

SAT vs ACT

The [SAT](#) and [ACT](#) generally test the same types of content. Both ACT and SAT scores are used for college admissions and merit-based scholarships. The biggest differences between the tests are that the ACT has a Science Test, and there's one SAT Math Section for which you cannot use a calculator. Most colleges don't prefer one test over the other.

	SAT	ACT
Why Take It	Colleges use SAT scores for admissions and merit-based scholarships.	Colleges use ACT scores for admissions and merit-based scholarships.
Test Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing & Language • Math • Essay (Optional) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English • Math • Reading • Science Reasoning Essay (Optional)
Length	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 hours (without essay) • 3 hours, 50 minutes (with essay) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 hours, 55 minutes (without essay) • 3 hours, 40 minutes (with essay)
Reading	5 reading passages	4 reading passages
Science	None	1 science section testing your critical thinking skills (not your specific science knowledge)
Math	Covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arithmetic • Algebra I & II • Geometry, Trigonometry and Data Analysis 	Covers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arithmetic • Algebra I & II • Geometry and Trigonometry
Calculator Policy	Some math questions don't allow you to use a calculator.	You can use a calculator on all math questions.
Essays	Optional. The essay will test your comprehension of a source text.	Optional. The essay will test how well you evaluate and analyze complex issues.
How It's Scored	Scored on a scale of 400–1600	Scored on a scale of 1–36

ACT versus SAT: How do I choose?

Students are increasingly taking [both the SAT and ACT](#). Changes made to the SAT in 2016 have made it easier than ever to prep for both tests concurrently—and earn competitive scores on both! The best way to decide if taking the SAT, ACT, or both tests is right for you is to take a timed [full-length practice test](#) of each type. Since the content and style of the SAT and ACT are very similar, factors like how you handle time pressure and what types of questions you find most challenging can help you determine which test is a better fit. Try our [QUIZ: SAT, ACT, or Both?](#) to learn more.