

# SAT vs. ACT

Acalanes College & Career Center



# Standardized Testing's Role in Admissions

- Be Pragmatic
- Don't over or underestimate testing's role

“Winter break is over, and it’s time to get serious about college admission testing. From here, your **actions** and **attitudes** – two variables you can control – will have the greatest impact on your testing outcomes. Every year, our most successful students are those who are **organized** and **informed**. They have mapped out a **thoughtful, strategic, manageable, and appropriate course of action**. They remain **focused, resilient, and sensible**. And they invariably conclude this process with highly satisfying results.”

-Bruce Reed, Compass Prep

# Preparing for the SAT/ACT

- Plan ahead by mapping out calendar and test dates
  - Consider academic readiness, extracurricular and personal conflicts, application deadlines, preparation timelines
- Make an informed decision

\* The August SAT test date will be available beginning in 2017.

# 3 Common Timelines for Testing & Prep

## Early

Students on this timeline take maximum advantage of the summer before 11th grade. Goals typically include a peak performance on the PSAT, closing out the SAT or ACT by spring of 11th grade, and banking 3–4 strong Subject Test scores. The goal of these students is to be completely done with testing by June of 11th grade.

## Traditional

Prep in the summer before 11th grade is moderately paced and foundational, designed to lighten the intensity of prep during the school year. This steadfast approach to prep culminates in the spring and leaves room for the competing priorities of junior year.

## Deferred

This timeline intentionally allows students to defer the testing process in favor of other summer activities and a focus on getting 11th grade classwork off to a great start. Rigorous prep for the SAT or ACT falls in winter/spring of 11th grade and may continue into the following summer prior to final testing in fall of 12th grade.

	May/June of 10th Grade	Summer between 10th and 11th Grades	Fall of 11th Grade		Early Spring of 11th Grade	May/June of 11th Grade	Summer/Fall of 12th Grade
Early	Take Subject Tests as appropriate. Take diagnostic SAT and ACT to plan for preparation.	Begin preparation geared toward the October PSAT and fall ACT or SAT.	Take October PSAT. Take ACT or SAT.		Consider repeating ACT or SAT and having admission testing completed prior to APs, finals, and Subject Tests.	Take Subject Tests as appropriate.	Focus on college applications. Additional preparation and testing only as needed.
Traditional	Take Subject Tests as appropriate.	Begin foundational preparation in the summer with the ultimate goal of a winter or spring ACT or SAT.	Take October PSAT. Foundational work allows additional preparation to fit into a busy junior calendar.		Take the ACT or SAT for the first time.	Take Subject Tests as appropriate. Consider repeating ACT or SAT and having admission testing completed prior to the summer and college applications.	Focus on college applications. Additional preparation and testing only as needed.
Deferred	Take Subject Tests as appropriate.		Take October PSAT. Take diagnostic SAT and ACT to decide on a course of preparation. Junior PSAT results can provide a guideline but are not available until December. Map out a schedule to prepare for the February or April ACT or the March or May SAT. Preparation typically begins in October or November.		Take the ACT or SAT for the first time.	Take Subject Tests as appropriate. Consider repeating ACT or SAT and having admission testing completed prior to the summer and college applications.	Focus on college applications. Additional preparation and testing only as needed.

\* The January test date will be discontinued after the 2017 sitting. Students in the class of 2018 may choose to take it as part of an early testing plan, but it will not be available for the class of 2019.

# Typical Timelines: Early

Goal: Complete testing by June of Junior year

- **May/June of 10th grade:** Consider taking subject tests. Take practice SAT and ACT
- **Summer between 10th & 11th:** Test Prep
- **Fall of 11th grade:** Take PSAT. Take first SAT/ACT
- **Early spring of 11th grade:** Consider repeating SAT/ACT
- **May/June of 11th grade:** Take subject tests, take final SAT/ACT

# Typical Timelines: Traditional

- **May/June of 10th grade:** Consider taking subject tests
- **Summer between 10th & 11th:** Foundational test prep with goal of taking test in winter of Junior year
- **Fall of 11th grade:** Take PSAT. Continue test prep.
- **Early spring/winter of 11th grade:** Take SAT/ACT
- **May/June of 11th grade:** Take subject tests, retake SAT/ACT
- **Fall of 12th grade:** Take additional SAT/ACT as needed

# Typical Timelines: Deferred

- **May/June of 10th grade:** Consider taking subject tests
- **Fall of 11th grade:** Take PSAT. Take practice ACT. Begin test preparation.
- **Spring of 11th grade:** February/April - ACT or March/May SAT
- **May/June of 11th grade:** Take subject tests, retake SAT/ACT
- **Fall of 12th grade:** Take additional SAT/ACT as needed



# Did you know?

- $\frac{2}{3}$  of applicants take the SAT/ACT in Fall of senior year.
- Typically this is when students see their best results due to combo of maturity, summer refresher, and experience.

# The only constant in college admissions is change

- NEW: August SAT, no more Jan SAT
- Great for rising seniors - August is perfect timing before early action deadlines.
- For rising juniors it's more complicated - either take the test in Nov/Dec or March of junior year.

