

ACT® vs SAT®: Which Test Should You Take?

Both the ACT and the SAT are nationally administered standardized tests that help colleges evaluate candidates. All schools accept either test interchangeably. There is no significant content difference between the ACT and the SAT, though the ACT's math section is slightly more rigorous in testing complex math comprehension. If you are a student who does well in math, you might want to consider the ACT.

If you are a student who needs more time when taking an exam, then you might consider the SAT, since it clocks in at 3 hours and 50 minutes, while the ACT is allotted 3 hours and 35 minutes for testing.

The best way to determine which test best fits your test-taking style, test the tests themselves! See which exam fits you, **take a sample ACT and SAT**. Or, take the quick diagnostic test to the right and see which exam is right for you.

In addition to comparing test structure and content, it's also important to think about your college admissions timeline when making your exam decision.

So as you begin to think about college and creating the best application package possible, your admissions plan should begin with the question, "Which test should I take?" Here's how to compare them.

Compare the tests so you can decide which you should take:

Test Structure and Format	ACT	New SAT
Length	3 hours, 35 min (with optional Writing Test)	3 hours, 50 minutes (with optional Essay)
Structure	4 sections (English, Math, Reading, Science) plus an Optional Essay (or Writing Test)	4 sections (Evidence-Based Reading, Writing, Math without a calculator, Math with a calculator) plus an Optional Essay
Scoring	ACT	New SAT
Score	Composite of 1-36 based on average scores from the 4 test sections 4 scores of 1-36 for each test Optional Writing Test score of 1-36 (not included in the overall)	Score is out of 1600: 800 for Math, 800 for Evidence-Based Reading and Writing Optional Essay receives a separate score Subscores and insight scores available
Wrong Answer Penalty	No penalty for wrong answers	No penalty for wrong answers

Scoring	ACT	New SAT
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Sending Score History	You decide which score is sent	Not yet known
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Content	ACT	New SAT
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Reading	Reading Comprehension	Reading Comprehension Words in Context Evidence Based
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Math	Arithmetic Algebra Geometry Algebra II Trigonometry	Algebra Data Analysis Geometry Trigonometry Algebra II
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Science	Analysis Interpretation Evaluation Basic Content Problem Solving	Science Insight Score Provided
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Writing and Language	The Essay: Writing Test English Test: Writing & Language multiple-choice questions	Tests grammatical and rhetorical skills
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Essay	Optional final section 40 minutes Not included in composite score Topic presents conversations around contemporary issues	Optional final section 50 minutes Separate score Tests Reading, Analysis, and Writing Skills Topic comes from a 750-word passage to be read on Test Day
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