



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

1600 36

1500 34

1430 32

1370 30

1310 28

1240 26

1180 24

ACT

Composite Score 1-36

- 1-36 English Optional
- 1-36 Math + 1-36 Science
- 1-36 Reading + 2-12 Writing

FORMAT & STRUCTURE



- adaptive
- digital only

Reading & Writing

Module 1
27 items
32 min

Module 2
27 items
32 min

Math

Module 1
22 items
35 min

Module 2
22 items
35 min

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 or digital

English

50 items
35 min

Math

45 items
50 min

Reading

36 items
40 min

Science

40 items
40 min

The ACT, offered on paper & digitally (where available), has separate English and Reading sections, and an optional "Science" section.

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



71



105

ACT



67



42



67



60

Most students struggle to complete the ACT 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 more closely mirror schoolwork. ACT questions are written 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.

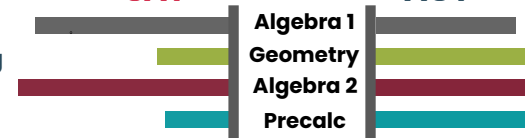
COGNITIVE LOAD vs. SHORT-TERM MEMORY

The SAT no longer features longer reading passages, instead providing students with no more than a paragraph or two for each question. Those paragraphs, however, feature more complex language and usage than do the much lengthier ACT reading passages. Moreover, each question has 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 evenly from all high school math classes whereas the SAT focuses on algebra, often deeply enough to challenge even strong math students. Those who have not completed precalc should expect to learn some new material in order to be well-prepared for the ACT.

SAT



ACT

TEST DATES

SAT



ACT



SCIENCE?

The optional ACT Science section does **not** contribute to the composite score and should really be called the Reading Charts & Graphs section, since students aren't asked to recall specific facts but must instead find and inter-



pret given experimental information. (That's why scores in Science often better correlate with those on Reading than Math.) Many selective colleges "recommend" the Science section, so students are advised to check the latest testing requirements for schools to which they plan to apply.

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