

SAT vs ACT

Which one is right for you?

Many students and parents begin the college prep process by comparing the ACT and SAT tests. The [SAT](#) and [ACT](#) generally cover the same topics. Both ACT and SAT scores are used for college admissions decisions and awarding merit-based scholarships. Most colleges do not prefer one test over the other.

TEST	ACT	SAT
TIMING	3 hours and 35 minutes with Writing test	3 hours and 50 minutes with Essay
STRUCTURE	4 tests: English, Math, Reading, Science Optional Writing test	4 tests: Reading, Writing & Language, Math— Calculator, Math—no Calculator
QUESTION TYPES	Multiple choice and essay	Multiple choice, grid-ins, and essay
SCORE	Highest composite score is 36, which is the average of the 4 test scores	Highest composite score is 1600, which is the sum of the 2 section scores
CONTENT		
READING	35 min– 40 questions 3 stand alone and 1 paired passage: Natural Science, Humanities, Literature and Social Science.	65 min 4 stand alone passage and 1 paired passage: Science, Literature, Social Science, Primary Sources and Careers
MATH	60 min—60 questions Multiple choice answers with 5 answer choices	55 min (with calculator) - 38 questions 25 min (without calculator) - 20 questions Multiple choice and grid in questions
SCIENCE	35 min-40 questions	Science passages throughout the test Students receive an Analysis in Science Cross Test Score
WRITING & LANGUAGE/ ENGLISH	45 min– 75 questions	35 min– 44 questions; 4 passages
ESSAY (OPTIONAL)	40 min Students analyze three perspectives and give their own point of view 4 scores, each on a scale of 2-12	50 min Students analyze a 650-750 word document and explain how the author builds an argument 3 scores, each on a scale of 2-8
NOTABLE DIFFERENCES		
TIMING	Less time per question	More time per question
MATH	More geometry	More data analysis/problem solving Math—no calculator section
SCORING	English, Math, Reading and Science each make up 25% of the score	Evidence based Reading and Writing section and Math section each make up 50% of score.
READING TOPICS	More focus on science reading	More focus on history/social studies reading

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The best way to decide if taking the SAT, ACT, or both tests is right for you is to take a timed [full-length practice test](#) of each type. Since the content and style of the SAT and ACT are very similar, factors like how you handle time pressure and what types of questions you find most challenging can help you determine which test is a better fit. Go to <https://www.princetonreview.com/college/sat-act> to take a free quiz to see which test is best for you.