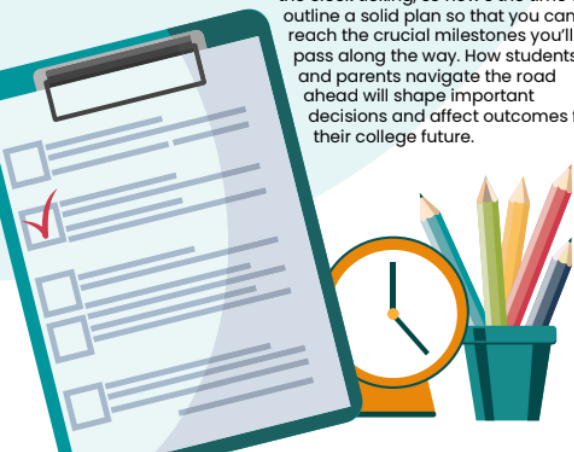


Everything You Need to Know for Your
College Journey Checklist

COLLEGE JOURNEY CHECKLIST

In less than 24 months, your high school junior will be a college freshman. It's not uncommon for parents and students to feel the clock ticking, so now's the time to outline a solid plan so that you can reach the crucial milestones you'll pass along the way. How students and parents navigate the road ahead will shape important decisions and affect outcomes for their college future.



Over the last 25 years, PrepMatters has helped thousands of families reach these milestones with confidence and focus, and we have developed a simplified checklist for families to understand how to tackle the challenges ahead. Our list is a recommendation informed by our extensive experience of working with families like yours. The items that are shown below should serve as a starting point and help you to develop a plan that works for your family.

LEGEND



SOPHOMORE YEAR: SUMMER

- Learn About the SAT and ACT:** If you haven't yet taken a practice SAT or ACT, that's ok. We have developed a simple [6 question quiz](#) to help give you a general idea of which test might be the better fit for you. Right after completing the quiz, we will email your results along with some recommendations. We also host live proctored practice testing most weekends for those of you who like taking tests and can have detailed score reports ready for you the next day. You need only contact our team about [setting up a time](#).
- Assessment and Strategy:** Equipped with your quiz results, PSAT, or practice test scores, you may want to talk with a tutor about the right test for your student and craft a test prep plan and testing calendar. [Schedule your test prep assessment](#) appointment.
- Academic Kickstart:** Summer learning loss is real and does nothing to prepare students for the increased workload that junior year brings. Those students who are looking to avoid the summer rust will benefit from an academic kickstart, which will lay the foundation for a strong school year. Summer is a great time to [build a relationship with a tutor](#).

JUNIOR YEAR: FALL SEMESTER

- Finalize your test preparation calendar:** Look at the [specific test dates](#) for the SAT or ACT to decide which administrations to target so that you can plan your test preparation schedule. Be sure to factor in school and personal events so that you are testing when you have time to be both well-rested and well-prepared. Armed with those test dates, you can work backwards to build out a [proper test preparation schedule](#).
- Start conversations with a professional college counselor:** Encourage your student to talk with their school college counselor to learn about important steps at school. This will also create an opportunity for the counselor, who will write the important counselor college recommendation, to get to know your student. An [independent counselor](#) can be an additional resource, offering advice and insight that will complement the information obtained from school and help your student reach their ideal college destination.
- Build your initial college list and travel plans:** Fall is the time to meet with your college counselor and to begin to build your initial college list. You can also plot out travel to a few select locations during the upcoming fall, winter, and spring breaks, which will help you adjust your list.
- Academic gut check:** During the fall semester of junior year, students must learn to balance increasingly difficult coursework with extracurricular demands on their time. Since junior year grades matter most to colleges, students are advised to make sure that they have in place the structure and support they'll need to be consistently successful throughout the year.
- Prepare for and/or Take the ACT or the SAT:** By the end of the first semester, you should either be deep into your test prep, be taking practice tests and maybe even an official test, or have a solid plan in place for the start of the new year. Ensure that whatever prep schedule you put in place includes proctored practice testing so that you get the feedback you need and can make any necessary adjustments to your testing calendar.

JUNIOR YEAR: SECOND SEMESTER

- ❑ **Letters of Recommendation:** Develop a strategy with your counselor to gather letters of recommendation that are consistent with your application strategy. Typically, students will need one letter from a science or math teacher and one from a humanities teacher. Because this is not always the case, it is important, early in the process, to check to see what each college requires.
- ❑ **Optimizing Test Scores:** Decide with your tutor and counselor whether retesting makes sense and, if so, optimize your prep time by focusing on specific areas of growth. Ideally, you'll be able to realize your score goal – or at least come close to it – by the end of your junior year.
- ❑ **AP exam preparation:** AP exams give you the chance to demonstrate your ability to handle college-level academic rigor. Our tutors are not only content experts but can also help you craft a study plan so that you feel confident and ready to perform your best on the exams in May.
- ❑ **College Visits:** Use spring break to visit college campuses. Nothing replaces in-person visits for getting a feel for the places your student may spend the next four years. Make a list of criteria that matter to you and craft follow-up steps after your visits.

SENIOR YEAR: FIRST SEMESTER

- ❑ **Don't coast on grades:** First semester is NOT the time to start your senior slide! In fact, most students are shocked by how difficult it is to balance their coursework with the college admissions process. Until students are admitted – and even thereafter – grades will matter. When needed, tutors can help keep kids stay on task.
- ❑ **Submitting Applications:** The first semester of senior year is when all of the hard work and planning over the last few months and years come together. During this time, your student will be working very closely with their college counselor(s) to make final adjustments to lists and

JUNIOR YEAR: SUMMER

- ❑ **Solidified Application Strategy:** Meet with your college counselor to develop a finalized college list and application strategy, one that includes score submissions, letters of recommendation, interviews, additional visits, in addition to determining whether supplemental essays, and additional application materials such as resumes and portfolios are required.
- ❑ **Essays:** The summer of junior year is a fantastic opportunity for students to begin working on the first drafts of their essay(s). It is common during these times for students to attend essay writing workshops and begin to [work with essay specialists](#). It is not uncommon for students to produce several iterations of their main essay before arriving at their first draft. Additionally, students will typically write between 10 – 20 supplemental essays depending on their college list, so it's important to start writing early.
- ❑ **Optimizing Test Scores:** SAT and ACT test administrations in June, July and August provide rising seniors with test dates outside the academic year. Many of those students are able to put the test behind them during the summer, which enables them to focus their efforts without having to simultaneously balance school, sports, and extracurriculars.

strategies, do final proofs of essays, and check that all the components of applications are complete before submitting.

