

Magosh

SAT[®] vs ACT[®]

Students preparing for college admissions are often confused about which admissions test will make their college applications stronger – the ACT or the SAT? While neither test is “better” and most great schools accept either, it’s important to consider both the similarities and differences before you register.

Note: This infographic reflects changes to the SAT beginning in Spring 2016, aka the “New SAT”.

Overview

SAT

ACT



what is it?

The SAT is a reasoning test. It's meant to test your ability to combine information and analyze real-world problems.

The ACT is a content-based test. It's meant to test skills you learn in school.

It's known for: trickier questions.

It's known for: straightforward questions but serious time pressure.



when is it taken?

Oct, Nov, Dec, Jan, March, May, June

Sept, Oct, Dec, Feb, April, June

Tip: Know early which test is the right fit for you.

Take a practice test of both the SAT and ACT or compare your PSAT and ACT scores. Many students do both, or one and then the other!

SAT

ACT

Content



Reading

SAT
might be better for you if...

you like to read the "classics."
You're good at understanding historical documents.

ACT
might be better for you if...

you are a fast reader and detail-oriented.



Math

you are good at doing math by hand
(there is a no-calculator section).

you are good at mental math and finding shortcuts.



Science

you don't like science!
no science test here!

you like science and are good at interpreting tables and graphs and connecting information.



English/Writing

you like informational graphics.
(There are several questions that ask you to use data from charts and graphs.)

you're not as confident in your reading skills. The passages are easier.



Essay
(both are optional)

you're good at analyzing texts in your English class. (You have to analyze how someone else develops an argument.)

you're good at winning arguments. (You have to analyze different perspectives on an issue and present your own.)

Tip: If you like science, take the ACT!

Although most of the test questions are written in simple, readable English, the ACT's reading section includes more challenging passages. You'll also have to analyze data from charts and graphs, and connect information.

Format



total test time

SAT

3 hours without the essay;
3 hours 50 minutes with the essay.

ACT

2 hours 55 minutes without the essay;
3 hours 35 minutes with the essay.