

The SAT®/ACT™ Fact Sheet*

What is the SAT®?

- A 3-hour exam that measures two skill areas: verbal and mathematical reasoning.
- Exam consists of seven sections: three verbal reasoning, three mathematical reasoning, and one variable section (of either type) that is not graded. Each subject is divided into two, 30-minute sections and one, 15-minute section. The variable section consists of one, 30-minute section.
- The maximum possible combined score for the exam is 1600, 800 verbal and 800 mathematics.

What is the ACT™?

- A 3-hour exam covering four skill areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning.
- The exam consists of 215 multiple-choice questions.
- The maximum possible score is 36.

How do the SAT® and ACT™ differ?

- There are many differences between the two exams, including:
 - They are administered by different organizations. The College Board administers the SAT® while ACT, Inc. administers the ACT™.
 - The SAT® tests general verbal and mathematical reasoning skills while the ACT™ is more closely tied with high school curricula.
 - The ACT™ contains only multiple-choice questions, while the SAT® contains some mathematical questions requiring students to generate their own responses. These questions measure a student's ability to solve problems, and are designed to test at a level that would require students to have taken a year of algebra along with some geometry.

When do students take the SAT®/ACT™?

- High school students take the exam generally during their junior spring semester or senior fall semester. Nearly half of students taking these exams choose to take the exam more than once.
- If the ACT™ is taken more than once, the student decides which score to report to the colleges they have selected.
- If the SAT® is taken more than once, *all scores* are reported to the colleges the student has selected. Colleges vary on the policy of determining which scores, or combination of scores, they use in admissions decisions. For example, one college may use the highest score where as another college may use an average of all of the scores received for a particular student.
- The SAT® is administered seven Saturdays each year (October, November, December, January, March, May, and June). A calendar of SAT testing dates is available at www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees.html.
- The ACT™ is administered six Saturdays each year (September, October, December, February, April, and June). A calendar of ACT™ testing dates is available at www.act.org/aap/regist/actdates.html.

* Sources: (1) www.collegeboard.com and www.act.org. (2) The College Board "Q&A: The Complete, Total, All-Purpose Guide to the College Board's SAT®"

How do the SAT and ACT compare?

Indicator	SAT®	ACT™
Time Length of Exam:	3 hour exam	3 hour exam
Skills Measured:	Mathematics & Verbal Reasoning	English, Reading, Mathematics, and Science Reasoning
Highest Possible Score:	800 verbal, 800 math	36
Average Score: ¹	507 verbal, 519 math	20.8
# of Times Offered per Academic year:	7	6
Cost of Exam:	\$28.50	\$26
Avg. # of times students take exam:	2	2
Recommended time to take exam:	Spring of Jr. year or Fall of Sr. year	Spring of Jr. year or Fall of Sr. year
Scores reported to colleges*:	All scores reported	Student selects which scores to report

*If exam is taken more than once

Which test is more difficult?

- The two tests measure somewhat different things. The SAT® tests general verbal and mathematical reasoning skills, while the ACT™ exam is somewhat more closely tied to high school curricula. Whether one test seems easier, harder, or about the same as the other will vary from student to student. However, most students will perform similarly on both tests.²

What is the best way to prepare for the SAT®/ACT™?

- Taking rigorous and challenging academic courses in high school, like the Core 40 and Academic Honors Diploma curricula, is the best way to prepare for either test.
- Familiarize yourself with the organization and content of the tests while refreshing knowledge and skills in certain content areas.³
- The College Board offers a variety of test-prep materials for the SAT®. These include a free practice test provided in the registration booklet; "PrepPacks" for each section, interactive software, and a book containing practice tests for additional costs. These materials can be ordered directly from the College Board's Web site at: www.collegeboard.com.
- ACT, Inc. also offers a variety of test-prep materials. These include a free practice test with scoring key provided in the registration booklet, interactive software, and several books offering practice tests for additional costs. These materials can be ordered directly from the ACT Assessment® Web site at: www.act.org.

¹ Source: The College Board, 2003; ACT, Inc., 2003.

² Source: The College Board "Q&A: The Complete, Total, All-Purpose Guide to the College Board's SAT®"

³ Source: The College Board "Q&A: The Complete, Total, All-Purpose Guide to the College Board's SAT®" and the ACT™ website at www.act.org/aap/testprep/index.html.

Is there a formal preparation exam for either the SAT®/ACT™?

- Yes, the College Board offers the PSAT™, which includes the same types of verbal and math questions as the SAT® plus writing skills questions like those on the SAT II: Subject Test in Writing. Because the questions are the same level of difficulty, PSAT™ practice questions can help you prepare for the SAT®. Students generally take this exam during their sophomore and/or junior year, and the state of Indiana pays the test fee for Indiana students.
- ACT, Inc. offers the PLAN® exam for sophomores to provide a midpoint review of a student's progress in high school.⁴ This exam is also paid for by the state of Indiana for Indiana students.

Should students take the PSAT™ or PLAN®?

- Yes. Both the PSAT™ and PLAN® will help you become more comfortable with the SAT® and ACT™, respectively, in terms of timing, content, types of questions, etc. Studies generally show that students taking these preparatory exams receive higher scores on the SAT® and ACT™.

How important is the SAT®/ACT™ in the admissions process?

