

SAT and ACT: Planning your Standardized Testing Road Map

There's no way around it; the overwhelming majority of colleges and universities require that students submit scores for the SAT or ACT as a part of their applications.

What is the SAT?

Created by the College Board, the SAT is an entrance exam used by most colleges and universities to make admissions decisions. The idea (in theory, at least) is to provide colleges with one common criterion that can be used to compare all applicants. However, it is just one factor in the admissions decision. Schools also consider your high school GPA, academic transcript, letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, interviews, and personal essays. The weight placed on SAT scores varies from school to school.

The SAT exam is offered nationally every year in August, October, November, December, March, May and June. **You can view upcoming testing dates and register for the SAT at www.sat.collegeboard.org.**

SAT Quick Facts

Frequency 7 times/year

Duration 3 hours, 50 minutes

Sections Math, Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, Optional Essay

Cost \$60 (\$46 without Essay)

Max. Score 800/section (Essay reported separately)

What is the ACT?

Created by ACT Inc., the ACT is an entrance exam used by most colleges and universities to make admissions decisions. As with the SAT, the idea behind the ACT is to provide colleges with one common criterion that can be used to compare all applicants.

The ACT is offered nationally every year in September, October, December, February*, April, June and July. You can view upcoming testing dates and register for the ACT at www.actstudent.org.

*The majority of colleges and universities require students to take the ACT PLUS Writing section, so make sure to sign up for the writing portion of the exam.

ACT Quick Facts

Frequency	6 times/year
Duration	3 hours, 3 hours 40 minutes including essay
Sections	English, Math, Reading, Science, Writing
Cost	\$46 - \$62.50
Max. Score	36
Avg. Score	21

Should I take the SAT or ACT?

Colleges will accept both SAT and ACT scores, so take the test that you feel most comfortable with taking and that you score the most highly on.

Your PSAT and pre-ACT scores from sophomore year can be indicators of your success on the SAT and ACT. Use these score reports to practice for the SAT and ACT and to make decisions about which test is the best fit for you.

You can research more about the differences between the SAT and ACT at <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/new-sat-vs-act-infographic> and <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/should-i-take-the-act-or-new-sat-quiz> .

How many times should I take the SAT and ACT and when should I take these exams?

I encourage students to create their standardized testing timelines by **keeping the end in mind**.

It is ideal to complete all standardized testing by October of your senior year. By completing standardized testing by October, you can comfortably submit completed early action and early decision college applications and ensure that you will be in contention for university-based merit scholarships that take into consideration your early applications and testing scores.

I encourage students to take each exam no more than two times. Why? If you have purposefully prepared for these exams, you will see the biggest increase in your score between a first and second time that you take a test. You may see a small increase between a second and third time, but after a third attempt, your scores tend to plateau.

Mrs. di Carlo's Suggested Testing Timeline

When creating your timeline, keep in mind that you must register for the SAT and ACT a month ahead of the actual test date to avoid late fees. View registration information for the SAT at www.sat.collegeboard.org and view ACT registration information at www.actstudent.org . If you receive free or reduced lunch, contact your counselor for SAT and ACT fee waivers; qualifying students can receive 2 SAT and 2 ACT fee waivers.

Sophomore Year: Wake County sophomores will take the pre-ACT FOR FREE in October and have the option to pay and register for the PSAT. Although you do not need to necessarily study for these exams, put in your best effort, as your scores on these tests will serve as indicators as to whether the SAT or ACT will be the best fit for you. You will receive your score reports for both exams in December or January; hold onto your score reports and booklets and use these as study tools to prepare for the SAT and ACT.

Junior Year: This is the year to take the SAT and ACT! **These tests are designed for juniors – You're ready to get started!!**

October: Take the PSAT. Sign up to take the PSAT with Mrs. di Carlo in September. The cost to take the PSAT is \$15. Although you will not report these scores to colleges, the PSAT is excellent practice for the SAT AND you can possibly qualify for National Merit Scholarships based on your PSAT scores. Learn more about the PSAT and National Merit qualification at <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt-psat-10?navId=gh-pn> .

December: Receive your PSAT scores and review areas of improvement. Work with Mrs. di Carlo to make a decision as to when you will take the SAT this spring (March, May and/or June). View registration deadlines and register for the SAT at www.sat.collegeboard.org .

