

ACT[®] vs. SAT[®]

WHICH TEST IS BETTER FOR YOU?

Although colleges accept either test, some students score substantially higher on the ACT while others do better on the SAT. So how do you choose? The answer depends on several factors. But here's a look at some of the main differences:

ACT questions tend to be more straightforward.

ACT questions are often easier to understand. On the SAT, you'll have to figure out what's being asked before you can answer the question. For example, take a look at these two essay prompts. One is for the SAT Essay and the other for the ACT Writing Test:

SAT: What is your view of the claim that something unsuccessful can still have some value?

ACT: In your view, should high schools become more tolerant of cheating?

The SAT puts a stronger emphasis on vocabulary.

If you're an ardent wordsmith, you'll love the SAT. If words aren't your thing, you may do better on the ACT.

The ACT has a Science Reasoning section. The SAT does not.

You don't need to know anything about amoebas or chemical reactions. The ACT Science Reasoning section tests your skills in analyzing charts and graphs. But if you're truly science-phobic, the SAT might be a better fit for you.

The ACT tests more advanced math concepts.

In addition to basic arithmetic, algebra I, algebra II and geometry, The ACT tests your knowledge of trigonometry as well with the inclusion of four questions. That said, the ACT Math section is not necessarily harder, since many students find the questions more straightforward than those on the SAT.

The ACT Writing Test is optional on test day.

The 25-minute SAT Essay is required and factored into your Writing Skills score. The 30-minute ACT Writing Test is optional and not included in your composite score—it's listed separately. Some colleges require the writing section of the ACT, so be sure to check with the schools where you are applying before opting out.

The SAT is broken up into more sections.

On the ACT, you tackle each content area in one big chunk, with the optional writing test at the end. On the SAT, the three main areas are broken up into 10 sections, with the required essay at the beginning. So, ask yourself if you prefer working in shorter or longer blocks of time or if moving back and forth between content areas will confuse you or keep you energized.

The ACT is more of a "big picture" exam.

College admissions officers look at how you did on each section of the SAT. On the ACT, they focus on your composite score. So if you're weak in one content area but strong in another, you can still end up with a very good ACT score and make a strong impression.



The SAT is undergoing its biggest change in 30 years to make the exam more relevant to the high school curriculum. The Redesigned SAT is expected to debut in March of 2016. In the meantime, below is a side-by-side comparison of the ACT and current SAT.

	ACT	Current SAT
SECTIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. English 2. Math 3. Reading 4. Science 5. Optional Writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Math 2. Critical Reading 3. Writing Skills
SCORING	1 to 36 for each section, averaged together for a composite score of 1 to 36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Total score (600–2400) ▪ 3 section scores (200–800)
LENGTH	3 hours, 3½ hours including essay	3 hours, 45 minutes
ANSWER CHOICES	4 answer choices per question	5 answer choices per question
INCORRECT ANSWER PENALTY	None	1/4 of a point
FORMAT	Paper and pencil	Paper and pencil
VERBAL SECTION CONTENT	<p>The Reading Test measures reading comprehension. You'll read several passages and answer questions that show your understanding of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is directly stated ▪ Statements with implied meanings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Critical Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Vocabulary words – Passage-based questions, with passages drawn from random topics ▪ Writing Skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Multiple-choice grammar questions – Essay
GRAMMAR CONTENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Punctuation ▪ 10-15 grammar rules tested in reading passages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 10-15 grammar rules tested on sentences
MATH CONTENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arithmetic ▪ Pre-algebra ▪ Algebra ▪ Geometry ▪ Trigonometry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Arithmetic ▪ Algebra I & II ▪ Geometry
THE ESSAY	<p>Prompts used for the ACT Writing Test:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Describe an issue relevant to high school students 2) Ask examinees to write about their perspective on the issue 	<p>Required first section of the test (25 minutes, timed)</p> <p>Students respond to a short prompt by providing personal opinion with supporting evidence</p>

The new test on the block.

To learn more about the redesigned SAT, visit PrincetonReview.com/SATChanges.

Still have questions? We've got answers.

Call us today to schedule your free consultation. Find out whether one test is a better fit for you. It could be that you would do equally well on either.

800-2REVIEW | SATChanges@Review.com

Test names are trademarks of their respective owners who are not affiliated with The Princeton Review. The Princeton Review is not affiliated with Princeton University.



Your Goals. Our Expertise.™