

SAT or ACT?

That is the question.

Long before you sit down to take the test, you're faced with one of its toughest questions **Which one to take?** The SAT and ACT serve the same function and have a good deal in common—both are lengthy, challenging and treated like the holy grail of college admissions

See how the two compare.

	SAT	ACT
What type of test is it?	The SAT is a reasoning test	The ACT is a content-based test
How often is it offered?	7x / year	6x / year
How long is the test?	3 hours 45 min	3 hours + 30 min if you choose to do the essay
Math	Up to basic geometry & algebra Two 25-min sections and one 20-min section	Up to trigonometry One 60-min section
Science	None	Charts & experiments, one 35-min section
Reading	Sentence completion, short and long critical reading passages, reading comprehension, vocabulary Two 25-min sections and one 20-min section	4 passages, one each of prose fiction, social sciences, humanities and natural sciences One 35-min section
Writing	1 essay, graded as a whole instead of a collection of criteria One 25-min essay, one 25-min section and one 10-min section	1 optional essay, points awarded when certain criteria are met
Do sections get progressively more difficult?	Yes	No
How is it scored?	200-800 for each section added together for a combined score ranging from 600-2400	1-36 for each section averaged together for a composite score ranging from 1-36
Is there a penalty for wrong answers?	Yes, wrong answers will cost you 1/4 of a point	No
Score Choice	Yes	Yes
Registration information	Visit CollegeBoard.com or call 609-921-9000	Visit ACTStudent.org or call 319-337-1270

Preparing for the SAT and/or the ACT?

Our prep programs are designed with you in mind and provide a personalized prep experience that fits your learning style, schedule and budget. PrincetonReview.com/College

Which Test Is Best for You?

In lieu of a crystal ball we created The Princeton Review Assessment (PRA), a test designed to help you determine on which exam you'd score higher.

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SAT | ACT

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The
Princeton
Review

What's the difference between the ACT and the SAT?

Both the ACT and the SAT are nationally administered standardized tests that help colleges evaluate candidates. Most colleges and universities accept either test. 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?" When weighing your options, keep in mind that there are differences in test structure and the type of content assessed. Use the chart below to see which test makes the most of your strengths to help you determine which test might be best for you.

	ACT	SAT
Test Length	3 hours, 25 minutes (including the 30-minute optional Writing Test)	3 hours, 45 minutes
Test Structure	4 Test Sections (5 with the optional Writing Test): English, Math, Reading, Science, Writing (Optional), Experimental Test (sometimes added and clearly labeled)	10 Sections: 3 Critical Reading, 3 Math, 3 Writing (including the Essay), 1 Experimental (unscored but included as a regular section)
» Reading	Reading Comprehension—4 passages with 10 questions per passage	Reading Comprehension—short and long passages with questions Sentence Completion
» Math	Arithmetic, algebra, geometry, algebra II, and trigonometry	Arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and algebra II
» Science	Analysis, interpretation, evaluation, basic content, and problem solving	Science not included
» Essay	Last thing you do (optional). 30 minutes Not included in composite score Topic of importance to high school students	First thing you do: 25 minutes • Factored into overall score • More abstract topic (vs ACT)
Scoring	Composite score of 1–36, based on average of scores from 4 tests 4 scores of 1–36 for each test Plus optional Writing Test Score of 0–12	Total score out of 600–2400, based on adding scores from 3 subjects • 3 scores of 200–800 for each subject • Score of 0–12 for the Essay
Wrong Answer Penalty	No penalty for wrong answers	¼ point subtracted for each wrong answer. (except for Math Grid-In questions)
Sending Score History	You decide which score is sent	Your entire score history will be sent automatically. NEW —Beginning with Class of 2010, you decide which test score is sent
Test Contact Information	ACT, Inc 1-319-337-1000 actstudent.org	The College Board 1-866-756-7346 collegeboard.com

* ACT tests knowledge of subject matter covered in high school

* SAT tests/measures a student's reasoning or critical thinking skills

College planning calendar for juniors

Fall

Start with you: Think about your abilities, social/cultural preferences and personal qualities. List things you may want to study and do in college.

