

College Entrance Exams FAQs

Q: When do I need to start thinking about taking college entrance exams?

A: The following timeline is recommended:

PSAT - October of Grade 10 and 11 (Students are typically registered at school.)

SAT and/or ACT options begin winter of Grade 11 and extend through December of Grade 12

Students or parents must complete their own registrations for SAT and ACT exams. These exams are only administered at College Board approved testing centers. For enrollment instructions, see the testing websites:

SAT: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/home>

ACT: <http://www.actstudent.org/index.html>

Q: When is the PSAT?

A: Wednesday, October 16, 2019 is the nationwide test date for the Preliminary SAT, with an Alternate Date of October 30 at a few high schools. (Ask your school administration about what date your class will be administered the PSAT) These dates are set each year by the College Board. No make-up dates can be provided. Arrangements to take the PSAT on the alternate date at another school must be made by families/students. Information about the test is typically distributed in class meetings, and a letter with additional information should be sent to parents.

Q: Should I prepare for the PSAT?

A: Yes, College Board sends PSAT test taking information to each school; including test-taking tips, and a full-length practice test. This information is then distributed to each student to whom the test will be administered to at school. Juniors, especially, should set aside time to review the format of the test, to read the Test Taking Tips, and to take a practice test. A great deal of preparation information is also available at the College Board's PSAT website:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/psat/about.html>

Q: What is the SAT?

A: The SAT is a college admission and readiness exam accepted by every college and university in the U.S. SAT scores are among the factors considered in college admission. Designed to assess your academic readiness for college, the SAT tests reading, writing and math skills. The SAT changed to its new format and scoring starting in March of 2016. Please visit the College Board website to familiarize yourself with the changes and new scoring procedures: <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/>. Most importantly, the new SAT no longer deducts points for incorrect answers.

Q: What is the ACT? How is it different from the SAT?

A: The ACT is also accepted by virtually every college and university in the U.S.. The ACT is a knowledge-based test, and it differs from the SAT in a few ways:

- 1.) The ACT includes a defined section on Science, which is not on the SAT.
- 2.) The ACT also has sections on English, Math, Reading, and an optional section on Writing which a few colleges require.
- 3.) The ACT is scored on a 1-36 scale.

The ACT also does not penalize for incorrect responses. There is a wealth of information on the ACT at their website, including test dates, test tips, etc.

<http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/index.html>

Q: Do I need to take the optional Writing Section on the SAT and ACT?

A: Maybe, some colleges require the Writing Section and may consider your ACT score incomplete without it. You should check the testing requirements at colleges and universities undergraduate admissions websites to see if the writing section is required.

Q: When should I take the SAT/ACT?

A: The recommendation, in general, is to take the SAT for the first time in December/January of Junior year and/or the ACT in December/February of Junior year. Students should continue testing through the Fall of their Senior year in order to achieve their best scores. Students should review the test dates and decide which works best for them based on their individual schedules (consider sports and other extracurricular commitments for example). Registration for tests should be completed at least 6 weeks ahead of the test day you choose. Each year, there are 7 SAT test dates: October, November, December, January, March, May and June. There are also 6 ACT test dates: September, October, December, February, April and June. Students must register themselves for the SAT and/or ACT. Select the test location that is most convenient for you. In general it is recommended that students consistently test at the same site throughout the process if possible, creating a known, less stressful environment. For test dates and information, go to:

<http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees.html> (SAT)

<http://www.actstudent.org/regist/dates.html> (ACT)

***Please note: Juniors in Algebra II are encouraged to wait until early spring to take the SAT/ACT, as the tests cover a good deal of math material taught in Algebra II.

Q: How many times should I take the SAT and/or ACT? Should I take both?

A: It depends. Most students will take an SAT and/or ACT in the winter/spring of junior year and re-test again in the fall of senior year. Some students opt to focus on just one test (based on their preliminary results from the PSAT and Practice ACTs). Others choose to take the SAT and the ACT once each, and then re-take the one they prefer. Some students may take the SAT or ACT a third time, which is fine. Research indicates, however, that scores plateau after the third test, so it is generally not recommended that students taking a test more than three times.

Q: Do all colleges require the SAT or ACT?

A: No. A number of highly selective colleges in the US are SAT/ACT optional. Examples include American University, Bowdoin College, Wake Forest University, and Wesleyan University. For more information, please see [the complete list](#).

Q: Do colleges prefer one test over the other? Do I have to take both?

