



In preparing for college, most universities require a student to submit a test score, either the ACT or SAT. Some universities specify a preference, but most will accept either to review with other student information during the admissions process. The SAT is taken by many more students than the ACT each year; however, the tests are different and it is worth some consideration to decide whether to take one or the other or both.

The ACT is composed of multiple-choice subject tests in English, Math, Reading, and Science. These are designed to evaluate overall academic preparation for college-level work. The total time for the tests is 2 hours and 55 minutes to complete the four subject tests not including breaks. The ACT measures:

- Knowledge and understanding of standard written English and rhetorical skills

- Knowledge and understanding of ninth through eleventh grade course work in math

- Reading comprehension across subject areas

- Reasoning and problem solving biology, chemistry, physical, and earth and space science (some general-level science background is helpful to understand the concepts)

The ACT test is scored on a scale of 1 to 36 based only on correct answers; wrong answers do not get deducted in the scoring process. An average of the four subject tests is reported as a composite score. There is an optional 30 minute writing test to assess organization and writing skills in developing a short essay. The writing score is reported separately and may include comments about the essay. The ACT is offered six times each year with only scores from the selected dates being sent to colleges.

In comparing the SAT to the ACT, the SAT is designed to evaluate general thinking and problem-solving abilities more than content knowledge in the four core subjects. The SAT is a 3 hour and 45 minute total test time, beginning with a Writing section then Critical Reading and finally Math. The SAT measures:

- Ability to identify genre, relationships among parts of a text, cause and effect, rhetorical devices, and comparative arguments

- Reading fluency

- Understanding of the meaning of words and the basic logic in sentences

Knowledge of math coursework

Ability to reason mathematically

Ability to identify grammatical errors and recognize how to improve sentences and paragraphs

The 25-minute essay is now a required portion of the SAT. The Math sections requires some original work in addition to multiple choice. The SAT is scored up to a top score of 2400 for the three combined tests. The SAT is offered seven times each year and reports up to six test administration scores to colleges.

The College Board, SAT <http://www.collegeboard.com/>

The ACT <http://www.actstudent.org/>

Articles: [www.educationplanner.org/education\\_planner/](http://www.educationplanner.org/education_planner/)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/education/edlife/guidance.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/education/edlife/guidance.html?_r=1&pagewanted=1)