



# ***A Parents Guide for the ACT, SAT, and Test Prep***

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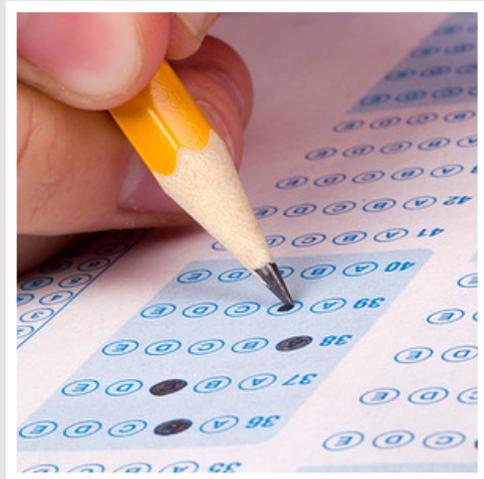
There is a lot of information out there about the ACT and SAT and we've tried to compact the most important points in this document for you! The college application process can be an intense time for both students and parents and knowing the facts can help to eliminate any anxiety about when to start preparing and how to prepare. Most students take the ACT and/or SAT during their junior year of high school. Sophomore and even freshman students should be aware of these tests and start researching colleges that they are interested in applying to. In this document, we will address the following topics:

- **Should my child take the ACT or the SAT?**
- **Commonly asked questions regarding the ACT/SAT**
- **Tips for taking the ACT**
- **Tips for taking the SAT**
- **A comparison chart for the ACT, SAT, and new SAT**
- **How to receive help**

## Should my child take the ACT or SAT?

This is one of the most common questions that is asked! Many parents believe that their child should take both the ACT and the SAT. That's not always the best idea because the tests are different and usually students prefer one test over the other. Most colleges don't care which test is taken and they will accept both equally. It's important to know the differences and which test will be better for your son/daughter in order to get the best results.

The SAT recently changed in March of 2016 and was designed to look more like the ACT. The best way for students to determine if they would rather take the ACT or the SAT is to try taking a practice test from both, and then compare their results. There are free practice exams that you can access online or one of our ACT/SAT specialists can work with a student that signs up for a test prep package to help proctor the two tests and even help score them and compare the results! One test is not better than the other, it just depends on your child's test taking abilities.



## If your child fits the criteria below, then they might prefer the ACT:

1. He/she is good at taking tests that are given at the high school level. The ACT focuses on more straightforward types of questions than the SAT.
2. He/she is very good at math and science. The ACT tests both math and science whereas the SAT only tests math. The new SAT will be including science questions that will be incorporated into the Math, Reading, and Writing & Language tests.
3. He/she does not have strong writing skills. The essay for the ACT is not required but make sure to check first with the colleges you're interested in.
4. He/she works quickly on exams. The ACT is shorter than the SAT.

## If your child fits the criteria below, then they might prefer the SAT:

1. He/she is a good problem solver. The SAT asks questions that tests analytical skills and higher level thinking. The questions on the SAT are not as straightforward as the ones on the ACT.
2. He/she has a diverse vocabulary and good reading skills. The new SAT will include words that aren't as obscure and vocabulary will be de-emphasized, but still important.
3. He/she is a strong writer. The new SAT has an optional essay in which students will have 50 minutes to complete but the content is more challenging because students are asked to persuade an audience about their viewpoint. Many colleges do want students to submit an essay so make sure to check with the colleges they are applying to first.
4. He/she works slower. The SAT is 25 minutes longer than the ACT so students will have more time to complete the SAT.

## COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS...

### 1. How much time should my son/daughter allow to prepare for the ACT/SAT?

Each student is very unique in the way they learn and their test taking abilities. So, each student's approach to how they study for either the ACT or SAT can be completely different. Start off by researching the colleges they want to attend and find out the deadline dates for their applications and test scores. Then, have your son/daughter take a preliminary exam to see how they score and gauge it from there. The lower the score is, the more time that they

will need to devote into studying. A general rule of thumb is to allow at least 3 months to prepare for these tests. Within these 3 months, students should plan on taking anywhere from 3-5 hours a week to prepare themselves. The most important thing is to be consistent with the studying patterns. Students shouldn't study for 5 hours one week and then a half an hour the following week. If you really want to reach your goal, then you need to put in the time and energy that it requires.



## 2. Should my son/daughter take both the ACT and SAT?

We recommend choosing one test to focus and study for. The new SAT will compare a lot more to the structure and material that is on the ACT. One idea is to have your son/daughter try a practice exam for both tests and then compare the results for both of them to see which one fits your child.

