

SAT and ACT

Things to Know

- ▶ These tests are designed to measure college readiness for students.
- ▶ Colleges vary in the importance they place on standardized testing.
- ▶ **Remember**: Your value as a college applicant is not defined by a number on a test (no matter how high or low you score). The application process is holistic and colleges consider a variety of factors when making admissions decisions.

The ACT and SAT are very similar

- ▶ Both tests have a reading comprehension section.
- ▶ Both tests have a math section.
- ▶ Both tests have an optional essay.

Let's have a closer look...

SAT

Reading

1, 65 minute section

Math

1, 25 minute section (no calculator)

1, 55 minute section (calculator)

Writing and Language

1, 35 minute section

Essay (optional)

1, 50 minute section

ACT

English

1, 45 minute section

Math

1, 60 minute section (calculator)

Reading

1, 35 minute section

Science

1, 35 minute section

Writing (optional)

1, 40 minute section

What are the Differences?

Science

- ▶ ACT has a science section; SAT does not.
- ▶ The ACT science section requires no knowledge of chemistry, biology or physics.
- ▶ The ACT science section is really designed to assess how well students can utilize information provided in charts and graphs.
- ▶ The SAT incorporates science items and asks students to utilize data from charts and graphs in both the verbal and math sections, but it does not break these questions out as a separate test category.

What are the differences?

The essay

- ▶ Both offer an optional essay, but they are different:

- ❖ ACT Essay:

The essay prompt presents 3 perspectives on an issue, and students are asked to evaluate the perspectives; to state their own perspectives; and to elaborate on the relationships among the perspectives.

- ❖ SAT Essay

The essay prompts ask students to read a passage and consider how the author uses evidence to support his or her claims. Students must write an essay explaining how the author builds an argument, analyzing how the author uses techniques to strengthen their logic.

- ▶ One is not easier or harder than the other; they are simply different.

What are the differences?

Scoring

SAT

- *Students receive 2 scores: Math and Evidenced-based reading and writing.*
- *Each section is scored out of 800 points, with a possible score range of 200-800.*
- *The sections are then added, for a composite score of 400-1600.*
- *The essay is scored separately. Students receive a score of 2-8 in 3 domains: reading; analysis; and writing.*

ACT

- *Students receive 4 scores: English; Mathematics; Reading; Science.*
- *All 4 sections are scored on a 1-36 scale.*
- *The four scores are then averaged for a composite score of 1-36.*
- *The essay is scored separately. Students are evaluated along 4 domains: Ideas & Analysis; Development & Support; Organization & Language; and Use & Conventions. Students receive a writing score from 1-36.*

If the material is so similar...

What's the REAL difference?

The ACT is faster paced & more time sensitive than the SAT.

The ACT is a more literal test than the SAT.

Neither test is better than the other; some students may perform stronger on one than the other. It varies by individual.

Which test should I take?

- ▶ **COLLEGES HAVE NO PREFERENCE!**
- ▶ Take whichever test gives you the best score.

Not sure?

Step 1

Get the official testing booklet for both exams. These books have real SATs and ACTs and real grading rubrics.

- ❖ *The Official College Board SAT Manual*
- ❖ *The Real ACT Prep Guide*

STEP 2

Look through each test. You may be done at this point!

STEP 3

Take a sample of each and grade both

STEP 4

Compare your scores

How do I compare my scores?

Concordance between ACT Composite Score and Sum of SAT Critical Reading and Mathematics Scores		
SAT CR+M (Score Range)	ACT Composite Score	SAT CR+M (Single Score)
1600	36	1600
1540-1590	35	1560
1490-1530	34	1510
1440-1480	33	1460
1400-1430	32	1420
1360-1390	31	1380
1330-1350	30	1340
1290-1320	29	1300
1250-1280	28	1260
1210-1240	27	1220
1170-1200	26	1190
1130-1160	25	1150
1090-1120	24	1110
1050-1080	23	1070
1020-1040	22	1030
980-1010	21	990
940-970	20	950
900-930	19	910
860-890	18	870
820-850	17	830
770-810	16	790
720-760	15	740
670-710	14	690
620-660	13	640
560-610	12	590
510-550	11	530

FAQs

- ▶ How many times should I take the SAT or ACT?
- ▶ Should I take SAT and ACT?
- ▶ Should I take the optional essay on the SAT or ACT exam?
- ▶ How should I prepare for the SAT or ACT?
- ▶ Do I have to send all of my scores?
- ▶ What if I do not test well?
- ▶ How do I pay for these tests?

How many times should I take the SAT or ACT?

We typically recommend 2.

- ▶ Students' scores often go up the second time. Why?
 - ❖ *They know what to expect and are more comfortable.*
 - ❖ *They have completed more school.*
- ▶ Almost all schools super score the SAT. Many schools super score the ACT.
 - ❖ *Super score means colleges select a student's highest sub-score from each test section, across test dates, and create what could be a more impressive super-score.*
 - ❖ *Students only need to increase their scores on one section to increase their super score.*
- ▶ Typically, students do not increase their scores beyond 2 or 3 test sittings.

Should I take SAT and ACT?

Maybe!

- ▶ Pick the test you think you feel plays to your strengths.
- ▶ If you are not satisfied with your scores, you might consider trying the alternate test.
- ▶ Some students perform similarly across the 2 tests; some score very differently.
- ▶ Any preparation you do for one exam will translate to the other.
- ▶ You choose whether to send SAT scores or ACT scores to colleges.

Should I take the optional essay on the SAT or ACT exam?

Yes!

- ▶ Many schools require the essay.
- ▶ If your list of schools is not finalized, you may not know whether you are going to be required to submit an essay score.
- ▶ You can not sit for the essay alone.
- ▶ If you discover you need an essay score after you have sat for the SAT/ACT, and you did not complete the essay originally, you will have to re-sit for the entire exam.

How should I prepare for the SAT or ACT and other tests?

▶ SAT/ACT

▶ Independent work

- ❖ Online resources... Many are free. Check out the STEM website tab “Free Online SAT & ACT Resources”
- ❖ STEM SAT prep class
- ❖ Books

▶ Group classes

▶ Individual tutors

Do I have to send all of my scores?

No!

- ▶ College Board and ACT both allow for Score Choice.
- ▶ You have the option to send all of your scores or to pick which scores you send.
- ▶ For SAT and ACT, you pick by test date.
- ▶ Score choice is not likely to make a difference. Nearly all schools will pull out the students' highest scores over the course of their testing. If in doubt, send everything.

What if I do not test well?

Not all schools require SATs and ACTs.

- ▶ Hundreds of schools no longer require standardized testing
- ▶ Usually need to provide a writing sample or alternative assessment if not submitting test scores
- ▶ Check out www.fairtest.org for a full listing of test flexible schools

How do I pay for these tests?

- ▶ STEM offers the SAT every April during the school day for sophomores, juniors and seniors. It is free.
- ▶ All students are eligible for 2 fee waivers for the SAT and 2 free Question-and-Answer Service (QAS) or Student Answer Service (SAS) reports. See your counselor for waivers.
- ▶ All students are eligible for 2 fee waivers for the ACT. See your counselor for waivers.
- ▶ Go to <https://www.collegeboard.org/> and <http://www.act.org/> to learn more.