Learn about colleges. Look at their websites (www.collegeboard.org has links). Talk to friends, family, teachers and recent grads of your school now in college. Browse college guide books. List college features that interest you.

Meet with your school counselor. Will there be a college night? When will college representatives visit your school? (Put the dates in your calendar.)

At school, sign up early to take the PSAT/NMSQT®, which is given in October.

Make a file to manage your college search, testing and application materials.

If appropriate (for example, if you're interested in drama, music, art, sports, etc.), start to gather material for a portfolio.

With your family, start to learn about financial aid. Read the Department of Education's *Funding Your Education* (about federal aid programs). Use *Getting Financial Aid* published by the College Board and the financial aid calculator at www.collegeboard.org to estimate how much aid you might receive.

Winter

Make a family appointment with your counselor to discuss ways to improve your college-preparation and selection processes

Sign up to take college admission tests (e.g., the SAT) this spring. Register online or through your school. Fee waivers are available for students with financial need. To prepare, download practice materials from admission test websites.

Begin a search for scholarships. National sources include the *College Board Scholarship Handbook* and electronic sources. Don't overlook local and state aid sources (ask a counselor or check your public library).

College planning calendar for juniors (page 2)

Ask a counselor or teacher about taking the SAT Subject Tests™ in the spring. You should take them while course material is still fresh in your mind. You can download “Taking the SAT Subject Tests,” which offers test-prep advice, from www.collegeboard.org.

Think about which teachers you will ask to write letters of recommendation.

Spring

Visit some local colleges — large, small, public and private. Get a feel for what works for you. Attend college fairs, too.

Develop a list of 15 or 20 colleges that attract you. Request viewbooks and information about financial aid and academic programs that interest you. Plan campus visits. It's best to go when classes are in session.

If you are considering military academies or ROTC scholarships, contact your counselor before leaving school for the summer. If you want a four-year ROTC scholarship, you should begin the application process the summer before your senior year.

Summer

Plan summer activities early. Enrich yourself by volunteering, getting an interesting job or internship, or signing up for special summer learning programs.

If you are an athlete planning to continue playing a sport in college, register with the NCAA Eligibility Center (www.eligibilitycenter.org).

Find a full-time or part-time job, or participate in a camp or summer college program.

Visit colleges. Take campus tours and, at colleges you're serious about, make appointments to have interviews with admissions counselors.

Create a résumé — a record of accomplishments, activities and work experiences since you started high school.

If you are applying to a visual or performing arts program, work on your portfolio or audition pieces.

Source: *The College Board*

20 Questions to ask college representatives

Whether you meet them at a college fair or on a campus visit, college reps genuinely enjoy talking to high school students and answering questions about their college. The following questions will help start a good dialogue:

1. What makes your college unique?
2. What academic programs is your college most known for?
3. How would you describe the kids that go there? Where do most of them come from?
4. Where do kids hang out on campus?
5. What happens on weekends—are there things to do on campus or in town, or do most kids go home?
6. Are fraternities and sororities a big part of campus life?
7. What are the housing options for freshmen?
8. Do many students live off campus?
9. Is there a sports complex or fitness center?
10. What are the most popular clubs and activities?
11. What's the security like on campus?
12. What's the surrounding area like? Is it easy to get around?
13. What are the most popular majors?
14. How would you describe the academic pressure and workload?
15. What support services are available (academic advisers, tutors, etc)?
16. Do I need to bring my own computer?
17. What's the faculty like? How accessible are they outside of class?
18. Are there opportunities for internships?
19. Is there job placement help for graduates?
20. Are any big changes in the works that I should know about?