- ❑ **Initial Application Results:** Celebrate! If necessary, work on your Plan B. Talk with your college counselor, using results from all early applications to update lists and strategies for applications to other colleges.
- ❑ **Final Opportunity to Retake the SAT or ACT** By now most students should have completed their standardized testing. Students who wish to take one final test should be careful to check on score release dates, which may fall after Early Decision deadlines.

PrepMatters



SENIOR YEAR: SECOND SEMESTER

- ❑ **Execute backup strategies:** Students don't always get admitted into their first choice schools and will need to work on their back-up plan with their college counselors. During this time, counselors help students maintain perspective and keep everyone focused and on track. This often means submitting Early Decision Two applications or even additional letters of recommendation.
- ❑ **Finish Strong:** The last semester of senior year is often the most difficult time for students to focus on academics. Try to view this unique time in your academic career when grades really don't matter as an opportunity to enjoy learning for learning's sake! Focus on yourself and make YOU your senior project!
- ❑ **Commitment Day:** Once students have received all of their responses, it is time to work with their college counselor to decide what path is the best fit for them based on the last months of their work together. This important decision is why you have put in all of the hard. Professional counselors have prepared for this day since the beginning of the process.
- ❑ **Graduation Day:** Throw that cap up with pride as you have crossed a major life milestone! Congratulations, and enjoy your new adventure!



Who cares about Test Scores?

TABLE 7. PERCENTAGE OF COLLEGES ATTRIBUTING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE TO FACTORS IN ADMISSION DECISIONS: FIRST-TIME FRESHMEN, FALL 2023

	N	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
Grades in All Courses	185	76.8	15.1	4.9	3.2
Grades in Core Courses	185	74.1	18.9	5.4	1.6
Strength of Curriculum	185	63.8	22.7	10.3	3.2
Admission Test Scores	185	4.9	25.4	38.9	30.8
Essay or Writing Sample	185	18.9	37.3	26.5	17.3
Student's Demonstrated Interest	185	15.7	27.6	25.4	31.4
Counselor Recommendation	185	11.9	40.0	27.6	20.5
Teacher Recommendation	185	10.8	40.5	28.1	20.5
Class Rank	183	5.5	22.4	43.2	29.0
Extracurricular Activities	185	6.5	44.3	30.8	18.4
Portfolio	185	4.9	10.8	24.3	60.0
Subject Test Scores	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
Interview	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
Work	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
State Graduation Requirements	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6
SAT II Scores	185	4.3	8.6	32.4	54.6

SOURCE: NACAC

PORTANCE

No Importance
5.0
4.1
7.3
5.0
19.5
32.1
17.9
19.2
27.7
18.7
54.8
41.1
49.8
30.4
70.2
77.8

The Rise of Test Optional

“You will not be disadvantaged in our evaluation process if you do not include scores for consideration in your application.”

“We value the information provided by standardized testing and will continue to consider test scores as part of our holistic admissions review process.”

Permanent

Experimenting

Reluctant

“ Test Optional ”

Test Blind

UC System	Catholic Univ
Univ San Diego	Hampshire College
Caltech	Idaho State
Reed	Loyola
Northern Illinois	Dickinson
Northern Michigan	Worcester Polytechnic Inst
Univ. New England	Washington State

Test Required

Georgetown University
MIT
Service Academies
Florida State
Univ of Florida
Univ of Georgia
Georgia Tech
Univ of Tennessee

SAT v ACT - Scoring

ACT

Composite Score 1-36

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

SAT

Total Score 400-1600

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



2018 ACT/SAT CONCORDANCE TABLES

Table A1: SAT Total to ACT Composite.

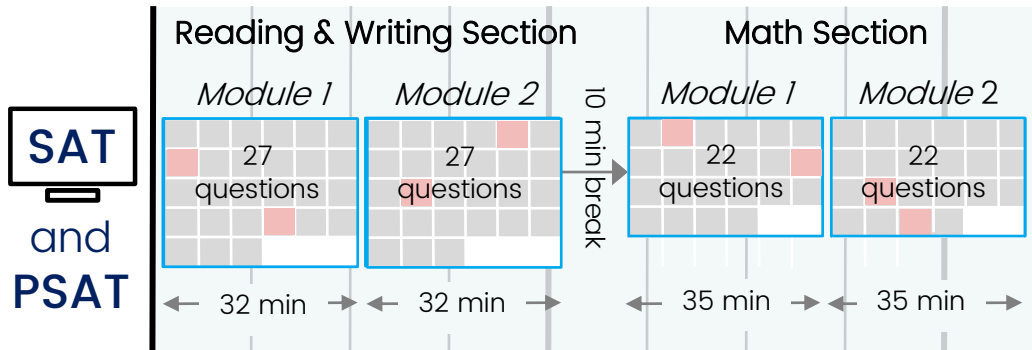
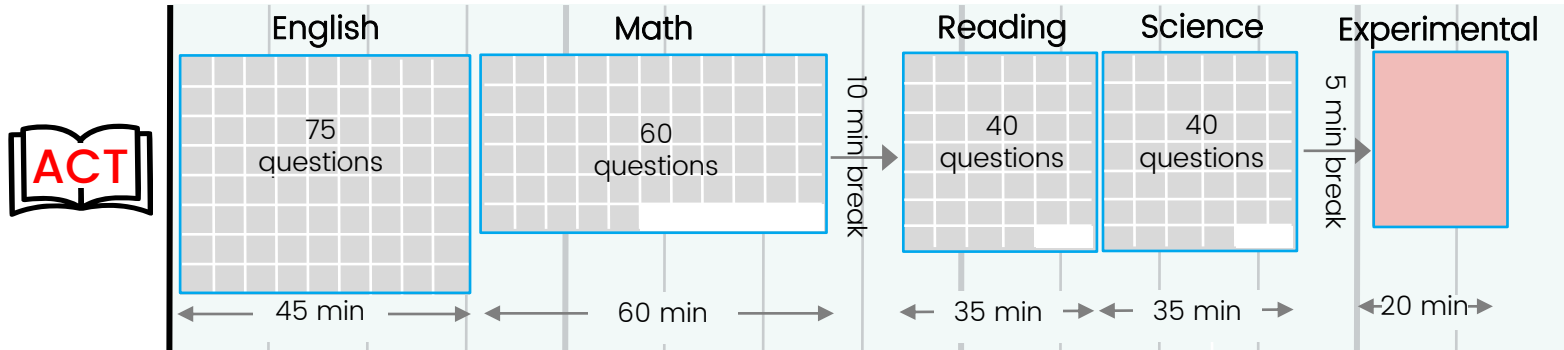
SAT	ACT	SAT	ACT	SAT	ACT
1600	36	1250	26	910	16
*1590	36	*1240	26	900	16
1580	36	1230	26	*890	16
1570	36	1220	25	880	16
1560	35	*1210	25	870	15
1550	35	1200	25	860	15
*1540	35	1190	24	*850	15
1530	35	*1180	24	840	15
1520	34	1170	24	830	15
1510	34	1160	24	820	14
*1500	34	1150	23	810	14