# Making an Informed Decision:

## 1 | Take the PSAT

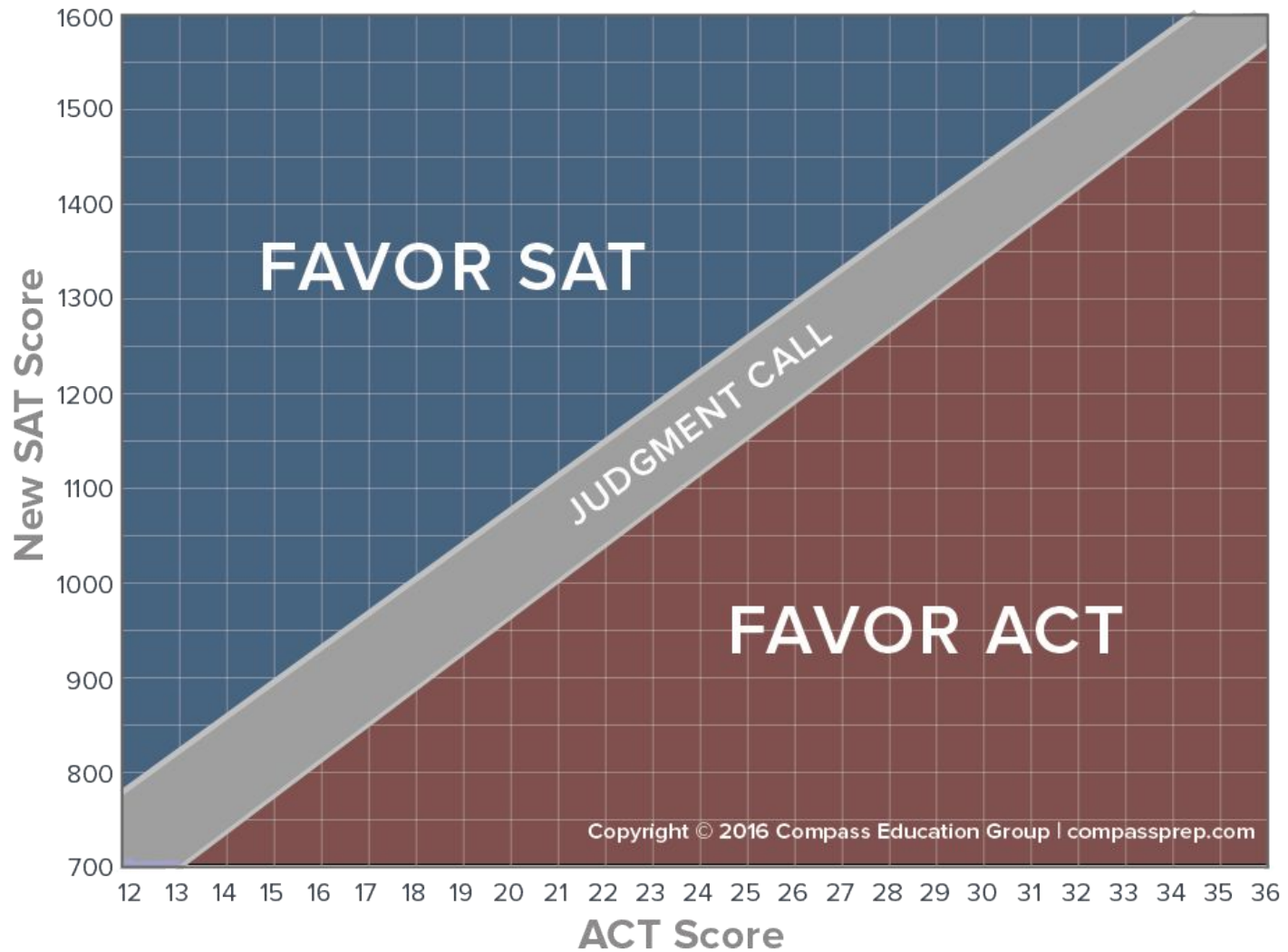
Your score on the PSAT is a good indicator of what you would score on the SAT if you took it today with no prep.

## 2 | Take an ACT practice test

Take a full length ACT practice test.

## 3 | Compare your scores

Compare your practice test scores and then determine which test to take.



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	Time	% of Test	Questions
<b>Reading</b>			
U.S. and World Literature (1 passage)		20%	10
History/Social Studies (2 passages)		40%	21
Science (2 passages)		40%	21
<b>Reading Total</b>	<b>65 minutes</b>		<b>52</b>
<b>Writing and Language</b>			
Standard English Conventions		45%	20
Punctuation			
Usage			
Sentence Structure			
Expression of Ideas		55%	24
Development			
Organization			
Effective Language Use			
<b>Writing and Language Total</b>	<b>35 minutes</b>		<b>44</b>
<b>Mathematics</b>			
Heart of Algebra		33%	19
Problem Solving and Data Analysis		29%	17
Passport to Advanced Math		28%	16
Additional Topics		10%	6
<b>Mathematics Total</b>	<b>80 minutes</b>		<b>58</b>
<b>Essay (Optional)</b>			
<b>Essay Total</b>	<b>50 minutes</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>SAT with Essay</b>		<b>3 hours 50 minutes</b>	