About Education's website has a great table that compares ACT and SAT scores. Here is the link to access that table:

[http://testprep.about.com/od/ACT\\_Scores/a/ACT\\_SAT\\_Score\\_Comparison.htm](http://testprep.about.com/od/ACT_Scores/a/ACT_SAT_Score_Comparison.htm)

All colleges accept both tests so it's wise for students to choose the one that they feel more comfortable with and think that they'll perform better on.



## 3. Is it better for my son/daughter to sign up for a class to prepare or for one-on-one test prep?

Group classes cater to all 10-20 students simultaneously and students do not get a lot of individualized instruction. Based on research, students that get one-on-one help for the ACT and SAT tend to score higher than students that participate in a group class. Private tutoring for the ACT and SAT allows the tutor to focus on student's weak areas and customize each lesson to meet those student's needs. Students that receive one-on-one instruction will be more engaged and be able to reach the goals that they're aiming for.



#### 4. What do I do if my son/daughter is just not a good test taker?

Some students experience test anxiety which can cause a decrease in memory and reasoning abilities. If a student is worried about time issues, then the SAT is the better choice because it allows for more time. The SAT that will be given before the spring of 2016 deducts  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a point for every incorrect answer and this can also lead students to anxiety. The new SAT will not deduct any points for incorrect answers. Students that do have a history of test anxiety will probably need more time to prepare for the ACT or SAT. Not only do they need to know and understand the material, but learning test taking strategies and pacing is also very important. Other students work extremely hard to earn high grades in school but do not necessarily have strong reasoning and critical-thinking skills. These students usually do all of their homework and put forth a lot of effort, but don't always get the best grades. The ACT test lines up more closely to what is taught in the school whereas the SAT tends to rely more on critical-thinking. So, a student that falls into this category may want to take the ACT. Either way, it comes down to being prepared. It's very unlikely that a student will perform well on either the ACT or SAT if they haven't taken the time to try a practice test or study well before.



#### 5. What is considered to be a 'good' test score?

The answer to this question depends on what colleges you are planning on attending. Overall, the national average for the ACT is around a 20 and the average for the current SAT is around a 1500. Anything below a 15 on the ACT or an 1100 on the SAT is considered below average. The higher the score the better and there is always room for improvement unless you do end up earning the highest score possible. It's recommended for students to research the colleges that they're interested in applying to and writing down the test scores that they need for those specific colleges. That way they will have a goal in mind as to what score they need to try to get when they do take the test.

## Tips for Taking the ACT

1. Make sure to read all directions. Read the directions on the front cover of the test booklet. Also, read through each question and every single answer choice before deciding on a correct answer.
2. Always answer the easier questions first and then tackle the harder questions after that. This will allow you to pace yourself better while taking the test. If you end up spending too much time on the harder questions first, then you're more likely to run out of time.
3. Use process of elimination when trying to choose an answer. After reading through all of the answer choices, eliminate answers that don't make sense or you know are definitely not correct. That way you'll have a greater chance of getting the correct answer.
4. Make sure to fully circle in each answer choice. If you need to erase something, make sure to erase COMPLETELY, otherwise your answer could be marked incorrect.
5. Don't leave any answers blank. If you absolutely need to, then guess. Guessing is better than leaving an answer blank.
6. If you finish a test early, always make sure to go back and check your answers. Many times students realize that they accidentally skipped over a problem or didn't erase fully.
7. Allow plenty of time before the ACT to prepare and practice!

## Tips for Taking the New SAT

1. Take the PSAT. The PSAT is a preliminary SAT that students can take and won't count against college admissions. By taking this, you will have a better understanding of how the SAT is laid out and what to expect.
2. Practice without a calculator. The new SAT will contain a section that involves no calculator. The more math problems students attempt without a calculator, the better prepared they will be.
3. Focus on doing a lot of reading. There will be many questions on the SAT that involve a wide range of contexts in today's society. Students should concentrate on reading outside of their comfort zone and reading journals and other Internet articles in science, economics, social issues, etc.
4. Become familiar with graphs and charts. The new SAT will require students to analyze and reason through graphs and data. Taking practice exams will definitely help students accomplish this.
5. Study test taking strategies. There will be no more penalties for wrong answers when taking the SAT. But it's a wise idea for students to learn how to narrow down their selections for answer choices in order to arrive at the correct answer.