Table A2: ACT Composite to SAT Total.

ACT	SAT	SAT Range
36	1590	1570-1600
35	1540	1530-1560
34	1500	1490-1520
33	1460	1450-1480
32	1430	1420-1440
31	1400	1390-1410
30	1370	1360-1380
29	1340	1330-1350
28	1310	1300-1320
27	1280	1260-1290
26	1240	1230-1250

All US colleges accept SAT and ACT scores on an equal basis and use a concordance to compare students on a common scale.

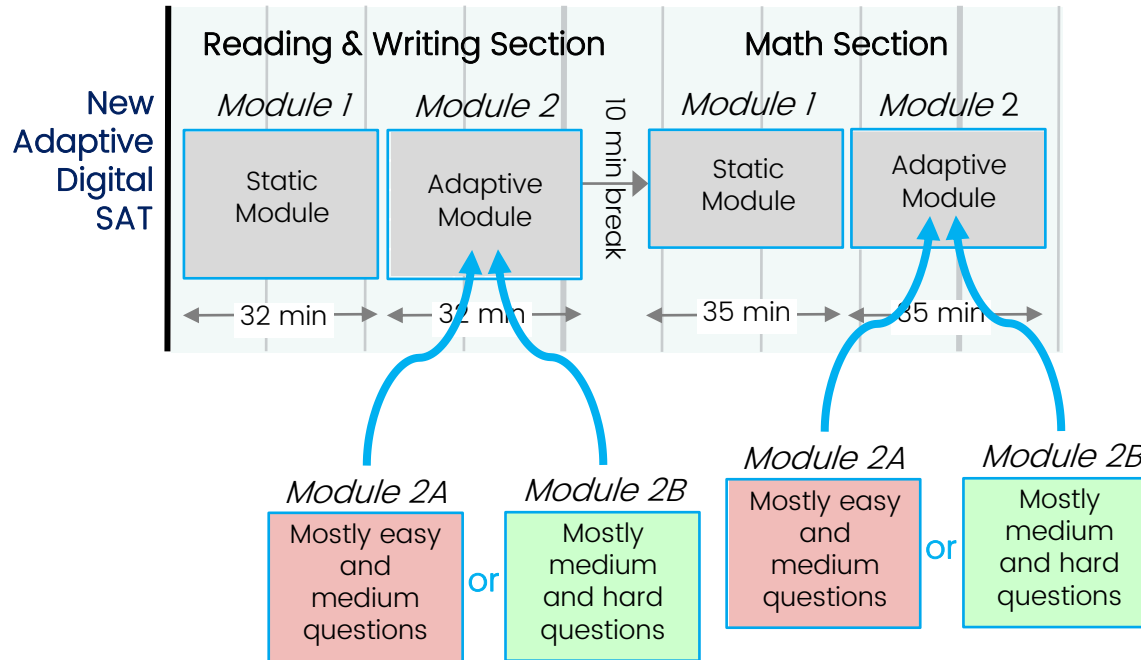
SAT v ACT – Structure & Format



	Time	Questions
Paper ACT	2hr 55min	215
Digital SAT	2hr 14min	98

SAT v ACT – Adaptive v Static

So how is the dSAT able to be so much shorter than the paper test?



Student performance on each Module 1 determines which version of Module 2 the student will receive, one easier and one more difficult.

