



SAT VS. ACT

ACT® questions tend to be more straightforward.

ACT® questions are often easier to understand on a first read. On the SAT®, you may need to spend time figuring out what you're being asked before you can start solving the problem. For example, here are sample questions from the SAT® essay and the ACT® writing test (their name for the essay):

SAT®: What is your view of the claim that something unsuccessful can still have some value?

ACT®: In your view, should high schools become more tolerant of cheating?

The SAT® has a stronger emphasis on vocabulary.

If you're an ardent wordsmith, you'll love the SAT®. If words aren't your thing, you may do better on the ACT®.

The ACT® has a Science section, while the SAT® does not.

You don't need to know anything about amoebas or chemical reactions for the ACT® Science section. It is meant to test your reading and reasoning skills based upon a given set of facts. But if you're a true science-phobe, the SAT® might be a better fit.

The ACT® tests more advanced math concepts.

In addition to basic arithmetic, algebra I and II, and geometry, the ACT® tests your knowledge of trigonometry, too. That said, the ACT® Math section is not necessarily harder, since many students find the questions to be more straightforward than those on the SAT®.

The ACT® Writing Test is optional on test day, but required by many schools.

The 25-minute SAT® essay is required and is factored into your writing score. The 30-minute ACT® writing test is optional. If you choose to take it, it is not included in your composite score — schools will see it listed separately. Many colleges require the writing section of the ACT®, so be sure to check with the schools where you are applying before opting out.





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The SAT® is broken up into more sections.

On the ACT®, you tackle each content area (English, Math, Reading and Science) in one big chunk, with the optional writing test at the end. On the SAT®, the content areas (Critical Reading, Math and Writing) are broken up into 10 sections, with the required essay at the beginning. You do a little math, a little writing, a little critical reading, a little more math, etc. When choosing between the SAT® and ACT®, ask yourself if moving back and forth between content areas confuse you or keep you energized?

The ACT® is more of a "big picture" exam.

College admissions officers care about how you did on each section of the SAT®. On the ACT®, they're most concerned with your composite score. So if you're weak in one content area but strong in others, you could still end up with a very good ACT® score and thus make a strong impression with the admissions committee.