## A COMPARISON OF THE ACT, THE CURRENT SAT, AND THE NEW SAT

	ACT	CURRENT SAT	NEW SAT
<b>Type of Test</b>	The ACT is an achievement test and measures what you learned in school. The ACT is a more straightforward test and tends to be easier to understand.	The SAT is an aptitude test that measures reasoning and verbal abilities. The SAT questions may take more time to understand and can be trickier.	The new SAT is being designed to look more like the ACT. It will focus more on critical thinking and problem solving and more time will be given for the essay.
<b>Length</b>	3 hours 25 minutes (with writing component)	3 hours 45 minutes	3 hours 50 minutes
<b>Components</b>	Has up to 5 components: English Math Reading Science Essay (optional – only do the essay if the college you’re applying to needs it)	10 short sections: 3 Critical Reasoning 3 Math 3 Writing 1 Experimental (the writing part is required)	5 long sections (total of 3 tests) Writing & Language Reading 2 Math Essay (optional – only do the essay if the college you’re applying to needs it)
<b>Reading Section</b>	Contains 4 passages with 10 questions per passage. The passages will be on social studies, natural sciences, literary narratives, and the humanities.	Contains questions pertaining to comprehension and sentence completion. Contains 7 short and long passages. Vocabulary is emphasized.	Vocabulary is not emphasized as much as compared to the current SAT but it’s still important. Has 4 longer passages with 1 paired passage and 52 questions. Diagrams/charts will be included.
<b>Science Section</b>	40 questions Emphasizes science reasoning skills Analysis, Knowledge, Problem-Solving No calculator	None	Science questions will be integrated into the Math Section, Reading Section, and The Writing & Language Section.
<b>Math Section</b>	60 questions Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II, basic Trigonometry  Formulas not given	54 total questions 44 multiple choice 10 grid in questions  Pre-Algebra Algebra I, Algebra II, Geometry  Formulas given	12 grid in questions 1 extended thinking question  Pre-Algebra, Algebra, Geometry, Algebra II, basic Trigonometry  Calculator cannot be used in one section
<b>English Section</b>	75 questions Contains 5 passages each containing a number of questions afterward.	48 passage based reading components and 19 sentence completion. Tests reasoning, comprehension and vocabulary.	This is now called the Writing and Language Test and consists of 44 questions. Tests punctuation rules, logic, and expression of ideas.
<b>Essay</b>	The essay is an optional 30-minute section that is not factored into the composite score.	The essay is a required 25-minute section that is factored into the overall score.	The essay is an optional 50 minute essay and it’s the last section.
<b>Getting Incorrect Answers</b>	The ACT does not penalize for guessing. So, it’s best to answer all questions.	The SAT takes off 1/4 of a point for every incorrect response.	There will no longer be a penalty for getting incorrect answers. So, make sure to answer all questions.
<b>Scoring</b>	Students receive a score that ranges from 1- 36 for each section, and then an overall composite score that averages the four sections.	Students will receive a score that ranges from 200-800 for each section with a total combined range of 600-2400.	Students will receive a score that ranges from 200-800 for the Evidence-Based Reading and Writing and for Math. The essay will be scored separately with a total combined range of 400-1600.
<b>Top Scores</b>	36	2400	1600

## Other Helpful Resources:

Direct link to the ACT website for additional information: <http://www.actstudent.org>

Direct link to the SAT website for additional information concerning the current SAT and the new SAT: <https://sat.collegeboard.org/home>

# GET THE HELP YOU NEED TODAY!

iAchieve Learning has both ACT and SAT specialists that can assist in helping your child be successful and earn the score that they want!

## We offer:

- one-on-one test prep with highly qualified ACT and SAT tutors.
- customized lessons for each student to strengthen their weaknesses.
- up to date and current ACT and SAT test prep materials.
- guidance through the process, including going through and analyzing practice tests.
- tutors that will come to your home or meet at a library.
- affordable and flexible test prep packages.

## PACKAGES

We HIGHLY recommend spending at least 20 hours to prepare for either the ACT or SAT. We offer 1 hour sessions to allow flexibility for families. A discount is available if a package is purchased and an ACT or SAT book is included.

### 1 Hour Test Prep Packages

#### ACT/SAT Package #1

Recommended for students that are taking the test for the first time and need help in all sections.

20 sessions – 20 hours

#### ACT/SAT Package #2

Recommended for students that don't have as much time to prepare and maybe need assistance with a couple of the sections.

15 sessions – 15 hours

#### ACT/SAT Package #3

Recommended for students that have little time to prepare or have taken the test before and just need a brush up.

10 sessions – 10 hours

Individual test prep is available on an hourly basis as well but not at a discounted rate. Also, ACT and SAT books are not included but can be purchased at an additional cost.

## CONTACT US TODAY!

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