

The choice between the SAT and the ACT should be a thoughtful but not stressful one, since many students score equally well on each. Some students, however, perform better on one, so it's worth discovering whether there's an easier test for you before you prepare or register for either. These tests are sufficiently different that students should focus their efforts on one test rather than being divided and conquered.



SCORING

Colleges have no SAT/ACT preference and employ a concordance to compare all test-takers on one scale.

SAT

Total Score 400-1600

- 200-800 Reading & Writing
- 200-800 Math

SAT | ACT

1600	36
1500	34
1430	32
1370	30
1310	28
1240	26
1180	24

ACT

Composite Score 1-36

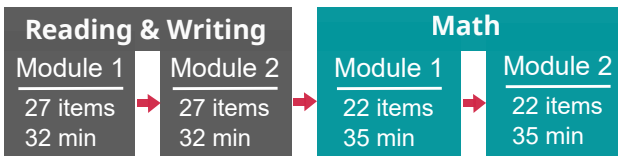
- 1-36 English
- 1-36 Reading
- 1-36 Math
- 1-36 Science



FORMAT & STRUCTURE



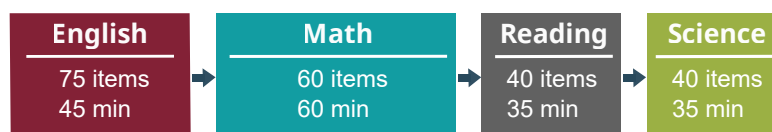
- adaptive
- computer-based



The SAT may only be taken digitally since the difficulty of the second module on each section will vary based on student performance, resulting in a shorter test with fewer, more important questions.



- linear
- paper-based



The ACT retains its longer paper format, separate English and Reading sections, and the "Science" section with no equivalent on the SAT.

POWER vs. SPEED

The primary difference between the two tests is time. The hardest questions on the SAT are harder than those on the ACT, but students have much more time to answer them.

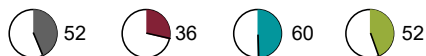
Seconds per Question

Reading Writing Math Science

SAT



ACT



Most students struggle to complete ACT sections in time, especially the fast-paced Science and Reading sections. Practice can overcome some but not all speed limitations.

REASONING vs. ASSESSMENT

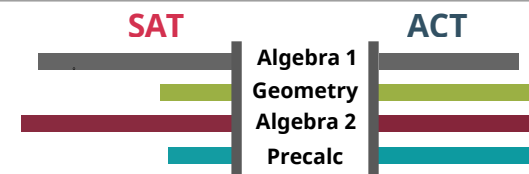
SAT questions tend to be more off-putting to students than those on the ACT, which often more closely mirror schoolwork. ACT questions are designed to determine whether students learned what they were taught, while SAT questions often require students to reason through less familiar material, often perceived to be "trickier" due to its abstraction and nuance.

COGNITIVE LOAD vs. SHORT-TERM MEMORY

The SAT no longer features long form reading passages, instead providing students with no more than a paragraph or two for each question. Those paragraphs, however, feature more complexity and a higher level of diction than do the substantially lengthier ACT reading passages. Moreover, each question brings with it a new passage and new context, forcing students to constantly assimilate and contextualize new information, a more taxing and time-consuming process than many expect.

MATH CONTENT

The ACT draws more evenly from all high school math classes than does the SAT, which is now primarily a test of algebra. Students who have not completed precalc should expect to learn some new material in order to be prepared for all the ACT might throw at them.



TEST DATES

SAT	AUG	OCT	NOV	DEC	MAR	MAY	JUN
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ACT	SEP	OCT	DEC	FEB	APR	JUN	JUL
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SCIENCE?

The ACT Science section should really be called the Reading Charts & Graphs section, since students aren't asked to recall biology or physics facts but must instead find and interpret given experimental information.



Students who struggle in science should NOT discount the ACT because of this section, and good science students should not expect this section to be immediately easy due to the time pressure of the ACT. In fact, Science scores are more well correlated with Reading scores than with Math scores for many students.

Still unsure which test is right for you? Your best bet is always to take a full practice test of each and compare not simply the scores but the overall experiences. We wish you the best of luck and we're always here to help! www.prepmatters.com