SAT & ACT
What you Need to Know

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What does the SAT stand for?

A. Scholastic Aptitude Test
B. Scholastic Assessment Test
C. Silly Atrocious Torture
D. Nothing

Yes, the test used to be called the Scholastic Aptitude Test, but like so much about the SAT, even the name was causing controversy: some felt that the SAT measured only an aptitude for taking aptitude tests. Hence the test is now simply called SAT.
What do SAT scores really measure?

How well your child takes the SAT!

- Don’t take the scores personally.
- SAT scores are NOT a measure of your child’s intelligence.
- Anybody, with the proper coaching, can learn how to increase their scores.
SAT Sections

There are 10 sections on the test:
- 3 math
- 3 writing
- 3 reading

$3 + 3 + 3 = 10?$ ← WHAT?!?
Each section (Math, Reading and Writing) is scored on a scale of 200-800.

The mean is around 500 for each section.

The writing score is a combination of Grammar (20-80) and Essay (2-12.)

The Grammar portion of the Writing section makes up about 70% of your Writing Score.
SAT Scoring

- Each correct answer earns 1 full point, regardless of level of difficulty.

- Each unanswered question earns a student 0 points.

- Each incorrect answer to a student-produced response question earns a student 0 points.

- Students lose ¼ point for each incorrect answer to a multiple-choice question.
# Why Students Struggle with the SAT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAT</th>
<th>High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong># of questions</strong></td>
<td>Designed so you don’t have time to finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Answer Choices</strong></td>
<td>Designed so you can finish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Written to trick students and filled with common errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Goal is to assess strengths &amp; weaknesses, not to try to get a student to answer incorrectly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>25 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hours/weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Under serious time constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Grammar!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar has little emphasis in most schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Intentionally hard to understand and convoluted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Straight forward</td>
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</table>
SAT Math

- Not difficult math. Everything you need to know for SAT math you’ve learned by the end of your sophomore year.

- Questions in 2 math sections of the SAT will be in order of difficulty. The first third will be easy. The middle third will be medium difficulty, and the final third will be hard.

- Keep in mind that easy questions will have easy answers. Difficult questions will have difficult answers.

- Knowing the order of difficulty in a test section helps you significantly when eliminating answer choices and determining your testing strategy.
**SAT Reading**

- **Passages**: These are little, open-book tests. Make sure you go back to the passage and come up with your own answer before looking at the answer choices. On long passages, the questions will appear chronologically.

- **Sentence Completion**: Fill in your own words!
SAT Writing: Essay & Grammar

How long do you think the SAT graders will take to grade your child’s essays?

- SAT essays are graded in approximately 60 seconds. 2 graders spend about a minute each to give you a total score from 2-12.

Is grammar less important than the essay?

- No way! Grammar accounts for about 70% of the writing score, leaving only about 30% for the essay. Learn the grammar rules!
Top 5 Signs Your Child Should Take the SAT

- They’re a quick thinker who loves the challenge of puzzles and logic games.
- They can rapidly define a plethora of onerous vocabulary words.
- They prefer to write about World War II and The Great Gatsby rather than about school uniforms.
- They have a shorter attention span and prefer to complete an exam in small, more “bite-sized” pieces.
- They rocked the PSAT. Stick with what’s working.
Quick Facts about the SAT

• Administered by College Board (collegeboard.org)
  ✓ Registration deadline - 5 weeks prior to test date. $51.

• Score Information
  ✓ National average – 1500 (estimate)
  ✓ Competitive score – 1910 (estimate)
  ✓ Ivy league score – 2100 (estimate)

• Can I cancel my scores?
  ✓ Yes -- "Request to Cancel Test Scores" form.
• **What is Score Choice™?**

  ✓ Score Choice is a free option that you choose when you register for the test. It allows you to decide which SAT scores to release to prospective colleges. If you do not choose Score Choice, your prospective colleges will receive all of your scores. Keep in mind that many schools still request to see all of your scores, regardless of Score Choice. You should still feel comfortable sending all scores, since most colleges consider a student’s best score.
## What About the ACT?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SAT</th>
<th>ACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When is it administered?</strong></td>
<td>Seven times per year</td>
<td>Five times per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is tested?</strong></td>
<td>Math, Reading, Writing, Essay</td>
<td>Math, Reading, Writing, Science, Optional Essay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is the test structure?</strong></td>
<td>Ten section exam with a masked experimental section</td>
<td>Four section exam. Experimental section is optional and clearly marked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Penalty for wrong answers?</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do the tests measure?</strong></td>
<td>How well you take the SAT</td>
<td>How well you take the ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Offered in my state?</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes-accepted by virtually all schools in lieu of the SAT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACT at a Glance

- **Total Time:** 3 Hours and 35 Minutes
- **5 Sections**
  - English
  - Math
  - Reading
  - Science Reasoning
  - Writing (Essay) → optional
- **Scored 1-36 per Section; Average: 21**
- Composite score is average of English, Math, Reading and Science.
How is the ACT Scored?

