

## **SAT/ACT comparison and FAQs sheet**

### **Q: What is the difference between the SAT and ACT?**

**A:** The SAT and ACT are both considered acceptable standardized college entrance exams. However, they have subtle differences between them including layout, structure and material covered on. Check the chart below for a specific list of differences between the two.

### **Q: Is one test more difficult than the other?**

**A:** The difficulty of a standardized test is often very subjective and dependent upon the skills and strengths of the test-taker. The best strategy for figuring out which test is right for you is to assess your own critical thinking skills and overall knowledge. For example, if you have strong reasoning abilities, the SAT might be the test for you since that test focuses primarily on these skills. Conversely, the ACT places more emphasis on strict knowledge, so if material recall is one of your strengths, you may excel at the ACT. Of course, both tests do have a fair amount of crossover material, which means that the only reliable method for figuring out which test is for you is to visit both the ACT and SAT websites and utilize their free practice materials. Links to each are listed below:

[ACT Practice Materials](#)

[SAT Practice Materials](#)

While both tests have a math and English section, the ACT also includes a science section that primarily focuses on biology, earth science, and some physics concepts. Students without a solid foundation in these areas tend to find the ACT exam more of a challenge.

### **Q: How can I use my PSAT scores to study for the SAT?**

**A:** The Peters Township High School Counseling Website offers a variety of links to videos and step-by-step instructions on how to utilize your PSAT scores. The link to these materials can be found [on the PSAT section of our webpage.](#)

Khan Academy is the ultimate resource for utilizing your PSAT score to achieve real gains on the SAT. [Linking your Khan Academy Account to your College Board Account](#) will give you immediate access to free, individualized practice to help you on the SAT. Instead of wasting your time quizzing you on concepts on which you already have solid foundational knowledge, Khan Academy specifically focuses its prep on your areas of weakness as demonstrated by your PSAT results.

### **Q: Do all colleges and universities accept SAT and/or ACT scores with equal weight?**

**A:** Yes, all schools will take either the SAT or ACT as part of the college application process.

### **Q: If I've taken both the SAT and ACT, should I send both scores onto my colleges?**

**A:** This is a highly individualized process that requires individual college research and strategy. In general, it is best to stick with sending the highest score from whichever test you performed best on, unless your college specifically requests that you send every standardized test score you have. In some instances, it might work to your advantage to send both along, depending on your individual circumstances. If you are not sure whether you should send one or both, see your school counselor.

### **Q: The SAT & ACT use different scoring scales. How do I know which test I did better on?**

**A:** It is important to pay attention to percentiles when comparing the two scores. A percentile rank is a number between 1 - 99 that shows how you scored compared to other students. It represents the percentage of students whose scores fall at or below your score. Both the SAT and ACT will provide percentile information along with your

score report. Additionally, there are many comparison charts which show you how SAT/ACT scores compare to one another so that you can see scores [side-by-side](#).

Below is a side-by-side comparison from [Study Point](#) outlining the specific differences between the two exams:

SAT	VS	ACT
Content-based test	Type of Test	Content-based test
Reading: 1, 65-min section; Math: 1, 25-min section (no calculator) & 1, 55-min section (w/ calculator); Writing & Language: 1, 35-min section; Essay: 1, 50-min section (optional)	Test Format	English: 1, 45-min section; Math: 1, 60-min section; Reading: 1, 35-min section; Science: 1, 35-min section; Writing: 1, 40-min essay (optional)
Reading, relevant words in context, math, grammar & usage, analytical writing (optional)	Content Covered	Grammar & usage, math, reading, science reasoning, and writing (optional)
Questions are evidence and context-based in an effort to focus on real-world situations and multi-step problem-solving	Test Style	Straightforward, questions may be long but are usually less difficult to decipher
Math and Evidence-Based Reading & Writing are each scored on a scale of 200-800. Composite SAT score is the sum of the two section scores and ranges from 400-1600	Scoring	English, Math, Reading, and Science scores range from 1-36. Composite ACT score is the average of your scores on the four sections; ranges from 1-36

No – you do not lose points for incorrect answers	Penalty for Wrong Answers?	No – you do not lose points for incorrect answers
Yes – you can choose which set(s) of SAT scores to submit to colleges. However, some colleges require or recommend that students submit all scores. Students should review the score-reporting policy of each college to which they plan to apply.	Score Choice?	Yes – you can choose which set(s) of ACT scores to submit to colleges. However, some colleges require or recommend that students submit all scores. Students should review the score-reporting policy of each college to which they plan to apply.
Math questions generally increase in difficulty level as you move through that question type in a section. Reading passage questions generally progress chronologically through the passage, not by difficulty level. Writing & Language passage questions do not progress by difficulty level.	Difficulty Levels	For the English and Reading sections, the difficulty level of the questions is random. For the Math section, questions generally increase in difficulty as you progress through the section. For the Science section, passages generally increase in difficulty as you progress through the test, and questions generally become more difficult as you progress through a passage.
Arithmetic, problem-solving & data analysis, heart of algebra, geometry, pre-calculus, and trigonometry; formulas provided	Math Levels	Arithmetic, algebra I and II, functions, geometry, trigonometry; no formulas are provided
Seven times per year: March or April, May, June, August, October, November, December (note that some states offer the SAT as part of their state testing requirements; these tests are not administered on the national test dates)	Offered when?	Seven times per year: February, April, June, July, September, October, December (note that some states offer the ACT as part of their state testing requirements; these tests are not administered on the national test dates)
Typically about four weeks before the test date	Registration deadline?	Typically about five to six weeks before the test date