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# Grading system. Examinations. Certification

## Grading system

At Estonian general secondary and vocational secondary schools there is a unified grading system. The students' knowledge, skills and competence are assessed on a five-point scale, with 3 as the pass mark:

| Grade | Description in Estonian | Description in English | Completion of required work |
|---|---|---|---|
| 5 | *väga hea* | very good | 90% - 100% |
| 4 | *hea* | good | 75% - 89% |
| 3 | *rahuldav* | satisfactory | 50% - 74% |
| 2 | *puudulik* | unsatisfactory (fail) | 20% - 49% |
| 1 | *nõrk* | poor (fail) | 0% - 19% |

This scale is used for current assessment throughout the school year as well as for the final examinations.

## Examinations

At the end of basic school, the students take unified final examinations in three subjects: Estonian language (*eesti keel*), mathematics (*matemaatika*) and one examination according to the student's choice. At schools where the language of instruction is Russian, the examinations are: Russian language and literature (*vene keel ja kirjandus*), mathematics (*matemaatika*), and Estonian as a second language (*eesti keel teise keelena*).

The system of state examinations (*riigieksamid*) for general secondary school graduation in Estonia was introduced in 1997. General secondary school students have to take the school examination (*koolieksam*), three state examinations (*riigieksamid*) and complete student's research or practical work. School examination and student's research paper or practical work are organised by the school.

The state examination in the Estonian language (*eesti keel*) or Estonian as a second language (*eesti keel teise keelena*), mathematics (*matemaatika*) and foreign language (*võõrkeel*) are obligatory for all secondary school leavers.

In mathematics, the state examination can be chosen between the narrow mathematics and broad (extensive) mathematics. In the case of the foreign language examination student has a choice between German, English, French, or Russian language examinations. State examination of foreign language may be replaced by an internationally recognised language examination on the conditions established by the Minister of Education and Research. Since 2019, secondary school students can take the Cambridge English: C1 Advanced test instead of the English language state examination. The examination is funded by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research and is free of charge for students. The agreement was concluded for four years and testing is organised by Education and Youth Board (*Haridus- ja Noorteamet*), the organiser of national testing in Estonia.

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Since August 2012 state examinations are administered by Education and Youth Board. Until 31.07.2012 administration of state examinations were the responsibility of the State Examination and Qualification Centre (*Riiklik Eksami- ja Kvalifikatsioonikeskus*).

State examinations are graded on a 100-point scale, with the exception of the essay in the mother tongue (Estonian) for which a 10-point scale was used until 2000. From 1997 to 2001 the state examination score of at least one point was a passing score. From 2002 to 2013 graduation, the minimum passing score was 20 points. Since 2014 graduation the passing score is back to one point. The foreign language examination is also graded on a 100-point scale, but the State Examination Certificate shows the score for the oral part of the examination separately.

State examinations also serve as entrance examinations for higher education institutions, although tests, interviews, portfolios etc., may be required in addition.

**Former system of state examinations**

Until 2013 general secondary school students had to take five final examinations. At least three of them had to be state examinations (in 1997 there were two state examinations) and two could be taken as school examinations (*koolieksamid*), but students could also take all five examinations as state examinations. In one subject either the state examination or the school examination could be taken.

The state examination in the Estonian language (*eesti keel*) or Estonian as a second language (*eesti keel teise keelena*) was obligatory for all secondary school leavers. The rest of the state examinations were chosen from among Russian (*vene keel*) (at a school or class where the language of instruction is Russian), English (*inglise keel*), German (*saksa keel*), French (*prantsuse keel*), Russian (*vene keel*) (as a foreign language), biology (*bioloogia*), chemistry (*keemia*), mathematics (*matemaatika*), physics (*füüsika*), geography (*geograafia*), history (*ajalugu*), and social studies (*ühiskonnaõpetus*). There could be only one foreign language examination among the three compulsory state examinations (Estonian is not considered a foreign language).

In 2003 it was possible for secondary school leavers to choose between the short version (50 points) and the complete version (100 points) of the state examination in English, mathematics and chemistry. The passing minimum was 20 points both for the short and complete versions. This practice was discontinued the next year.

**Certification**

The formats and statutes of the Certificate of General Secondary Education and the State Examination Certificate are approved by the Government and are regulated by the Statute and Format of the Basic School and General Secondary School Certificates and the State Examination Certificate (*Põhikooli ja gümnaasiumi lõputunnistuse ning riigieksamitunnistuse statuut ja vorm*). Since 2003 graduation the Certificate of General Secondary Education and the transcript of grades (*hinneteleht*) have been issued as two separate credentials.

General secondary school (*gümnaasium*) graduates receive a *Gümnaasiumi lõputunnistus* (Certificate of General Secondary Education) and a *Riigieksamitunnistus* (State Examination Certificate). The Certificate of General Secondary Education is issued by the school.

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Until 31.07.2012 the State Examination Certificate was issued by the State Examination and Qualification Centre and since August 2012 it is issued by the Education and Youth Board. The State Examination Certificate is valid only if accompanied by the Certificate of General Secondary Education.

Effective 2009, the State Examination Certificate is not issued in paper format. The certificate is available in electronic format through the official state portal *eesti.ee*.

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