ACT v SAT – Considerations

Paper v Digital

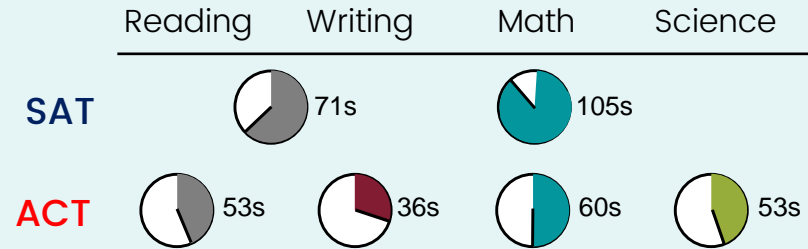


- Equal question weights
- Write on test
- Bring your TI-84
- Retain & Recall



- Adaptive & weighted
- Scratch paper
- Integrated Desmos
- Cognitive load

Speed v Complexity



Assessment v Reasoning



ACT v SAT – Content

Reading

ACT

SAT

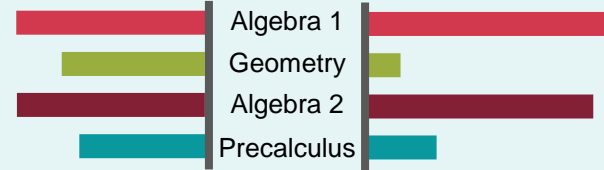


WSJ

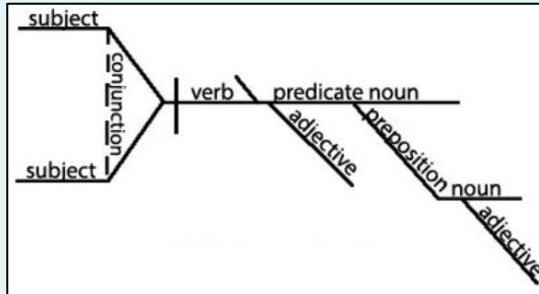
Math

ACT

SAT



English v Writing



Science



READING
CHARTS &
GRAPHS

Some knowledge
helpful for context

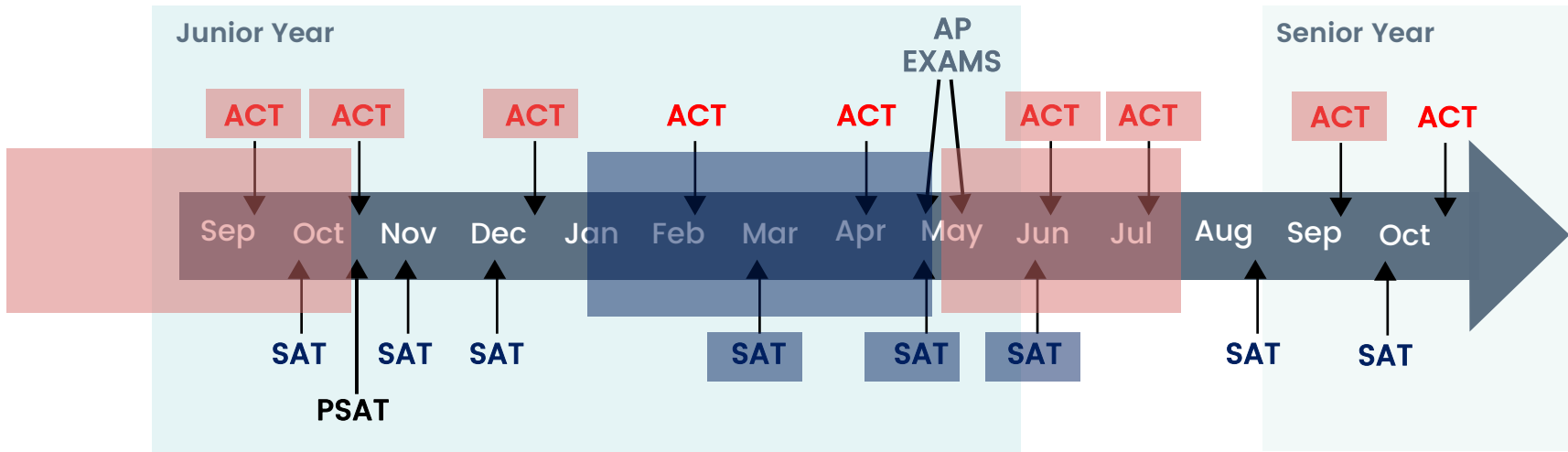
Correlates with
Reading score

ACT v SAT – Accommodations



- Power Test vs. Speed Test
- ACT also features a larger suite of potential accommodations
- Fewer than a handful of exceptions over 30+ years of tutoring

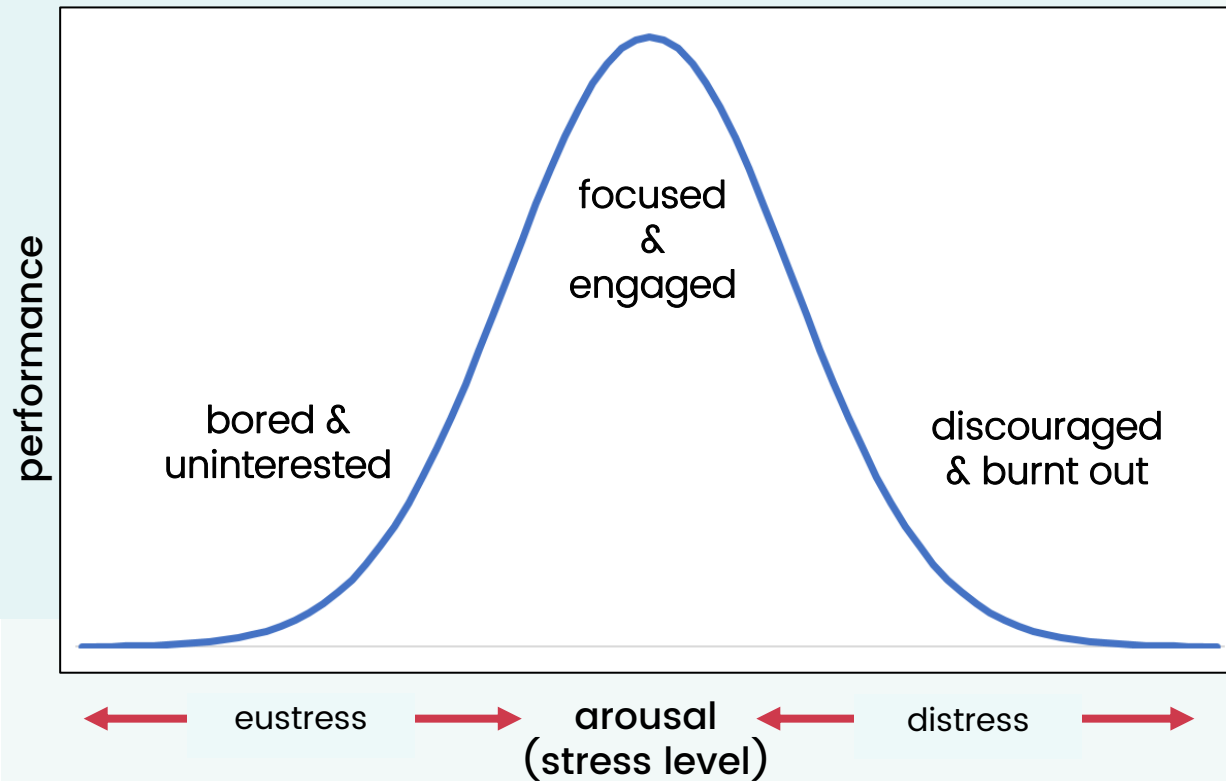
ACT v SAT – Testing Timelines



The best time to take the SAT or ACT is when students can be well prepared and rested, but starting early provides more options, which lowers students' stress levels.

