
SAT vs ACT

KEY DIFFERENCES

Timing

SAT time limits are more generous. There is more time pressure on the ACT.

Science

The SAT does not have a science section, but there are science-related questions in other sections.

The ACT has a science section, centered around analyzing data, reading comprehension, and employing scientific skills to understand experimental design. There are very few questions that test raw science knowledge, and they usually require only a superficial understanding of the core sciences.

Reading

Reading questions on the SAT require more critical thinking.

Reading questions on the ACT are more direct and fact-based.

TEST FORMATS

Timing

3 hours, 50 minutes (with essay)
3 hours (without essay)

3 hours, 35 minutes (with essay)
2 hours, 55 minutes (without essay)

Subjects

Evidence-Based Reading and Writing,
Math, Essay (optional)

English, Math, Reading,
Science, Essay (optional)

Scoring

Two sections (not including essay) are scored separately and combined for a score from 400-1600. The Essay is scored separately with 3 scores ranging from 2-8.

Four sections (not including essay) are averaged for a composite score from 1-36. The Essay is scored separately from 2-12.

ADMISSIONS SCORE REPORTING POLICIES

Most colleges superscore the SAT by taking the best score for each section across multiple test dates

Many colleges count the highest ACT composite score

Cancel Scores

Cancel scores before Wednesday
11:59pm after test date.

Delete the record of your scores
on a test date any time.

CURRICULA AND SUBJECT MATTER

English/Writing

Revise a passage of writing according to standard English grammar and punctuation, rhetoric, and structure.

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Math

The questions are multiple choice and free response. They emphasize Algebra 2 and data interpretation and analysis. Some formulas are provided. There are two sections: Calculator and No Calculator.

The questions are multiple choice and cover Pre-Algebra through Algebra 2, Coordinate Geometry, Plane Geometry, and Trigonometry. Calculators* are allowed on the whole section.

Science

There is no science section on the SAT. There are science-related questions within other sections that are used to calculate the Analysis in Science subscore.

Each of the six passages on this section focuses on these subject areas: Biology, Chemistry, Earth Sciences, or Physics. Students need to evaluate the information given in each passage and the accompanying charts and graphs. Scientific knowledge is not the basis of this section, but students will need to bring in some knowledge from their school science classes.

Reading

Students read passages and answer evidence-based questions about the text. This section includes passages written before 1900 (both fiction and nonfiction) with denser language and more advanced vocabulary.

The test contains four prose passages that cover topics from natural sciences, fiction, the humanities, and social studies.

Essay

The Essay is optional on the SAT. Students have 50 minutes to read a passage and write an essay. Students will use evidence from the passage to explain how the author built the argument. Students receive scores on three dimensions: Reading, Analysis, and Writing.

The Writing is optional ACT. Students are prompted to consider a contemporary issue and provides three diverse perspectives to stimulate creative thinking. Students receive 40 minutes to plan, write, and edit an essay responding to these perspectives and craft their own.