February/March: Take the ACT Plus Writing FOR FREE at school! North Carolina pays for all juniors at public high schools to take the ACT for free in March. You can report these scores to colleges; make sure to select 4 colleges to which you would like to send scores. You do not need to register for this test; your school will register you for this month's test, which will be administered during the school day.

April, May or June: Take the SAT and/or ACT. Depending on your schedule and your testing preference, select a test date and exam to take again. If you have questions about which test to take again, check in with Mrs. di Carlo.

You have now taken the SAT and ACT once. Reflect on your scores. On which test did you perform better? Convert your scores using this easy SAT/ACT conversion calculator at <http://convertyourscore.org/> . You can also check out these detailed conversion charts at <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/pdf/higher-ed-brief-sat-concordance.pdf> .

Summer and Fall of Senior Year: You still have time to take each exam at least one more time if you would like to finish by October. If you would like to retest, take the ACT and/or SAT.

July and September: The ACT is administered.

August and October: The SAT is administered.

How and When Should I Report My Scores?

When you register for both the SAT and ACT, you can select up to 4 colleges to send score reports. Go ahead and select 4 schools to send score reports.

When you complete your college applications in the fall of your senior year, you can edit your reports. **All colleges require that you send scores directly from College Board (SAT) and ACT; they will not accept self-reported scores or score reports sent from your counselor.**

Should I Send All of My Scores?

The short answer is: Most colleges superscore the SAT; some colleges superscore the ACT. Check with each individual college to view their policy on superscoring.

*What is superscoring? **Superscoring** is the process by which colleges consider your highest section scores across all the dates you took the SAT or ACT. Rather than confining your scores to one particular date, these schools will take your highest section scores, forming the highest possible composite score.

SAT and ACT Prep Resources

Ideally, you have been preparing your whole life for these exams by being an avid reader and enthusiastic learner, but most of us benefit from some extra test prep before these big exams! I recommend that you begin preparing at the end of sophomore year. Listed below are resources for the independent learner and for those who benefit from a classroom setting. Cost varies, so start with the free options first and then work your way up, depending on your needs.

- College Board (SAT) and ACT offer both free and fee-based test prep options through their websites: <http://sat.collegeboard.org/practice/> ;
<http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/>
- College Foundation of North Carolina (CFNC) offers free SAT and ACT prep to registered students: https://www1.cfnc.org/Plan/For_College/default.aspx
- Number 2 Test Prep (free): <https://www.number2.com/>
- Wade Edwards Learning Lab: The WELL offers a number of affordable SAT and Act test prep options. They also offer scholarships and reduced fee options for students who qualify. You can view a schedule and register for classes at <http://www.wade.org/portfolio-item/act-sat-test-prep/> .
- A+ Higher Scores: <http://aplushigherscores.com/>

- Khan Academy: Khan Academy offers free online test prep at <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat> .
- St. David's School Test Prep: Offered several times a year. Students can take a full 2-day course for \$295, or a 1-day subject only course for \$180. Contact Ben Wood at BWood@sdsd.org for course dates.
- Kaplan Test Prep: Locations and pricing can be found at <http://www.kaptest.com/enroll/SAT/27607/comprehensive/dprod59>
- Kaplan: Kaplan test prep periodically offers FREE practice SAT and ACT tests and prep sessions. Check out the local schedules at www.kaptest.com
- PLAN and PSAT results: Students can use their PLAN and PSAT score reports to create customized planning guides.
- Princeton Review Prep: Locations and pricing can be found at <http://www.princetonreview.com/college/sat-test-preparation.aspx>
- Huntington Learning Center: <http://raleigh.huntingtonhelps.com/>
- Traditional High Schools: Millbrook High School offers four prep sessions a year, and they offer this opportunity to non-Millbrook students.
- Wake AHEC: Wake AHEC periodically offers one day boot camps. Check their website at www.wakeahec.org for class offerings.
- Wake Tech: Wake Tech periodically offers SAT and ACT prep classes. Check their website at www.waktech.edu for class offerings.
- For students who are self-paced, there are a number of test prep books available on Amazon and at local book stores. We encourage each student to look through the test prep books to see which the best fit are for her!