Let's Take a Moment to Talk about Stress

Yerkes-Dodson Law

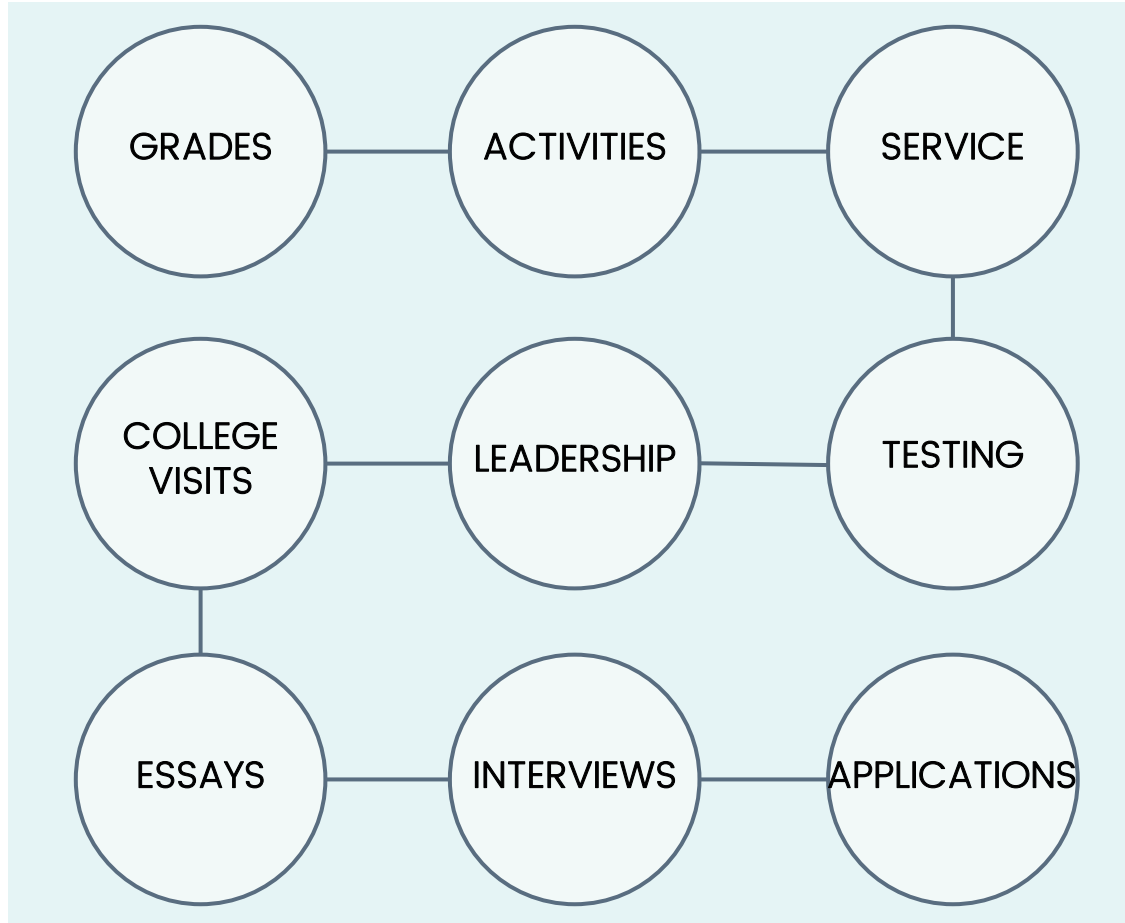


Where to Begin?

The road to college begins with early conversations between your family and your college counselor

- ✓ Talk openly and honestly about what your student wants and is interested in
- ✓ Be sure to leave your meeting with a clear understanding of major deadlines and next steps

Stepping Stones Along Your Journey



Grades & Academic Rigor

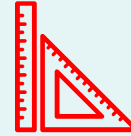


Do your freshman
grades matter?

Senior grades?



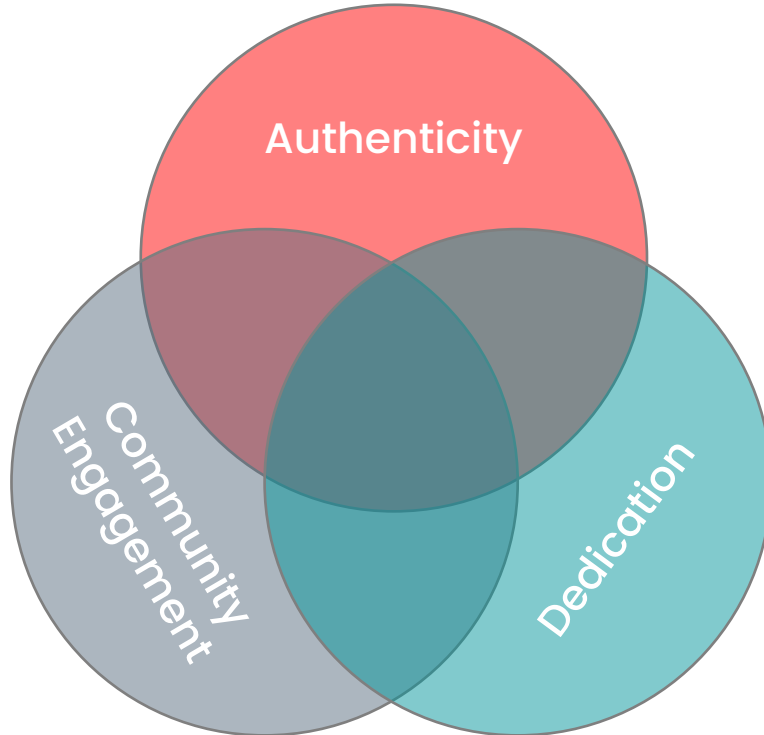
How important **is**
your GPA?



