

ACT or SAT?

The decision of whether a student is more likely to do well on the ACT or SAT is difficult to sort out, but a few comparisons can be made between the tests. Information on the table below is from <http://www.princetonreview.com>

	SAT	ACT
When is it changing?	March 2005	February 2005
What are the changes?	Paragraph-length critical reading passages, an essay, and more challenging math. Nor more analogies or quantitative comparisons.	Additional of an "optional" essay
When is it administered?	Seven times per year	Six times per year
What is the test structure?	Ten-Section exam: Three critical reading, three math, three writing, and one experimental. The experimental section is masked to look like a regular section	Four-section exam: English, math, reading, and science reasoning. An experimental section is added to tests on certain dates only and is clearly experimental.
What is the test content?	Math: up to 9 th grade basic geometry and Algebra II. Science: none Reading: sentence completions, short and long critical reading passages, reading comprehension. Stresses vocabulary. More questions testing grammar, usage, and word choice.	Math: Up to trigonometry. Science section included. Reading: Four passages, one each of prose fiction, social science, humanities, and natural science. Stresses grammar.
Is there a penalty for wrong answers?	Yes	No
How is the test scored?	200-800 per section, added together for a combined score. A 2400 is the highest possible combined score.	1-36 for each subject, averaged for a composite score. A 36 is the highest possible composite score.
Are all scores sent to schools?	Yes. If a student requests a score report be sent to specific colleges, the report will include the scores the student received on every SAT taken.	No. There is a "Score Choice" option. Students can choose which schools will receive their scores and which scores the schools will see.
Are there other uses for the exams?	Scholarship purposes	Scholarship purposes. Certain statewide testing programs.
Best time to register?	At least SIX WEEKS before the test date	At least four weeks before the test date
Need more information?	Educational Testing Service (ETS) (609) 771-7600 www.ets.org The College Board www.collegeboard.com	ACT, Inc. (319) 337-1000 www.act.org

Choosing the test

Consider some differences before you decide. . . .

Following are some thoughts concerning the ACT or SAT decision. This is not a complete list of issues, nor is it intended to guide your decision in a particular direction.

One of the primary differences between the ACT and SAT test lies in the content that is tested; while the SAT covers verbal and math (including Algebra II and geometry), the ACT tests reading, English, science reasoning, and math (up to trigonometry).

A second difference is that the SAT penalizes students for selecting incorrect answers, but the ACT does not penalize for guessing. Hypothetically (assuming an equal scale), if a question were worth 10 points, and the student answered it incorrectly, the ACT would assign a score of 0 for that question. The SAT would assign a score of -2.5. Leaving the answer blank would result in a score of 0 from both companies. As a result, it is important for students taking either test to use strategies to help them decide

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when to guess, and when to leave an answer blank.

When it comes time to submit scores to colleges, the SAT will send all test scores; if the student took the SAT test seven times, all seven sets will be sent. The ACT will send the highest test scores of the seven tests.

Be sure to check with the institutions your child is interested in attending to see if there is a preference concerning which scores to send. Historically the Midwestern scores have preferred the ACT, while schools on the coasts have preferred the SAT. Many schools today accept either.

Finally, encourage your son or daughter to prepare for the test. The test registration booklet includes a description of the various test sections, the rules, the amount of time allotted per section, and so forth. You can also purchase test preparation books in the reference section of your local book store. Some of these guides focus on strategies, while others lean toward more practice tests and reviewing of concepts to be covered. Encourage your son or daughter to look carefully at the books before purchasing one.