is rarely waived. A high AFQT score can help with other waivers. The higher your AFQT score, the more likely it is that a service branch will favorably consider a waiver for other disqualifying factors. For example, if you have too many 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 if you score 45.

Why You Want the Highest Possible Score

Chapter 2 gives you the minimum AFQT qualifying scores for each service. But you don't want to be satisfied with making just the minimum. You want to score as high as possible.

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 means you might have access to special treats, such as the following:

- ✔ **Enlistment incentives:** 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 Army College Fund (a monetary incentive that increases the value of the G.I. Bill).
- ✔ **Enlistment programs:** Most military jobs are tied to individual line scores derived from the entire ASVAB, but certain enlistment programs sometimes require a minimum AFQT score, which 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:** In order to join any of the services, a high school diploma is required. The services are, however, allowed to take a limited number of GED applicants each year. In order to qualify with a GED, you must score higher on the AFQT than a qualified high school diploma holder.
- ✔ **Quotas:** During times when the services are doing well meeting their recruiting goals, they often get more people who want to join than they have room for. At these times, the services get to pick and choose who they let join and who they don't. It's not unusual for a branch to temporarily raise its AFQT minimum score in order to separate the best-qualified applicants from the rest. For example, at the time this book went to print, the Army National Guard wasn't accepting anyone with an AFQT score less than 50.
- ✔ **Waivers:** One recent study indicated that only four 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. However, when the military grants a waiver, it's taking a chance on an otherwise ineligible recruit. The military is much more likely to take a chance on someone with a high AFQT score than someone who has a low (but qualifying) score.



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 or visit <http://usmilitary.about.com>.

The AFQT is scored as a *percentile*. That means, for example, that if you score 70, you've scored higher than 70 percent of the thousands of people who've taken the test before you. The highest possible score on the AFQT is 99.



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 trying until you get the score you want and deserve.

Establishing a Study Program

If you're not planning to make a study plan, you should plan again. A study plan is essential if you want to score well on the AFQT.

There is no one best way to prepare a study plan. Each person has different ways of study and learning that work the best for him. Still, people can generally be divided into three categories when it comes to learning:

- ✓ **Auditory learners:** These people learn best by hearing something. They do really well in lecture classes, and they love listening to audiobooks.
- ✓ **Visual learners:** These folks prefer to learn by seeing something. They prefer to read a book or look at a diagram.
- ✓ **Tactical learners:** These people get the best results by doing something. Instead of listening to an explanation or reading an instruction manual, they need to do it in order to learn it.

Try to figure out what type of learner you are before developing a plan of study. Chapter 2 can help with this. Chapter 2 also includes some tips about what to include in your study plan, based on your own individual learning style.



Most people don't look forward to sitting down for a study session. Because of that, they try to make study more enjoyable by spending time on the subjects they're already good at. After all, studying familiar information is much easier than learning something new. Try not to fall into this trap! If you're already an avid reader, you probably don't need to spend much of your time improving your reading comprehension skills. You're already going to ace that portion of the AFQT, right? Instead, spend most of your time boning up on the areas where you need improvement, such as math and math word problems.



Try to dedicate one to two hours per day to your AFQT studies. Pick a time and place where you won't be interrupted. Having your dad yell at you to cut the grass probably won't be beneficial to your study session. Also, turn off your cellphone. Is that call as important as your future military career? You won't be allowed to use your cellphone in basic training anyway, so this is a good time to get into the practice of not texting your BFF that OMG, J4I, UBD is making me AAK.



Having raised twin daughters, I happen to be an expert on this texting stuff. Your BFF is your "best friend forever." And "OMG, J4I, UBD is making me AAK" translates to "Oh my God, just for info, user brain damage is making me asleep at the keyboard."

Guessing Smart

All the questions on the ASVAB/AFQT are multiple-choice with four possible answers. That means if you answer eeny-meeny-miny-mo, by the law of averages, you'd get one-fourth of the questions right.

Of course, you can increase these odds immensely by studying. But the chances are good that no matter how much time you put into advanced study, you'll come across at least one question on the test that leaves you scratching your head.



When this happens, you can improve your odds of guessing correctly by guessing smart. See Chapter 5 for tips on intelligent guessing for the Word Knowledge subtest, Chapter 7 for techniques you can use on the Paragraph Comprehension subtest, Chapter 9 for Mathematics Knowledge subtest guessing plans, and Chapter 11 to learn how to make intelligent guesses on the Arithmetic Knowledge subtest. Chapter 3 includes tips and techniques about smart guessing in general.

Using the Practice Exams to Your Advantage

This book includes four full-length AFQT practice exams, with questions that are very similar to the ones you'll see on the ASVAB subtests that comprise the AFQT score. The practice exams included in this book can help increase your confidence and ensure that you're ready to take the actual ASVAB, but you have to use them correctly.

When I wrote my first book, *ASVAB For Dummies*, many readers contacted me. Some were disappointed that the practice tests included in the book were not the *exact same* as the questions they found on the actual ASVAB. I'll let you in on a little not-so-secret secret: No ASVAB or AFQT preparation book will include the exact same questions as what you'll find on the actual test. Not only would that be unethical, but it would probably result in several federal law-enforcement agents knocking on the author's door — not my idea of a good time. Actual ASVAB test questions are *controlled items* — that means that the military keeps them to themselves. If you see any questions on the actual ASVAB or AFQT that are the exact same as the ones you find in this book (or any other preparation guide), it's pure coincidence.



However, just because the practice exams don't include the exact same questions that you'll see on the AFQT doesn't mean that the practice exams aren't valuable — just use them the way they were designed to be used:

- ✓ **Practice Exam 1:** The first practice test is designed as an initial assessment tool. Take this test before you set up your study plan. You can use the results of Practice Exam 1 to determine which areas of the AFQT you need to spend the most time on.
- ✓ **Practice Exam 2:** Use this test as a progress check after a week or two of study. Adjust your study plan accordingly.
- ✓ **Practice Exam 3:** Take this practice exam about a week before you're scheduled to take the actual ASVAB. Use the results to determine which AFQT subjects need a little extra attention.
- ✓ **Practice Exam 4:** Take the final practice exam a day or two before the ASVAB to make sure you're ready, and to boost your confidence. If you don't score well, you may want to consider asking your recruiter to reschedule your ASVAB test for a later date, to give you more time to study.

You may find your recruiter trying to rush you to take the ASVAB and medical exam, so he can get you signed up quickly. Recruiters live and die off their recruiting goals. Make sure you don't let the recruiter schedule your exam until you're sure you're ready to take the test.



The mini-AFQT computerized test (see Chapter 2) that recruiters have in their offices is a pretty good indicator of whether you're ready for the real test. Usually, people's AFQT score is within five or six points of what the mini-AFQT predicts.



Although you can't equate scores on the practice exam with actual AFQT scores (because of the method of scoring the AFQT; see Chapter 2), shoot for a minimum of 80 percent on each subtest:

- ✓ **Arithmetic Reasoning:** This subtest has 30 questions. If you miss more than 6, you should dedicate more study time to solving math problems.
- ✓ **Word Knowledge:** There are 35 questions on the Word Knowledge Subtest. You need to focus more attention on this area if you miss more than 7 questions.
- ✓ **Paragraph Comprehension:** If you miss more than 3 of the 15 Paragraph Comprehension questions, dedicate more study time to your reading skills.
- ✓ **Mathematics Knowledge:** Missing more than 5 questions on this 25-question subtest indicates the need for further study.