Source: *Get it Together for College 2nd ed* (College Board 2011)

Handout 3E

How to get the most out of a college fair

TIPS FOR STUDENTS FROM THE ASSOCIATED COLLEGES OF THE MIDWEST

Going to a college fair

- Take along a pen and a small notebook.
- Take a bag to carry the brochures you pick up.
- Print out some address labels with your name, address, phone number, email address, high school and year of graduation. Spend your time at the college tables asking questions, not filling out contact cards!
- When you arrive, check out the floor plan and find out where the tables for your top-choice colleges are located so you can go directly to them.
- Write your most important questions down in advance so you don't forget them.
- Check on whether any information sessions, such as financial aid, are being offered. Interested? Budget your time accordingly.
- Jot down notes about a college while your memory is fresh, such as right after visiting the table.
- Pick up the business cards of any representatives you talk to, so you can contact them if you have any more questions.

After you get home

- Make a point of going through the materials and your notes within one week after the fair. You'll probably remember more about your conversations with college representatives while the memories from the fair are still fresh.
- Follow up with any college that interests you by contacting the admission office to ask further questions, and, if possible, plan a visit to the campus.

Source: *Associated Colleges of the Midwest* (www.acm.edu)

College application checklist

Use this checklist to help you stay on top of your application tasks, paperwork and deadlines.

	College 1	College 2	College 3
Application deadlines			
Regular application deadline			
Early application deadline			
Grades			
Request high school transcript sent			
Request midyear grade reports sent			
Test Scores			
Send test scores (e.g., SAT)			
Send SAT Subject Test scores			
Send AP® scores			
Letters of Recommendation			
Number required			
Request recommendations			
Send thank-you notes			
Essays			
Number required			
Proof essay(s) for spelling and grammar			
Have two people read essay(s)			
Final copy in application			
Interviews			
Interview date			
Send thank-you note(s) to interviewer(s)			

College application checklist (page 2)

	College 1	College 2	College 3
Send and Track Your Application			
Save/copy all application materials			
Include application fee			
Sign application			
Confirm receipt of application materials			
Send supplemental material, if needed			
Give copy to school counselor			
Financial Aid Forms			
Priority financial aid deadline			
Regular financial aid deadline			
Submit FAFSA			
Submit CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE®, if needed			
Submit institutional aid form, if needed			
Submit state aid form, if needed			
After You Send Your Application			
Receive admission letter			
Receive financial aid award letter			
Accept financial aid package			
Housing forms completed and returned			
Send deposit			
Notify other colleges you will not attend			

Source: *Get it Together for College, 2nd ed (College Board, 2011)*

Tips for undertaking the application process

Getting started

- Set up a folder for each application. Keep all material relevant to each college in its own folder.
- Request letters of recommendations at least two weeks (a month is better) before the deadlines.
- Review all application requirements. Set up a schedule for completing them. You might want to put off this task as long as you can, but procrastination is risky. There is a lot to do, especially if you have several essays to write. You may not do the application (and yourself) justice if you leave it until the last minute. Remember: Leave enough time for correcting and revising.

Completing the application process

- Review each page of the application and its directions completely before you start to work on it.
- Be accurate, honest and neat. Spell correctly and use correct grammar.
- Don't type your essay directly into the application. Draft it separately, then upload the final, proof-read version.
- Request the testing organization to send your official test scores directly to the colleges. Do not send a photocopy of your own test score report unless requested to do so. Sometimes, a college accepts a photocopy as a means of obtaining preliminary information, but it will need the official report to make an offer of admission.
- When you have completed your application, ask someone to review it and check it for errors.
- Print and save to your hard drive the completed application before you send it.
- If you file an online application, be sure to tell your counselor when you have submitted the application and which materials the school needs to send to the college (such as recommendations or the transcript).

Tips for undertaking the application process

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Tips for online applicants

- Make sure a person whose opinion you trust reviews the application for errors before you send it.
- Use standard spelling and grammar — not email-ese: Treat this like a paper application.
- Spell your name the same way on the online application and on other components that are sent via mail; this will help the colleges match the components of your application in a timely way.
- Have your test scores sent to the colleges to which you are applying, if you haven't already.
- Print out a paper copy for your records.
- Do not apply electronically and send a paper copy in the mail: Wait for confirmation that the electronic copy was received (you should get that within three or four days, if not sooner).
- Tell your counselor of every online application you send, so he or she can send transcripts and letters of recommendation.

