

SAT/ACT COMPARISON

While the SAT and ACT are very different tests, they both fulfill the same role in the admissions process. The SAT and ACT are designed to provide college admissions officers with two things: a predictor of first-year academic achievement in college, and a common yardstick to use in comparing students from a wide range of educational backgrounds.

The ACT was traditionally required by colleges in the mid-west, and the SAT was the test of choice in the northeast and on the east and west coasts. But now an increasing number of students are taking the ACT, and the majority of schools in the United States now accept both SAT or ACT test results. Here are some of the factors that make the SAT and ACT very different breeds:

- The ACT includes a science reasoning test; the SAT does not.
- The ACT math section includes trigonometry; the SAT math does not.
- The SAT tests vocabulary much more than the ACT.
- The SAT is not entirely multiple choices.
- The SAT has a guessing penalty; the ACT does not.
- The ACT tests English grammar; the SAT does not.
- The SAT has an experimental section; the ACT does not have any.

Admissions officers and educators often describe the difference between SAT and ACT in these terms: the ACT is a content-based test, where-as the SAT tests critical thinking and problem solving. In fact, this contrast isn't exactly watertight. Many questions on the ACT test critical thinking, and there is a predictable range of material that's tested on the SAT. But the SAT and ACT reward different attributes, so performing well on each test can all boil down to what kind of test taker you are.

Depending on your particular strengths and weaknesses, you may perform much better on one test than the other. As a result, many students embarking on the admissions process are now considering both the SAT and ACT - to figure out which test provides a better showcase for their abilities.

The most important answer to the "SAT or ACT?" question is to check with your target schools about their requirements. If you have specific colleges in mind, find out from the high schools or your guidance which test the schools require or accept. Although the majority of colleges in the United States now accept both SAT or ACT test results, you'd better make sure about requirements of your target colleges.

If your target colleges accept both, think about which test you can better perform on.

The ACT is a more straightforward exam than the SAT, which can benefit students who are not naturally good test-takers. However, the ACT covers more advanced subjects than the SAT and also poses more of a time challenge for most students. Before you decide which test you can do better, do a few sample tests of both SAT and ACT and compare the results. Be sure that the sample tests cover all sections of the SAT and ACT.

One good reason for considering the ACT is that it may save you from having to take four SAT tests. Many competitive colleges now require applicants to take both the SAT I Reasoning Test and up to three SAT II Subject Tests. However, there are a number of schools including Boston College and Duke that do not require you to take SAT II tests if you take the ACT. So taking the ACT might save you hours of testing (and even more hours of preparation), and save your money.

Please note that these policies vary from school to school. There are a number of schools that require the SAT II regardless of their ACT or SAT I requirements. Be sure to do the research by yourself and make everything crystal clear before you make any decision over your test choice.

Even though most colleges now accept both SAT and ACT scores, familiarity is an important factor in the admissions process. If most students in your state take the SAT, for example, and you take the ACT, admission officers may wonder why.

Choosing the tests can be quite a completed process. So, spend time doing the research. Ask your high school teachers; talk to your classmates; think about your own particular situation. You keep spending time on this matter until you get everything clear for a smart choice. Your research time will be well worth it.

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	SAT	ACT
Preferred by?	Private schools; schools on the east and west coasts	Public schools; schools in the middle of the country; more colleges than prefer the SAT
How Questions Appear	Order of difficulty	No order of difficulty
Score Choice?	No	Yes
Highest Math Level	Algebra/Basic Geometry; test booklet supplies all formulas	Trigonometry (only 4 questions); test booklet rarely provides formulas
Skills Heavily Tested	Vocabulary and Reading; Math	Grammar and Reading; Math
Penalty For Wrong Answers?	Yes	No
Based on School Curriculum?	Less	More
Style of Test	Tricky, with many distracters	More straightforward, with fewer distracters
Structure of Test	Verbal: two 30-min. sections, one 15-min. section Math: two-30 min. sections, one 15-min. section Experimental: one 30-min. Verbal or Math section; looks like any other section	English: one 45-min. section Math: one 60-min. section Reading: one 35-min. section Science Reasoning: one 35-min. section Experimental: added to tests on certain dates; clearly added on
When it's Offered	Seven times per year: Late January Late March or early April Early May Early June Mid October Early November Early December	Six times per year: February April June September (in 13 states only) October December
Scoring	200-800 for Math and for Verbal, added together for a composite score; median about 1000	1-36 for each subject, averaged together for a composite score; median about 21
When Should You Register	At least six weeks before the test date	At least four weeks before the test date
For More Information	Educational Testing Service (ETS) (609) 771-7600 www.ets.org The College Board www.collegeboard.com	ACT (319) 337-1000 www.act.org

For more information on test preference, contact the admissions officer at the college of your choice.

LISD does not promote one test over the other; this information is provided only as a resource.

Source: <http://www.act-sat-prep.com/act2x.html>