	Time	% of Test	Questions
<b>English</b>			
Conventions of Standard English		53%	40
Punctuation			
Grammar and Usage			
Sentence Structure			
Production of Writing		31%	23
Knowledge of Language		16%	12
<b>English Total</b>	<b>45 minutes</b>		<b>75</b>

<b>Mathematics</b>			
Pre-Algebra		23%	14
Elementary Algebra		17%	10
Intermediate Algebra		15%	9
Coordinate Geometry		15%	9
Plane Geometry		23%	14
Trigonometry		7%	4
<b>Mathematics Total</b>	<b>60 minutes</b>		<b>60</b>

<b>Reading*</b>			
Literary Narrative or Prose Fiction		25%	10
Humanities		25%	10
Social Sciences		25%	10
Natural Sciences		25%	10
<b>Reading Total</b>	<b>35 minutes</b>		<b>40</b>

<b>Science<sup>†</sup></b>			
Data Representation		30–40%	12–16
Research Summaries		45–55%	18–22
Conflicting Viewpoints		15–20%	6–8
<b>Science Total</b>	<b>35 minutes</b>		<b>40</b>

<b>Writing (Optional)</b>			
<b>Essay Total</b>	<b>40 minutes</b>		<b>1</b>

<b>ACT with Writing</b>	<b>3 hours 35 minutes</b>		
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## Science†

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Research Summaries	45–55%	18–22
Conflicting Viewpoints	15–20%	6–8
<b>Science Total</b>	<b>35 minutes</b>	<b>40</b>

## Writing (Optional)

<b>Essay Total</b>	<b>40 minutes</b>	<b>1</b>
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**ACT with Writing**

**3 hours 35 minutes**



# Notable Differences

## 1. **Timing and Pacing**

- a. SAT allows more Seconds Per Question than ACT. In other words, ACT has speedier Questions Per Minute pace.
- b. SAT has fewer, longer sections. Fewer breaks.
- c. ACT is faster pace, more breaks.
- d. Pacing note: remember an easy question is worth just as many points as a hard question. Spend your time wisely.

# Notable Differences

1. **Science** - ACT has a Science section, SAT does not
2. **Calculator** - ACT allows calculators on all questions. SAT does not allow a calculator on  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the test.

# Content Comparison

## SAT: Writing and Language

35 minutes, 44 questions

33% more time per question than ACT

## ACT: English

45 minutes, 75 questions

Quick pace for over-thinkers.

## Key Differences

Overall, material is very similar.

# Content Comparison

## SAT: Reading

65 minutes, 52 questions on 5 passages

- Must focus for 30 minutes longer than ACT English
- Some students feel that the sophistication and nuance of the SAT Reading is tougher

## ACT: English

35 minutes, 40 questions on 4 passages

- Quick pace for slow readers. Feels rushed.

## Key Differences

SAT places emphasis on science questions and includes questions on charts and graphs. SAT has two-part questions asking students to identify line in passage that supports answer to previous question.

# Content Comparison

## SAT: Math

20 minutes, 20 questions  
without calculator

55 minutes, 38 questions with  
calculator

Multiple choice & fill in the  
blank. Formulas provided.

## ACT: Math

60 minutes, 60 questions with  
calculator

All multiple choice. No  
formulas.

## Key Differences

SAT - emphasis on algebra I,  
algebra II, and data analysis.  
1 trig question.

ACT - "broad but shallow"  
covers more topics including  
trig - 4 trig questions

# Content Comparison

## SAT:

N/A  
No Science section on the SAT, but data graphics and interpretation skills are tested throughout Reading, Writing, Lang. and Math.

## ACT: Science

35 minutes, 40 questions on 6 or 7 passages  
  
Not much correlation between how a student performs in Science class and Science section.

## Key Differences

ACT Science is not testing knowledge of bio, chem, phys. It's testing reading comp. and quantitative assessment on science-related topics.

# Content Comparison

## SAT: Essay

50 minutes

SAT provides passage and asks student to write an analysis of the author's argument.

## ACT: Writing

40 minutes

ACT gives the student three perspectives and asks student to analyze the perspectives and develop his own opinion.

## Key Differences

## Test Optional

- Approximately 850 colleges are Test Optional
- See complete list on [www.FairTest.Org](http://www.FairTest.Org)
- Schools that are test optional may ask applicant to write an additional essay or participate in an interview.



- Do Colleges prefer the SAT or ACT?
- What is super scoring?
- Should I take an SAT Subject test?
- Should I take the “optional” essay?
- How many times should I take the SAT/ACT?
- What is Score Choice?

# Superscoring - ACT

## Superscoring

	April ACT	September ACT	Superscore
English	26	29	29
Math	27	25	27
Reading	27	24	27
Science	23	27	27
Composite	26	26	28

# Superscoring - SAT

	March	May	October	Superscore
Evidence-Based Reading and Writing	620	630	670	670
Math	690	650	670	690
Total	1310	1280	1340	1360

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more detailed  
information:  
[CompassPrep.com](http://CompassPrep.com)

