

From Princeton Review

# SAT vs ACT

Many students and parents begin the college prep process by comparing the ACT and SAT. Two of the most common questions they ask are:

- Is the ACT easier than the SAT?
- Do colleges prefer scores from the SAT or 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. Colleges don't prefer one over the other, so explore both tests to decide which one is right for you.

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

**SAT**

comprehension of a source text.

Scored on a scale of 400–1600

**ACT**

and analyze complex issues.

Scored on a scale of 1–36

**How It's  
Scored**

## ACT versus SAT: How do I choose?

The best way to decide if the SAT or ACT is right for you is to take a timed full-length practice test in each. 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. For example, the pace of the SAT gives you a little more time to think through problems, while the ACT can be more of a time crunch. Some students really thrive under the pressure of the clock, while others prefer the extra time to ponder a question.