What's better?

Higher grades
or
higher rigor?

Activities, Service & Leadership: What to keep?



- Focus on your main interests
- Reevaluate other commitments
- Don't forget about your roots

College Visits

When?

- Fall break & spring breaks
- Work into your holiday travel?
- In-session vs. Out-of-session

Where?

- Be curious! Cast a wide net.
- Another nearby school “just in case”?

How?

- Schedule a tour or an interview
- Audit a class or two
- Be sure to take notes!

Begin to Build Your College List

Research & Reflection

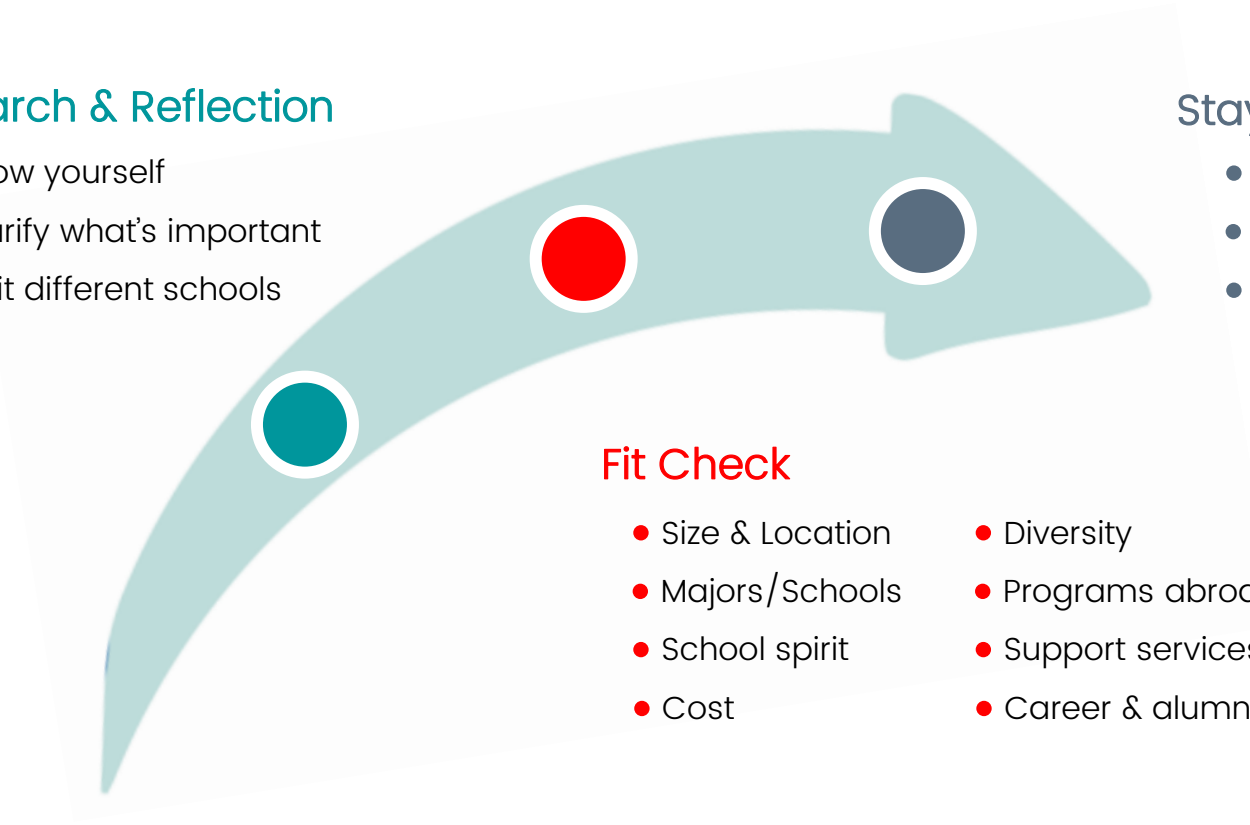
- Know yourself
- Clarify what's important
- Visit different schools

Stay Balanced

- Reaches
- Targets
- Likelies

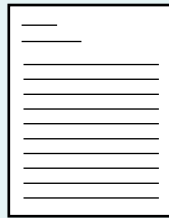
Fit Check

- Size & Location
- Majors/Schools
- School spirit
- Cost
- Diversity
- Programs abroad
- Support services
- Career & alumni support

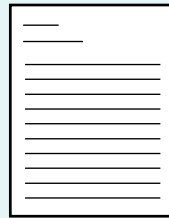


Letters of Recommendation

Plan for at least two:

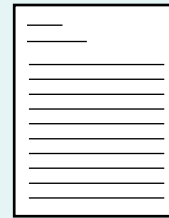


STEM teacher



Humanities teacher

Special
Circumstances?