A: No. All colleges accept the SAT and ACT equally, so after taking each test one time, students can choose the test that is best for them. Colleges do not require you to take both tests. And if students take both tests, most colleges do not require students to submit both scores. Based on college requirements and score success, college counselors can help students choose which

scores to submit.

Q: Do colleges want to receive all SAT/ACT test scores?

A: It depends. In 2009, the College Board (SAT testing Board) instituted a policy called Score Choice, which gives students in some cases the option to choose which scores (by test date for the SAT and by individual test for the SAT Subject Tests) they send to colleges. There are some colleges, however, that still require students to report all scores. Each college states its score-use practice when students send their scores. For more information, please see <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/sat-reasoning/scores/policy>.

The ACT on the other hand only provides score reports by single test administration. ACT sends a complete set of scores from specific test dates; they do not super score. Colleges however might super score your results from ACT once they receive all your scores. For example, if you have higher scores in Reading and Writing on one date but highest Math and Science scores on another date, send in both sets of scores and let the college do the super scoring for you. Each set of scores that you send from a specific test date to a specific college will be charged a fee. Make sure you understand a particular college's policy, as some select schools will ask for results from all your sittings.

Q: When should I send my scores? Should I use the free score reports I'm offered with my registration?

A: Most counselors recommend that students wait until fall of senior year to send scores. Generally, you would not have your scores sent directly to colleges from ACT or SAT until you have reviewed your scores and decided which scores are best to submit. However, if the cost of sending scores into colleges is a burden for your family the free score report opportunity should be utilized.

Q: Who takes the SAT Subject tests, and when should I take those?

A: Many colleges do not require the SAT Subject Tests. It is generally only the most selective colleges that require students to take these tests (and even some of those don't require the SAT Subject Tests if the student submits the ACT). Students who take the Subject Tests typically do so in May or June of the junior year, after consulting with their college counselor. The tests are 1 hour in length, so students may take up to 3 tests in one sitting. 3 SAT Subject tests are the most that any college requires. Please see the complete list of Subject tests offered here. <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat-subject-tests>

Q: How should I prepare for the SAT and/or ACT?

A: All students should take some time to prepare. At a minimum, students should review their PSAT Score Reports in preparation for the SAT. Students should also take at least 1 full-length practice test before taking either the SAT or ACT. It is important to understand the format and pacing required for the tests. Beyond that, there are many options for further preparation and there is no one "right" way for all students to prepare. Most test prep businesses offer free full-length practice tests, which simulate an actual test. They will score it, and although they will obviously try to sell families a program, there is often no obligation to sign on for further instruction. Both ACT.org and CollegeBoard.com offer online practice and sell prep materials that include actual tests from previous years.

Q: Should I take a prep course?

A: Some students want a structured environment in which to review. Others will take time to do review on their own. This is a personal decision and a standard answer is not suitable for all students. Prep courses take considerable time and often require a fee. Families should consider the pros and cons of the time and money invested when making their decision. There is opportunity and financial costs to 30-hour courses and students should consider their schedules, resources and other time commitments when deciding how to best prepare for the SAT/ACT. Some students decide that a course is right for them and are extremely pleased with the results. Families are encouraged to think about various options before deciding what to do. Many students very successfully prepare on their own, taking sample practice tests and reviewing the missed answers with our teachers. Other effective and much less expensive ways to prepare include FREE online sites such as <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat> and <https://www.kaptest.com/act/free/act-practice>, as well as low cost online prep. Practice books or private tutoring that focus preparation on a specific area where a student most needs improvement (critical reading on the SAT, or Science on the ACT, for example) can also be effective.

Q: Any test day tips?

A: Yes, both the SAT and ACT are nearly 4 hours long. Get a good night's sleep before the test and eat breakfast before going. Also, take a snack and some water, and don't forget your ID and calculator. Parents may want to consider driving your son/daughter to the test site, so that the student is not stressed by parking congestion, etc. Review other tips on the many online resources, as well.

Q: Am I able to receive accommodations if necessary?

A: Yes, for students with an IEP, a testing coordinator on the student's behalf requests accommodations when necessary. Documented paperwork must be sent in at least 8 weeks in advance.

- For SAT, appropriate paperwork should be sent in to College Board as long as an Academic Support Plan is in place at. <https://www.collegeboard.org/students-with-disabilities>
- For ACT, parents must fill out a form first. Once the form is complete and turned into the school administrator who will complete the school portion and send the required documentation to ACT.org <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/disab/>
- Please be advised that psycho-educational evaluations must be current (within 3 years) in order to pursue accommodations from both ACT and SAT.
- If your student requires physical accommodations, please contact your school office to find out how best to make those arrangements.