

SAT and ACT Differences

Many students and parents begin the college prep process by comparing the ACT and SAT tests. The SAT and ACT generally cover the same topics. With recent changes to the SAT test, the tests are very similar. Both ACT and SAT scores are used for college admissions decisions and awarding merit-based scholarships. Most colleges do not 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, Trigonometry, and Probability & Statistics
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.
Scoring	Scored on a scale of 400–1600	Scored on a scale of 1–36
Cost	\$64.50 with writing; \$47.50 without writing Fee waivers based on eligibility are available in the ALA office.	\$67 with writing; \$50.50 without writing Fee waivers based on eligibility are available in the ALA office.
Website	collegereadiness.collegeboard.org	act.org
Test Prep	Free test prep through Khan Academy Free test prep booklets are available from ALA.	A variety of test prep options including online, live, book—all are free or at a small cost Free test prep booklets are available from ALA.