

ACT vs. SAT

All colleges accept both tests without bias. The table below highlights their similarities and differences.

	ACT	SAT
Test Length	2 hours 55 minutes or 3 hours 25 minutes with essay	3 hours 45 minutes
Topics Covered & Nature of Material	<p>Sections include English (grammar), Mathematics Reading, and Science.</p> <p>English questions address grammar, word usage and punctuation as well as rhetorical skills.</p> <p>Math questions are straightforward, knowledge/skill based and include topics up to Trigonometry.</p> <p>Reading sections are logical and easy to understand.</p> <p>Science questions mainly test data interpretation and reading comprehension skills and understanding of scientific process rather than factual science knowledge.</p>	<p>Sections include Critical Reading, Mathematics and Writing.</p> <p>Writing questions involve identifying errors, improving sentence structure and improving paragraphs.</p> <p>Math questions cover topics through Geometry and Algebra 2 and tend to require interpretation and problem solving skills /thinking outside the box.</p> <p>Reading passages are taken from college level readings from literature and other sources.</p>
Test Structure	One section of each type, always in the same order: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science.	Test has nine multiple choice sections, eight of which contribute to the score (the other is purely for experimental purposes): 3 math, 3 critical reading, 2 writing. The order of sections varies on each test.
Essay	30 minute essay is optional, taken at the end of the test. Most colleges require applicants to take the test with essay.	25 minute essay is required, taken at the beginning of the test.
Question Order	<p>English: Five paragraphs are the platform for 75 questions of varying content, type and difficulty.</p> <p>Math: The first half of the section consists of questions of easy and medium levels of difficulty. More difficult questions are found in the second half where they are mixed with some easy and medium difficulty level questions.</p> <p>Reading: Four reading passages with 10 questions each. There are no sentence completion (vocabulary) questions. Questions are arranged in varying order of difficulty.</p> <p>Science: Seven passages taken from scientific studies. Questions are arranged in increasing order of difficulty in each passage.</p>	Math, vocabulary and writing questions are arranged in increasing order of difficulty in each section.

Reporting Scores	Send to colleges only scores you choose.	Score choice means you may choose to send some test date scores and not others. Some colleges may require you to send all scores.
Scoring	Each section is scored on a scale of 36. The four scores are averaged to form a composite score out of 36. Though a few colleges may “cherry pick” the best sub scores from multiple test days, most ask for the composite score only.	Each section is scored from 200 to 800 points and added to form a maximum of 2400 points. Generally colleges look at CR + M for a total score out of 1600. Almost all colleges “cherry pick” best math and critical reading scores from multiple test dates to form a “super score.”
Other Tests	Many colleges accept the ACT with writing in lieu of SAT subject tests.	SAT subject tests may also be required by colleges.
Penalty for Guessing	No penalty for incorrect answers. Students answer every question and don’t have to concern themselves with whether or not they should guess.	Incorrect answers are penalized by an extra $\frac{1}{4}$ point. Students must develop and practice a guessing strategy.
Types of Questions	English, Reading and Science sections are composed of 4-choice multiple choice questions. Math section is comprised of 5-choice multiple choice questions. Questions tend to be straightforward.	All sections are comprised of 5-choice multiple choice questions with the exception of 10 student produced response questions in one math section. Students sometimes have difficulty deciphering questions.
Given Information	No formulas given.	Formulas are given on the front page of each math section.
What’s Being Tested	The ACT tests content knowledge in math and data analysis skills.	The SAT is an aptitude test.
Calculators	Calculator programs greatly simplify many questions and are very useful.	Calculators are helpful, but their use is not as beneficial as on the ACT.
Timing	Timing on the Reading and Science sections is very limited. Students typically need practice to finish on time.	Timing is not a problem for the majority of students. Most finish all sections within the allotted time.

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