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PSAT Desmos Strategy Guide

A decision guide for using the built-in graphing calculator efficiently and accurately.

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When Desmos helps

- Find an intersection for a system or equation.
- Graph a quadratic to inspect roots or a vertex.
- Use a table to test values or see a pattern.
- Check a transformed function visually.
- Verify a solution after completing algebra by hand.

When hand-solving is faster

- One-step arithmetic or percentage calculations.
- Simple linear equations.
- Factoring with obvious integer pairs.
- Questions where setting up the model is the real task.

Three-step calculator rule

Step	Action
1. Model	Translate the words before opening the calculator.
2. Execute	Use a graph, table or expression deliberately.
3. Verify	Check scale, variable meaning and the requested quantity.

Common Desmos traps

- Reading an approximate graph when an exact answer is required.
- Entering an expression incorrectly.
- Using the visible window as proof that no other solutions exist.
- Reporting the x-coordinate when the question asks for y.

Official sources

College Board practice: <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/practice>

Digital PSAT structure: <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt/whats-on-the-test/structure>

Understanding scores: <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/scores/understanding-scores>

International registration: <https://satsuite.collegeboard.org/psat-10/taking-the-test/international-registrations>

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