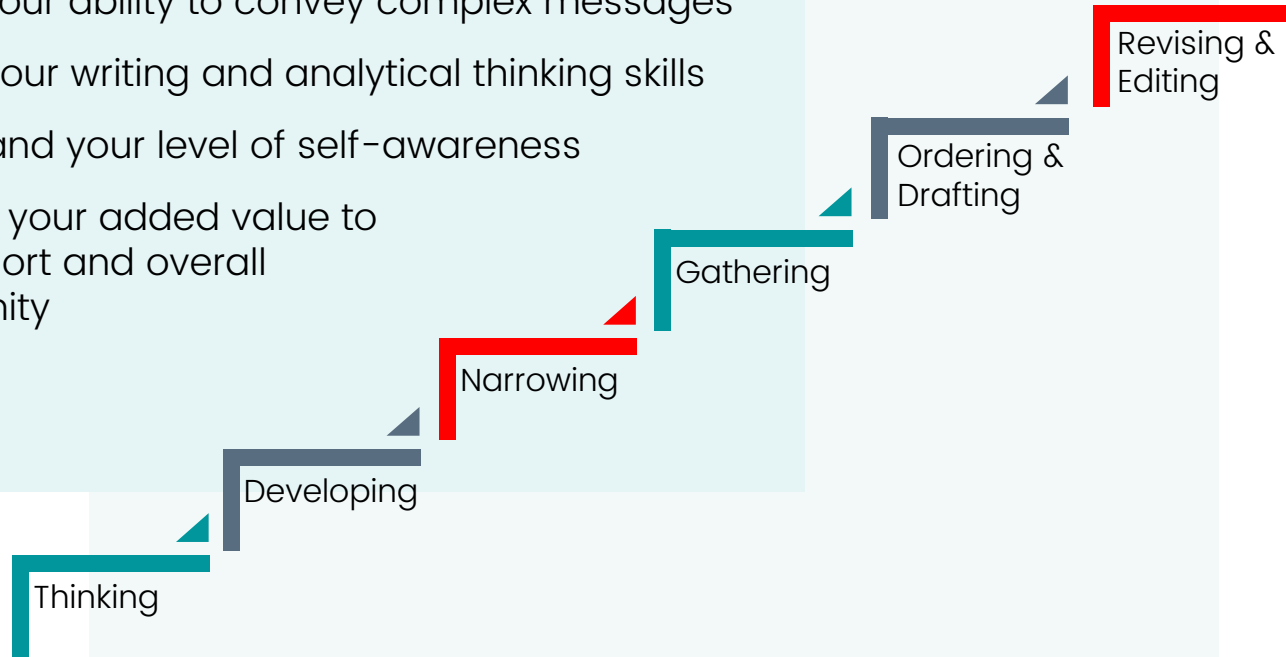


- Ideally, junior year teachers, so target your teachers now and fully engage in classroom discussion.
- Ask before the summer – and before everyone else!

Brainstorming Your Essay

Admissions officers will use your essay to...

- Gauge your ability to convey complex messages
- Review your writing and analytical thinking skills
- Understand your level of self-awareness
- Evaluate your added value to their cohort and overall community



Writing Your Essay

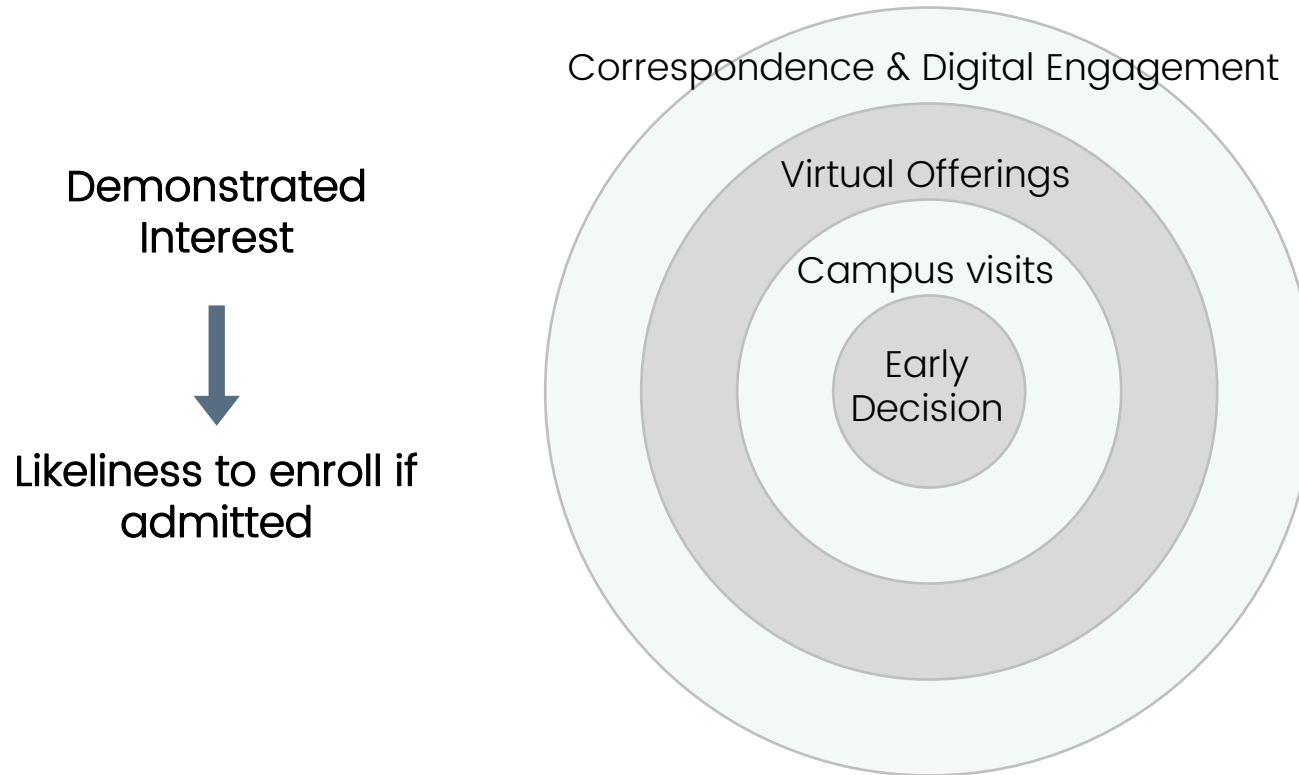
Be sure to...

