



The SAT versus the ACT: Which Test should you take? by Kaplan

Many colleges and universities now accept both SAT and ACT scores, giving you the option to choose which test to take for the best score possible. The recommended way to truly determine which test best suits your test-taking strengths is to take practice exams for both tests and then choose the test that makes you feel the most comfortable and confident. Before practicing, though, you should familiarize yourself with the differences between the exams through our list of frequently asked questions.

What's the difference between what is tested on the ACT versus the SAT?

The SAT is traditionally thought of as a test that measures your critical thinking skills, testing your ability to analyze and solve problems in math, reading, and writing. The ACT, on the other hand, is considered a more "curriculum-based" test, since it tests your academic preparedness for college in the areas of English, math, reading, and science specifically by calling on information you have learned in your high school coursework.

Which test should I take?

Here are the factors to consider when you're deciding whether to take the SAT or ACT:

1. Investigate the admissions requirements for the schools you're interested in. Keep in mind that while many schools do look at scores from both tests, not all schools treat them interchangeably. For example, some schools will only consider the SAT in the application process, but will look at the ACT as supplemental material.
2. Consider your test-taking strengths and weaknesses. Since the SAT and ACT vary in their content and format, individual preference goes a long way when determining which test is right for you. If you have a strong academic background, you may prefer the ACT because you have a proven track record with the materials tested. On the other hand, if you have a natural aptitude for solving problems, you may prefer the SAT, particularly if you're generally confident with your critical thinking skills.
3. Decide if taking both tests is a good option for you. If you find that the majority of the schools on your college list will consider both scores, we recommend taking both tests and submitting your highest score.

How can I find out if a school will accept an ACT score instead of an SAT?

You should be able to find this information by visiting the school's website or calling their admissions office.

I'm not as familiar with the ACT. What are colleges looking for from an ACT score?

Since the ACT is considered a curriculum-based test, scoring indicates a student's academic standing to a college. For instance, if you are applying to a program specializing in the sciences, the school may want to review your ACT score for a better understanding of your science skills. (Remember, science is not tested on the SAT).

Although the ACT writing test is officially optional, many schools require it from their applicants. For example, nine of the Big Ten schools require the writing test, and the other two recommend that applicants take it.

Which test is longer?

I'm worried about having to concentrate for such a long amount of time!

The SAT is longer by about 45 minutes. But we strongly recommend choosing the test that is most comfortable for you instead of focusing on the duration of the exam. Your best performance will be on the test where you feel most confident in correctly answering the questions, irrespective of the length of the exam.

Is the math on the ACT more challenging?

While the math on the SAT tests topics up to and including ninth grade basic geometry and algebra II, the math on the ACT tests topics up to and including trigonometry.

What about vocabulary?

If vocabulary is an area of forte, you may want to consider the SAT. The SAT stresses vocabulary more than the ACT due to the inclusion of the Sentence Completion question type.

I'm not comfortable with guessing. Is there a penalty for a wrong answer on both exams?

There is no penalty for a wrong answer on the ACT, but there is a penalty for a wrong answer on the SAT.

Where can I take SAT or ACT practice tests and learn which test is best for me?

Free practice tests are offered on several websites:

www.kaptest.com

www.petersons.com

www.princetonreview.com