

The Great Test Debate

Choosing the right-fit test for you is an important first step in the test preparation process. While we recommend taking a full-length diagnostic exam to compare the two, this breakdown of content, format, and important factors will help to demystify the important elements that will help you decide between the SAT and ACT.

SAT

Reading: 65 minutes for 5 passages and 52 questions

Writing & Language: 35 minutes for 44 questions

Math (No Calc): 25 minutes for 20 questions

Math (Calc): 55 minutes for 38 questions

***Essay (Optional):** 50 minutes

*Essays are scored separately and don't heavily factor into admissions decisions, so they should not factor into your testing decision.

Test Date	Score Release Date
13 Mar 2021*	21 Apr 2021
8 May 2021	16 Jun 2021
5 June 2021**	21 Jul 2021

*Subject tests are NOT available on the March test date.

**ONLY Subject tests are available on the June test date.

Writing & Language

- Tests knowledge of grammar rules and sentence structure, as well as the ability to edit passage and logically sequence information.
- Includes ~2 questions related to information in a chart or graph.
- Writing & Language Scale is VERY harsh for high-scoring students.

Math

- Less time restrictive, but less straightforward.
- Requires a deeper conceptual knowledge of the foundations of Algebra.
- Fewer questions on geometry & trigonometry (~6).
- Has 13 “Grid-In” (no multiple choice) questions.
- Calculator allowed on 38 of 58 questions.
- Math Score Scale can be harsh for high-scoring students.

Reading

- Tests ability to determine main idea, draw inferences and find supporting evidence.
- More time per passage, but passages use more sophisticated language and are more difficult to comprehend.
- Has 14-18 “evidence pair” questions.
- Contains either a U.S. Founding Document or passage in the Great Global Conversation, which are very hard to get through.

Science

- Does not have a science section, but “Analysis in Science” skills are tested throughout all sections of the test.

ACT Computer-Based Test

English: 45 minutes for 75 questions

Math: 60 minutes for 60 questions

Reading: 35 minutes for 4 passages and 40 questions

Science: 35 minutes for 6 passages and 40 questions

***Essay (Optional):** 40 minutes

*Essays are scored separately and don't heavily factor into admissions decisions, so they should not factor into your testing decision.

Test Date	Score Release Date
16-17 Apr 2021	21 Apr 2021
11-12 Jun 2021	16 Jun 2021
16-17 Jul 2021	21 Jul 2021

English

- Rules and concepts tested are functionally identical to SAT.
- Has 31 more questions than SAT Writing & Language, which allows for a less harsh scale.
- No questions relating to charts or graphs.

Math

- Faster paced, but more straightforward.
- Contains more “difficult” Algebra II concepts (matrices, conic sections, logarithms).
- More heavily tests geometry & trigonometry.
- Calculator allowed on entire test.

Reading

- Tests ability to determine main ideas, draw inferences and locate details in the passage.
- Extremely fast-paced, but requires a more cursory knowledge of the passage.

Science

- Tests a student's ability to read and analyze tables, graphs, diagrams and evaluate different scientific viewpoints.
- 5-6 questions per test require outside scientific knowledge.

Scoring

- The entire test (without essay) is scored out of 1600.
- Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (ERW) Score: Raw scores from the Reading and Writing & Language tests are combined and given a scaled score out of 800.
- Math Score: Raw scores from both Math tests are combined and given a scaled score out of 800.
- Scoring scales from test to test are very unpredictable, which is maddening for students.

Superscoring*

- More colleges and universities superscore the SAT than do the ACT.

International Students

- Offered FOUR times per year in 2019-20.
- An August test date will be added in 2020, giving students FIVE opportunities to take the SAT in an academic year.
- Accepted by more international colleges and universities than is the SAT.
- Still given on paper.
- The SAT scoring scale is PARTICULARLY harsh for high-scoring international students.

Accommodations

- Accommodations are available for students who require them.
- Students with accommodations receive their scores at the same time as students who do not have accommodations.

Scheduling

- Offered the same day as SAT Subject Tests, which limits testing opportunities for students that want or need to take those tests in order to apply to top-tier U.S. colleges and universities.

Study Resources

- The SAT has officially released 12 full-length practice tests, 8 of which have been officially given to students.
- 17 official tests can be found online.
- The SAT Official Study Guide has 10 official exams.
- The College Board has officially partnered with Khan Academy to provide free lessons and study resources for students.

Scoring

- Each test (English, Math, Reading, Science) is given a score on a 36-point scale.
- The composite score is the average of all four test scores and rounds up (ex. a composite of 31.5 will be displayed as a 32).
- ACT scoring scales are much more predictable from test to test than SAT scoring scales.

Superscoring*

- Many colleges and universities superscore the ACT, though less schools do so than superscore the SAT.

International Students

- Offered SIX times per year.
- Exclusively given as a computer-based test (CBT) for students taking the test outside of the U.S.
- Offered in fewer test centers, but each center offers testing on both weekend days and at multiple times each day.
- Scores are posted online just a few days after the test date.

Accommodations

- Accommodations are available for students who require them.
- Students who receive accommodations typically have the ability to take the test on paper.
- The ACT is a bit stricter when it comes to obtaining extra-time accommodations. For example, it requires a longer recorded history for students with diagnosed ADHD or other attention-deficit disorders.
- Students with accommodations usually receive their scores later than students who do not have accommodations.

Scheduling

- ACT dates do not overlap with SAT Subject Test dates.

Study Resources

- The ACT has released 6-8 full-length practice tests.
- Over 30 previously administered tests can be found online in PDF form.
- There are 2-3 official computer-based practice tests available online.
- The ACT Official Guide has 5 official paper tests and provides access to one official computer-based test.

**Superscoring is when a college or university takes the highest section scores across all test dates to form a higher score than a student might have obtained on any single test date. Each school's superscoring policy can be found on its admissions website.*

A mentor can change everything.

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