Source: *Susan Staggers, Cary Academy, North Carolina*

College application FAQs: Students ask, counselors answer

Do I have a better chance of getting in if I apply early?

This can vary from school to school and year to year and may depend on the applicant pool at the school to which you are applying. Check to see what percentage of students in the previous graduating classes at your high school were admitted as Early Decision to a specific college. Are you qualified to apply for Early Decision? If you are, and this is a school you really wish to attend, then apply for Early Decision.

How much time should I give my teachers to write letters of recommendation for me?

Teachers should always receive a minimum of two weeks' notice before the postmark date. Be sure to ask in a way that allows a teacher to decline comfortably if he or she does not have time to do an adequate job. For example: "Do you feel you know me well enough, and do you have enough time, to write a supportive letter of recommendation for me?" Give the teacher a stamped envelope addressed to the college, along with any recommendation form provided by the college.

How many times should I take the SAT®?

Some students are satisfied with their SAT scores the first time they take the test. Others believe they will benefit from taking it a second time. Most students will take the SAT in the spring of their junior year and the fall of their senior year. There is no evidence that taking the test more than twice results in significant score gains for most students.

My SAT scores are very low, and my grades are very high. Will this affect my chances of admission?

While SAT scores are an indicator of success in college, admissions staff look at many different factors when making a decision about whether to admit a student. One of the main things they are looking for is to see if your high school academic profile indicates that you have the potential for academic success on their campus. What kind of courses have you taken? Have you taken rigorous courses such as honors or AP® courses? Have you taken AP Exams so that there are scores to indicate how you may perform in a college-level course? That said, you should always check with the college or university you are applying to if you have questions on their score use policies.

My parents don't make a lot of money — will colleges hold this against me?

Colleges should tell you whether they have a "need-blind" admission policy. Those that do never consider ability to pay as an admission requirement. Other schools, which are "need conscious,"

College application FAQs: Students ask, counselors answer (page 2)

may consider ability to pay, but only for a very small proportion of the admitted group. My advice is always: Don't worry about this.

How can I improve my chances of getting in from the wait list?

If a college is your first choice, let the college know that — although the college may not ask for this information. Write a letter to the director of admission expressing your continuing strong interest and updating the admission office with any new information that enhances you. In addition, you may wish to ask your counselor to make a call on your behalf. Many colleges keep track of these kinds of contacts, and students who are enthusiastic and persistent will get looked at first. Colleges want to admit students off the wait list who will accept the offer of admission.

Do colleges really care about your senior-year grades?

Absolutely! Many colleges will not make a decision until receiving seventh-semester grades. They expect to see a performance that indicates you are ready for college-level work. The college at which you make your enrollment deposit will ask for a final transcript at the end of the senior year. (Admission letters often say something like, "Your admissions is contingent upon your continued successful performance.") It is not at all rare for a college to withdraw an offer of admission when grades drop significantly over the course of the senior year. (I have a folder full of copies of these letters.)

Answers provided by Mary Lee Hoganson, a former counselor at Homewood-Flossmoor High School, Illinois, and Nadine K. Maxwell, a former coordinator of guidance services for Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia.

Source: *The College Board*

Some typical admission policies

Early Action

Students who apply under a college's Early Action plan receive a decision before the standard response date but are not required to accept an offer of admission or to make a deposit prior to May 1. Most Early Action deadlines are in November, December or January, with notification some weeks later. Approximately 200 colleges have Early Action plans. Students should be sure to read the college policy carefully. Some colleges have "single choice Early Action" plans. In these plans, colleges place some restrictions on the applicant's right to make applications to other Early Decision or Early Action plans.

Early Decision

Students who apply under Early Decision commit to enroll at the college if they are admitted and offered a satisfactory financial aid package. Application deadlines are usually in mid-November, with a mid- to late-December notification date. Approximately 230 colleges have an Early Decision plan. Some colleges have both an Early Decision and an Early Action plan.

Open Admission

Under this policy, a college admits students without regard to conventional academic qualifications, such as taking appropriate high school subjects and receiving suitable high school grades and admission-test scores. Virtually all applicants with high school diplomas or the equivalent are accepted. Most community colleges practice open admission, although many have requirements for certain programs — for example, nursing.

