

ACT vs SAT: Key differences between the ACT and SAT

ACT vs SAT: which test is a better fit for you? Students may take whichever test they prefer (assuming there are available testing locations for both tests). If you're not sure which test you would prefer, consider the key differences between the ACT and SAT. Some students find that the ACT caters to their strengths more so than the SAT, and vice versa.

SAT	vs.	ACT
reasoning test	Type of Test	content-based test
Critical Reading: 2, 25-min sections and 1, 20-min section; Math: 2, 25-min sections and 1, 20-min section; Writing: 1, 25-min essay, 1, 25-min section, and 1, 10-min section	Test Format	English: 1, 45-min section; Math: 1, 60-min section; Reading: 1, 35-min section; Science: 1, 35-min section; Writing: 1, 30-min essay (optional)
reading, vocabulary, grammar & usage, writing, and math	Content Covered	grammar & usage, math, reading, science reasoning, and writing (optional)
tricky, questions can be phrased in ways that make them difficult to decipher	Test Style	straightforward, questions may be long but are usually less difficult to decipher
Math, Critical Reading, and Writing scores will each range between a 200-800; total SAT score ranges between 600-2400	Scoring	English, Math, Reading, and Science scores will each range between 1-36. Composite ACT score is the average of your scores on the four sections; ranges between 1-36
yes – you lose ¼ of a point for incorrect answers (except on the grid-in math questions)	Penalty for Wrong Answers?	no – you do not lose points for incorrect answers
yes – you can choose which set(s) of SAT scores to submit to colleges	Score Choice?	yes – you can choose which set(s) of ACT scores to submit to colleges
questions increase in difficulty level as you move through that question type in a section (except reading passage questions, which progress chronologically through the passage)	Difficulty Levels	difficulty level of the questions is random
arithmetic, data analysis, algebra I and II, functions, geometry; formulas are provided in the test booklet	Math Levels	arithmetic, algebra I and II, functions, geometry, trigonometry; no formulas are provided
with private schools and schools on the east and west coasts; however, every four-year college in the US accepts SAT scores	Tends to be more popular?	with public schools and schools in the Midwest and south; however, every four-year college in the US accepts ACT scores
seven times per year: January, March or April, May, June, October, November, December	Offered when?	six times per year: February, April, June, September, October, December (note that some states offer the ACT as part of their state testing requirements; these tests are not administered on the national test dates)
typically about four weeks before the test date	Registration deadline?	typically about five to six weeks before the test date
www.collegeboard.com	More Information	www.act.org