- Colleges report that the single most important factor to be weighed in admissions decisions is the student's transcript, demonstrating grade point average, and the rigor of courses taken. The ACT™/SAT® are intended to supplement the student's overall admission application (including recommendations, extracurricular activities, etc.).
- Nearly every college or university requires a standardized admissions test, generally either the SAT® or ACT™.

Which test do colleges prefer?

- Equal consideration for college admission is given regardless of which test you take. According to the admissions policies at all Indiana public universities requiring such an exam, there is no preference given to either test.⁵

⁴ Source: College Admissions Assessment: Debunking Myths and Misrepresentations, ACT, Inc.

⁵ Source: Admission websites of Indiana University, Purdue University, Indiana State University, University of Southern Indiana, and Ball State University.

SAT® Tip Sheet

- ✓ The College Board Web site at www.collegeboard.com contains a variety of helpful information and test preparation hints, such as:
 - × **Take the PSAT™.** It has the same kinds of questions as the SAT, but it's a shorter test. Taking the PSAT as a sophomore or junior is a good way to practice and get feedback as you start planning for college and prepare for the SAT.
 - × **Study the test directions for each question type ahead of time.** Use the time you save to answer questions. Be sure to look over the answer sheet beforehand as well. The answer sheet has four pages and you will need to know what answers go in which section. See *Taking the SAT I: Reasoning Test* for a sample answer sheet.
 - × **Answer easy questions first.** You earn just as many points for an easy question as you do for a hard question. Questions of the same type are grouped together. Except for the critical reading questions, the easier questions are at the beginning of the section and the harder questions are at the end.
 - × **Know how the test is scored.** On the multiple-choice questions, you earn one point for each correct answer and lose a fraction of a point for a wrong answer, but you don't gain or lose points if you do not answer a question. You don't have to answer every question correctly to get a good score. You can get an average score by answering about half of the questions correctly and omitting the remaining questions.
 - × **Guess smart.** If you can rule out one or more answer choices for a multiple-choice question as definitely wrong, your chances of guessing the right answer improve. For math questions without answer choices, fill in your best guess since no points are subtracted for wrong answers as they are in all the other question types.
- ✓ There are several SAT preparation materials available through the College Board, including⁶:

Publications:

- × ***Taking the SAT I: Reasoning Test:*** Free booklet containing examples of each type of question, explanations of sample questions, helpful test-taking tips and strategies, a complete SAT practice test, scoring instructions, and a calendar of test dates. (*Available in your school's guidance or principal's office or online at www.collegeboard.com*)
- × ***10 Real SATs:*** This book offers test-taking tips, strategies, practice questions, and 10 full-length actual SATs.

Online Resources (www.collegeboard.com):

- × ***Practice Questions:*** Free review questions and explanations, including a full-length test. Be sure to take the practice exam under time-simulated conditions to decrease test anxiety and improve test-taking skills.
- × ***Mini-SAT:*** Free, timed online evaluation offering students real test questions with feedback on their performance, a predicted score, and a personal study plan.
- × ***SAT PrepPacks:*** sets of at least 25 real test questions in both Verbal and Math, with 6 packs for each section containing hints and analysis of test questions.

CD-ROM:

- × ***One-on-One with the SAT:*** comprehensive SAT software program that includes a pre-test, full-length real SAT, post-test, and explanations for every answer.

⁶ Source: www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/prep_one/prep_one.html

ACT™ Tip Sheet

- ✓ Familiarize yourself with the content of the ACT™ exam: 1) English, 2) Reading, 3) Mathematics, and 4) Science.
- ✓ Take the PLAN exam. This exam mirrors the ACT and provides a good practice experience to better prepare you for the ACT.
- ✓ The ACT Assessment's Web site at www.act.org provides numerous test-taking tips, such as⁷:
 - × **Carefully read the instructions on the cover of the test booklet.**
 - × **Read the directions for each test carefully.** The English, Reading, and Science Reasoning Tests ask for the best answer. Read and consider all of the answer choices before you choose the one that best responds to the question. The Mathematics Test asks for the correct answer. Read each of the questions carefully to make sure you understand the type of answer required.
 - × **Pace yourself.** The test time limits give nearly everyone enough time to answer all the questions. However, because some tests include reading passages, don't spend too much time on a single passage or on any one question.
 - × **Answer the easy questions first.** After you answer all of the easy questions, go back and answer the more difficult ones.
 - × **Answer every question.** Your ACT scores are based on the number of questions you answer correctly. There is no penalty for guessing, so it is to your advantage to answer every question during the time allowed for that test.
- ✓ There are several preparation materials available through ACT, including⁸:

Publications:

- × ***Preparing for the ACT Assessment:*** A free booklet available through most high schools and colleges that includes valuable information about the test and a full practice test with scoring key.
- × ***Getting Into the ACT:*** An authoritative book featuring two complete exams with detailed analyses.
- × ***Sample ACT Assessment Test Booklets:*** complete tests for practice.

Online Resources:

- × ***ACT Assessment® Sample Test Questions:*** Free sample questions for each section of the ACT are available at www.act.org/aap/testprep/index.html. Explanations of both correct and incorrect answers are given with the correct choices.

CD-ROM:

- × ***ACTive Prep®:*** This CD-ROM software guides students through a personalized test preparation program using real ACT tests.

⁷ Source: www.act.org/aap/taking/tips.html

⁸ Source: www.act.org/aap/testprep/index.html