- Speak directly to the admissions office
- Highlight your strengths
- Develop and use your voice
- Showcase your writing skills
- Share your perspective on the world
- Talk about your background
- Reveal your personality
- Describe what you consider to be meaningful

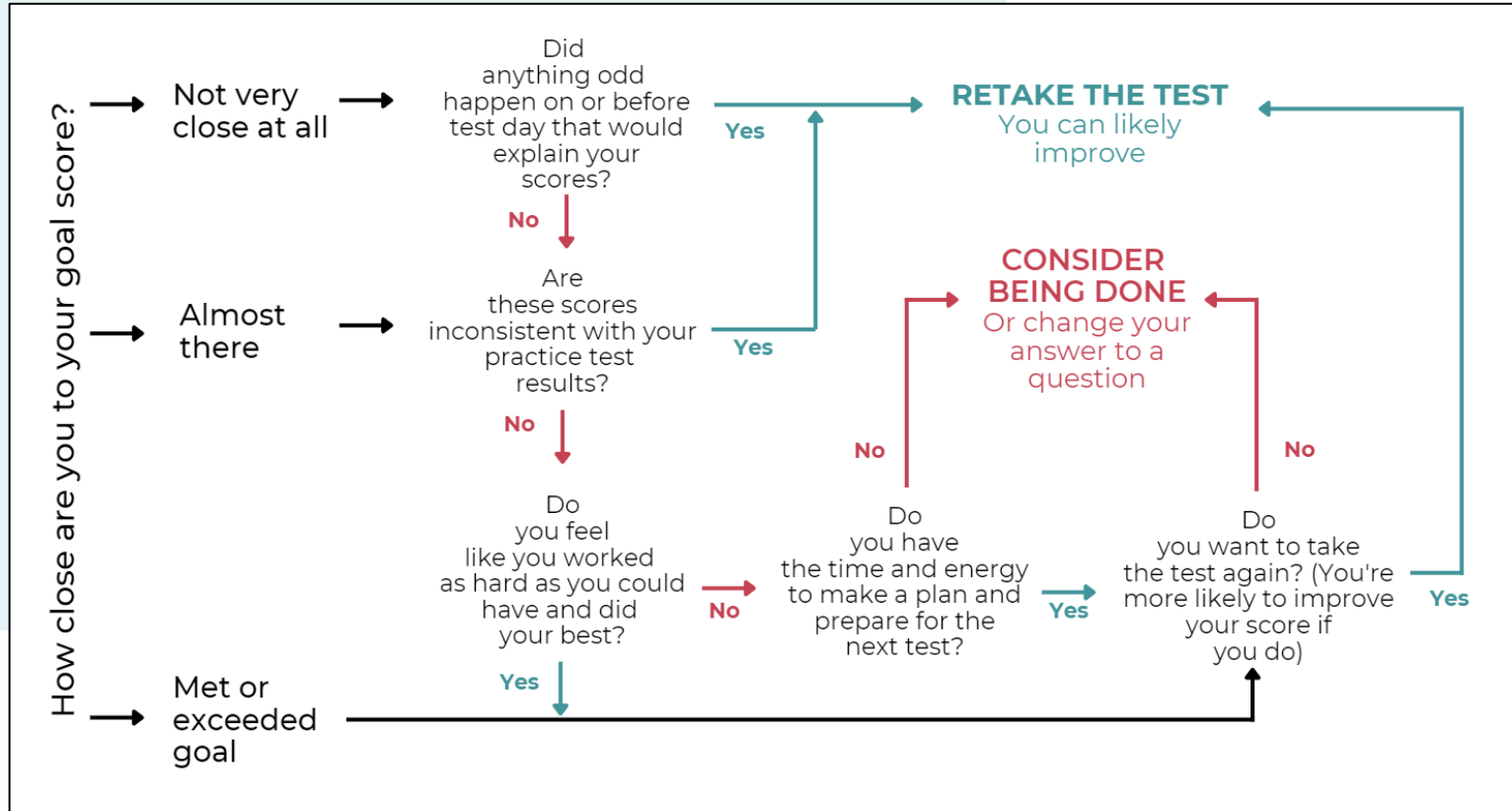
But please avoid...

- Simply writing out your resume
- Any of these topics:
 - Family loss: death or divorce
 - Sports injury or victory
 - Service abroad
 - Not/Making the team/cast/shot
 - Dealing with learning differences

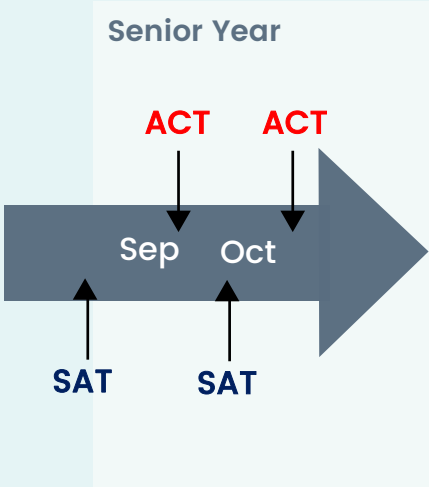
Demonstrate Your Interest!



To Retest or Not to Retest



Last Chance to take the ACT or SAT



The diagram illustrates the timeline for a Senior Year. A large blue arrow points to the right, representing the progression of the year. Inside the arrow, the months 'Sep' and 'Oct' are labeled. Above 'Sep' and 'Oct', the word 'ACT' is written in red, with arrows pointing down to the months. Below 'Sep' and 'Oct', the word 'SAT' is written in blue, with arrows pointing up to the months. The entire diagram is set against a light blue background.

- Be aware of Early Decision deadlines to report scores.
- An extra year of cognitive development can really help “late bloomers”.
- How will you balance test prep with applications and essays?

Putting the Final Pieces Together

Application Strategies

Early Decision	Binding commitment
Early Action	Apply early; find out early
Regular	Post-fall deadlines

Supplemental Essays



10-15 for
most students

- Research required

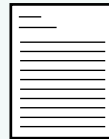
- School specific

“Defend an unpopular
opinion you hold”

“It’s 2040 – what’s your
headline?”

Additional Essays

Additional Context



- Change in academic standing
- Major life events
- Death of a loved one

Submit Your Applications

Read all instructions

Check in with your counselor

Send all helpful scores

Review. Proofread.
Do it again.

Preview, print, and
final review

SUBMIT!

Thanks for your time and attention.

Questions?

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Or write info@prepmatters.com