



SAT Versus ACT? Which Test is Right for Your Student?

Source: [Academic Approach](#)

Determining which test—the SAT or ACT—best represents a student’s academic achievement and aptitude is a crucial tactic in a well-planned approach to college admissions.

Although either the SAT or ACT can earn you admission to college or university, one test often features a student’s strengths and skills more advantageously than the other does. Diagnostic testing is the preferred way to determine the difference, but each test offers its own set of unique advantages and challenges:

SAT – Advantages

- The SAT has 10 short sections, the longest of which is 25-minutes. For students who like short bursts of attention, this format is friendly.
- Math students who are not skilled in the arts of trigonometry or calculus need not fear SAT math: it is largely a review of 9th and 10th grade math, along with a few reasoning concepts.
- About 1/4 of Critical Reading questions are vocabulary-based, so those students strong in reading and vocabulary will fare well on SAT Critical Reading.
- Beginning with the class of 2010 and all successive classes, SAT will offer score choice, that is, students can choose to send their best scores from one test administration while effectively suppressing scores from all others.

SAT – Challenges

- The SAT is about 4 hours long, a real endurance grind for students without the stamina.
- SAT penalizes $\frac{1}{4}$ point for incorrect answers.
- For those students not thrilled about the prospect of writing essays, the SAT opens with a timed essay exercise that is graded and factored into your Writing score.

ACT -- Advantages

- The ACT has only 4 sections, the longest of which is 1 hour. For those who like a simple structure, the ACT administration is lean and clear.
- The ACT is about 3 hours long, less of an endurance challenge than the SAT.
- The ACT allows you to test multiple times with score choice; that is, after testing several times, you reserve the right to send only your highest score to colleges.
- The ACT does not penalize for incorrect answers.

ACT -- Challenges

- The ACT's time demand can be profound; the reading section offers 4 passages and 40 questions in 35 minutes, a daunting challenge to many. Although its overall 4-section structure is simple, section by section it presents time management challenges.
- The ACT features a Science section that challenges many students who have difficulty reasoning with numbers and graphs. This section is not at all obviously correlated to in-school curriculum.
- The ACT tests math concepts that include trigonometry and does so in a math section comprised of 60 questions to be completed in 60 minutes. This content and format can challenge some math students, depending upon their curricular preparation and aptitude.
- For those students who have had no formal grammar training, the ACT English will certainly challenge their knowledge of colons, hyphens, commas, etc. It's an excellent but challenging test of proofreading.

The deciding factor must ultimately be real data. Have your student sit for a full-length, timed practice SAT and a full-length, timed practice ACT. Compare and contrast. Look at differences in percentile scores. Ask the student which test he or she prefers. Let real numbers and the student's instincts guide your decision.