Get it Right → + 1

Leave it Blank → 0

Get it Wrong → 0 (no points off for wrong answers)

What this means → You should take a guess on any questions that you don’t know.
Top 5 Signs Your Child Should Take the ACT

- They pay close attention in math class and understand basic trigonometry.
- They love the challenge of working swiftly and beating the clock.
- They’re good at reading graphs and tables and identifying trends.
- They’re a strong reader and would much rather read a passage than solve a math problem.
- They have a strong GPA, but did not do all that well on the PSAT.
Quick Facts about the ACT

• Administered by ACT, Inc. (ACT.org)
  ✓ $36.50 or ACT with Writing: $52.50

• Score Information
  ✓ National average – 21 (estimate)
  ✓ Competitive score – 26 and above (estimate)
  ✓ Ivy league score – 33 (estimate)

• ACT results are accepted by all four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

• Why would I take the ACT?
  ✓ The test questions on the ACT are directly related to what you have learned in your high school courses.
SAT/ACT Optional Schools

- About **815** colleges and universities across the United States admit students without regard to test scores.
- Some schools exempt students who meet GPA or class rank criteria while others require SAT or ACT scores but use them only for placement purposes or research studies. Check with the school’s admissions office to learn more about specific admissions requirements.

**But remember…**

- In many cases, SAT and ACT scores are very important in determining financial aid awards.
- You may change your mind and decide to apply to a school that requires SAT or ACT scores. Better safe than sorry!
There is NO downside to taking both tests. You do not need to take both exams to be admitted to College. However, we do recommend that students consider which exam may be better for the individual student.

In an ideal situation, students will take one full-length practice SAT and one full-length practice ACT to determine which test he or she is more comfortable with and which one will result in better scores.

The Princeton Review Assessment (PRA) which gives students sample problems from each exam and may help steer the student toward one test or another. The tests are very different in nature and students will typically do better on one exam than the other.
The **PSAT** is a great way to get some early practice for the SAT and get comfortable with standardized tests. It does not count towards college admissions or your transcript, plus it's the qualifying test for the **National Merit Scholarship**.

- Test is offered 2 times in the month of October at local high schools. Registration is $14.
- **Sections**: Math, critical reading and writing, with a scoring range of 20-80 per section; *Average score for 11th graders: 141*
- 50,000 students (out of 1.4 million) qualify for recognition based on their high PSAT scores. 34,000 of these students receive Letters of Commendation. The remaining 16,000 students whose scores put them in the **top 99th percentile** in their state, become National Merit Semifinalists. Of these, around half win scholarships after submitting their high school records, as well as recommendations from teachers and a personal essay.
Subject Tests (SAT 2s)

- Required by some schools, whether you take the SAT or ACT; not required by all schools.
- Some schools require anywhere from 1-3 subject tests
- Tests are multiple choice, last one hour, and are scored on a 200-800 scale (with a penalty for wrong answers)
- You can take up to three tests in one sitting
- Tests are given in Math (two different levels), Biology, Chemistry, Physics, US History, World History, and several languages
- Tests are administered at the same time as the SAT (but not given in March)
AP Tests (Advanced Placement)

- Not required by schools but impressive: shows stellar achievement and pushing yourself
- Tests are offered only in May and last three hours
- Tests have multiple choice and essay components
- Scoring scale is 1-5
- There is no guessing penalty
- Many colleges will give course credit for AP scores of 4 or 5; some may not.
- Tests are offered in a very broad range of subjects
Measuring Student Caliber

HS Transcript ➔ reveals all the academic work that you’ve completed from freshman year to senior year; answers the questions: “Have you consistently challenged yourself academically? Have you taken regular courses? Honors classes? AP classes?” GPA is critical. Focus on your GPA and getting good grades.

Standardized Test Scores ➔ The SAT/ACT are necessary evils in the eyes of most admissions counselors. It’s important for you to understand why those test scores are such a useful tool. And it’s a myth that the ACT is not acceptable! As a matter of fact, this marked the first year that the ACT was taken more than the SAT!
Measuring Student Caliber

Let’s take a closer look at some other parts of the application...

**Personal Statement ➔** An exceptional college application essay shares something about yourself that your transcript might not reveal.

**Interviews ➔** Admissions counselors allow students to interview because, again, it allows them to learn a little bit more about you.

**Extracurricular/Achievements ➔** What you do outside of school should all be included on your application because all of those activities tell a clear story about your commitments, your interests – quite simply, it tells your story.

All in all, every admissions counselor is trying to answer one question:

**Would this student applicant make our community better for being here?**
High School Timeline

9th Grade – grades and extracurricular activities

10th Grade – grades, tough classes, activities, build relationships, take practice PSAT, try a Subject Test if needed

Summer after 10th Grade – start prep for PSAT and SAT or ACT, continue activities

11th Grade – grades, tough classes, activities, take SAT and/or ACT, try a Subject Test if needed, explore colleges

12th Grade – grades, take SAT or ACT again if needed, apply to college in the fall and for financial aid after January 1.