Rolling Admission

In this frequently used procedure, a college considers each student's application as soon as all the required credentials, such as school record and test scores, have been received. The college usually notifies an applicant of its decision without delay. At many colleges, rolling admission allow for early notification and work much like nonbinding Early Action programs.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement

A college subscribing to this agreement does not require applicants offered admission as first-year students to notify the college of their decision to attend (or to accept an offer of financial aid) before May 1 of the year the applicants apply. The purpose of the agreement is to give students time to hear from all the colleges to which they have applied before having to make a commitment to any of them.

Source: *The College Board*

Handout 4D

Application ethics: What students need to consider

In recent years, college admissions officers and college counselors have seen a growing number of students and parents who, in an attempt to manipulate the system in their favor, are crossing the boundary between helping ensure a desired outcome and taking inappropriate actions.

The admission process is not a game to be won at any cost. It is a complex process that demands a great deal of integrity on everyone's part, especially the school's. Here are some examples of what we consider crossing the boundary.

- Applying to binding Early Decision programs at more than one college or university. The whole point of a binding ED program is to make a contract: "If you accept me, I will withdraw all my other applications and attend your university." Many colleges now require that the college adviser sign the application along with the student and parents. The school will not send transcripts to more than one ED school or to any other schools once a student has been admitted under a binding ED program.
- Failing to withdraw your applications to other colleges when you have been admitted under a binding ED program. It isn't fair to those colleges or to the students who have applied to them for you to continue in the process just to see what happens
- Attempting to gain release from an ED decision because you have changed your mind. The only acceptable reason for requesting release from your contract with your ED college is the inability to work out appropriate financial aid. You and your parents should discuss the cost factor when you are deciding whether to apply for ED in the first place.
- Having someone else write or heavily edit your essays When you sign an application, you are indicating it is your work. If it is not, then you may be subject to the school's honor code.
- Submitting deposits to more than one college. If you are admitted to a college that requires a deposit by May 1 and wait-listed at your favorite college, call the college that admitted you and discuss the matter before you send your check Your counselor can advise you how to conduct this conversation and what the appropriate behavior is.
- Stating an intended major that you have no intention of pursuing, because you think it might help your admission chances.
- Inaccurately describing your activities and accomplishments. Putting things in the best light is one thing; fabrication is something else.
- Stating to more than one college that it is your first choice.

Source: Adapted from material provided by Cary Academy, North Carolina

Handout 4F

Guidelines for students requesting recommendations

1. Think about who knows you and can attest to the quality of your work. If you need a *recommendation from a teacher, request one from a teacher in an academic subject who knows your strengths*. That may be a teacher in whose class you've gotten top grades, but it could also be a teacher who knows how hard you've worked to get B's and C's.
If you need three recommendations — one from a counselor, an academic teacher and another person — consider requesting one from someone who knows you well: a coach, employer, adult co-worker, or religious or youth-group leader, or an adult in the community with whom you have had regular and positive contact.
2. Ask the person if that individual would be willing to write a letter for you. Remember, the person is doing you a favor
3. Submit *information about yourself (résumé, brag sheet), the recommendation form (if there is one) and other pertinent information to the writer at least two weeks before it needs to be completed*. Remember, the deadline is the last possible day the letter/application may be **received** by the admissions or scholarship committee, not the day you put it in the mail.
4. Set your own deadline at least one week before you need to mail your application letter.
5. If the writer is to send your letter separately, provide a stamped, addressed envelope with a note attached listing a deadline for mailing that is at least five days before the application deadline. *Politely check with the writer to be certain your letter was mailed ("How's my letter coming? Do you need any more information?")*.
6. Write a brief thank-you note to the writer.
7. If you receive the scholarship or are accepted to the college for which the letter was written, let the writer know.
8. Copy all parts of your application, essay, letters and other materials for your own records.
9. Let the guidance office know when you have a response from the college or scholarship committee, one way or the other.

Source: *The College Board*

Handout 5H