

National Center Test for University Admissions

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(Redirected from Center Shiken)

The **National Center Test for University Admissions** (大学入試センター試験 *Daigaku Nyushi Center Shiken*[?]) is a type of standardized test used by public and some private universities in Japan. It is held annually during a weekend in mid-January over a period of two days.

The Center Test has become something of a national phenomenon in Japan, with television coverage and newspapers publishing test questions. To many test takers in Japan the test is the difference between college entrance and one year's study for the next year's exams as a *rōnin*. The fact that the test is only administered annually, and because college entrance is so competitive in Japan, the test has become the subject of scrutiny by many.

The test is administered by National Center for University Entrance Examinations, an Independent Administrative Institution (IAI). The National Center Test superseded the Common first-stage exam (共通一次, *kyōtsū ichiji*), which was administered from 1979 to 1989, letting private universities use the test scores as a criterion for admissions decisions.

Since the test is held in the midst of winter, snow can delay the exam in some regions.

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Designation

The official name in Japanese is **Daigaku Nyugakusha Senbatsu Daigaku Nyushi Center Shiken** (大学入学選抜大学入試センター試験, *daigaku nyūgakusha senbatsu daigaku nyūshi sentā shiken*, literally "University Candidate Selection University Admissions Center Test"), but this designation is rarely used. It is often called **Center Shiken** (センター試験), or simply **Center** (センター) by test-takers and teachers.

Function

Some universities decide successful candidates using only the National Center Test, but most prestigious universities require the candidate to take another, institution-specific exam, which is often more difficult than the National Center Test.

The function of the Center Test depends on the institution, but most can be categorised into the following three:

- **Center Test only** - Universities that require only the Center Test results and solely use them for admissions decisions. Mostly used by private universities alongside normal (using institution-specific exams) admission.
- **Center Test and secondary exam** - Universities using the Center Test and a secondary exam (their own test, or an essay or interview)) for their decisions. Used by most national universities.
- **Center Test as primary decision** - Universities using the Center Test as a primary decision, after which the successful candidates are placed on an even plane and are given a secondary, institution-specific exam that decides admission. Used by the most prestigious universities such as the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University, but not seen much elsewhere.

Checking scores

Because candidates are unable to know their Center Test scores before applying to their universities, most write their answers on the question sheets (which can be taken home), and check their answers using rubrics published by cram schools.

A number of cram schools and other companies have services to which candidates can send their scores and get to know their overall position in the other users of the service, called **Center Research** (センターリサーチ). Candidates can use this information to see how they fared compared to other test-takers, and make their final admissions decision. (In Japan, candidates may not apply to all the universities they want to, such as in the United States, mainly because the secondary exams fall near or on the same day.)

Tests

There are separate tests for each subject, and each is multiple choice. The tests follow the curriculum guidelines published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

There are a total of 29 tests in 6 subjects. Candidates take the subjects specified by their university. As an exception, however, candidates for the English (written) exam must take the English (listening).

First day

For 2008, the first day of exams will be held on January 19.

- Civics: 100 points each, 60 minutes
 - Contemporary social studies
 - Ethics
 - Politics and Economy

- Geography and History: 100 points each, 60 minutes
 - World History A
 - World History B
 - Japanese History A
 - Japanese History B
 - Geography A
 - Geography B
- Japanese literature: Total of 200 points (Modern language comprehension 100 points, Old Japanese 50 points, Chinese texts 50 points), 80 minutes
 - Japanese literature
- Foreign languages (written): 200 points each, 80 minutes
 - English
 - German
 - French
 - Chinese
 - Korean
- Foreign languages (listening): 50 points total, 60 minutes (Explanation of process and equipment 30 minutes, testing time 30 minutes) Only English test is available.

Second day

For 2008, the first day of exams will be held on January 20.

- Science (1): 100 points each, 60 minutes
 - Biology I
 - General Science B
- Mathematics (1): 100 points each, 60 minutes
 - Mathematics I
 - Mathematics I and Mathematics A
- Mathematics (2): 100 points each, 60 minutes
 - Mathematics II
 - Mathematics II and Mathematics B (Candidates may select two subjects from Mathematics B. Choices are: sequences, vectors, statistics & computers, calculation & computers)
 - Basic industrial mathematics/science
 - Bookkeeping/Accounting
 - Basic information technology
- Science (2): 100 points each, 60 minutes
 - Chemistry I
 - General Science A
- Science (3): 100 points each, 60 minutes
 - Physics I
 - Earth science I

Listening exam and IC player

A listening exam was introduced in 2006 for candidates of the English (written) exam. An IC player was handed out to all candidates of the exam, and a whole 30 minutes of testing time was devoted to the explanation of usage of this device.

There was some controversy surrounding the introduction of this exam, and critics doubted the reliability of this device. In 2006, there were 497 (about 0.09%) cases in which candidates had to be given re-tests because of device failure.^[1]



IC player used in 2007

Since the IC players could be taken home, candidates around Japan disassembled the devices at home, finding that the players used Sony's Memory Stick for storage of the exam. Although no note of the manufacturer was made in either the media or on the device itself, the use of this storage format led most to believe that Sony was the manufacturer.

The memory stick from a sample device provided to an examination supervisor prior to the 2007 examinations, containing a full sample audio test, contained 4 files with the .bin file extension. A cursory attempt to extract the content of these files failed and changing the file extension to common audio formats, such as .wav, .mp3, and .wma also did not result in playable files. The total size of all four files was 4.63MB, and the total listening time of 30 minutes makes it obvious that the audio tracks are highly compressed.

Additionally, the non-intuitive sequence of buttons needed to operate the player raises concern over the possibility of candidates having difficulty operating the player under test conditions. The inability to stop and restart the audio tracks seems probably due to a wish to ensure that all candidates complete all the listening within the test period. Of even more concern is that the memory stick on the sample player was exposed and could be removed by candidates, leaving open the possibility that candidates may inadvertently remove the memory stick during the test and render the player inoperable.

External links

- Daigaku Nyushi Center website (<http://www.dnc.ac.jp/>)
- Heart System website (<http://www.heart.dnc.ac.jp/>)

Notes

1. ^ NikkeiBP.jp センター試験のICプレーヤー誤作動, 3つの検査をすり抜ける (IC players malfunction in Center Shiken, passing through 3 tests [unnoticed]) <http://techon.nikkeibp.co.jp/article/NEWS/20060123/112571/>

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