

The SAT, ACT, and Test Optional College Admissions

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Today

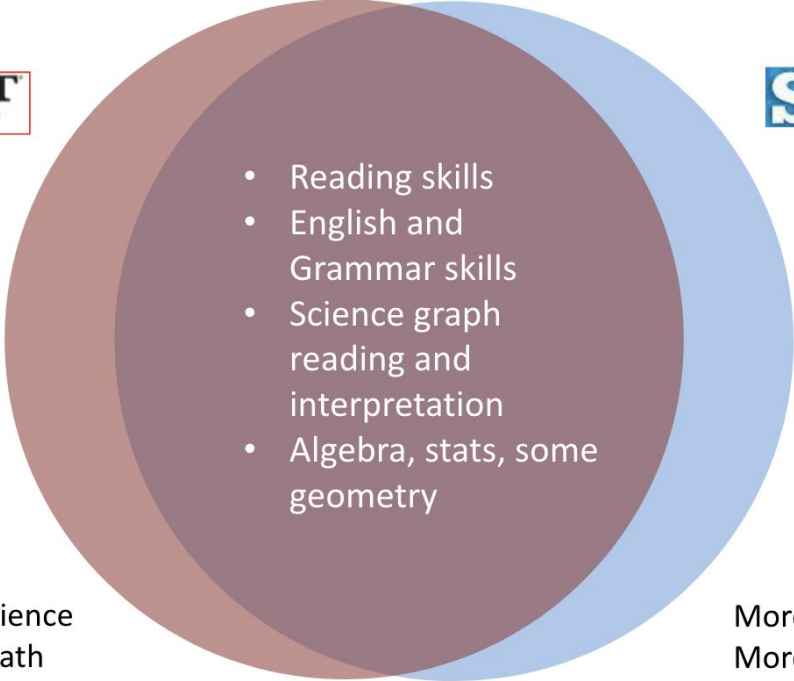
- SAT vs. ACT
- The Digital SAT
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SAT vs. ACT



The (d)SAT and ACT have roughly 80% overlapping content



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- A Venn diagram consisting of two overlapping circles. The left circle is brown and represents the ACT. The right circle is blue and represents the SAT. The overlapping area in the center is a darker, muted purple color. Inside this overlapping area, there is a list of four shared skills. The non-overlapping part of the brown circle is labeled with text describing unique ACT content, and the non-overlapping part of the blue circle is labeled with text describing unique SAT content.
- Reading skills
 - English and Grammar skills
 - Science graph reading and interpretation
 - Algebra, stats, some geometry

More advanced science
More advanced math

More advanced reading
More word problems

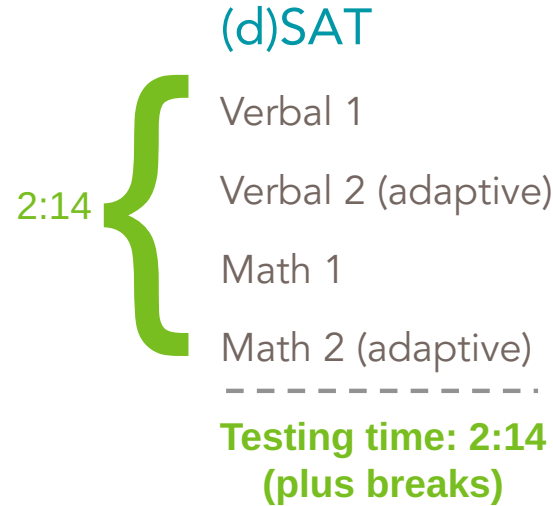
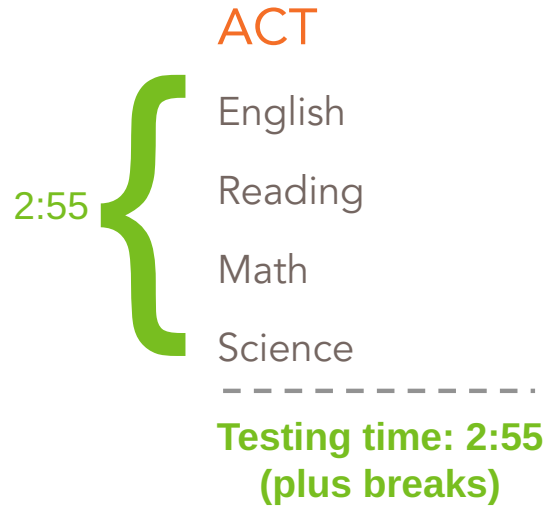
PSAT/SAT and ACT have moved away from each other in some ways

Short reading passages
Few grammar rules tested
Focus on Algebra and graphing skills
Digitally adaptive testing experience
2 hours and 24 minutes testing time

Long reading passages
More grammar rules tested
Covers wide range of math, including Precalculus
Science section
Optional essay
Linear paper-based testing
3 hours and 5 minutes testing time



Test Structure and Timing



The amount of time per question is a profound difference

Section	ACT	dSAT	% Difference (dSAT vs. ACT)
Verbal (E/W + R)	44.3	71.0	60%
Math	60.0	95.5	59%
Science	52.5	n/a	N/A

The SAT has a more forgiving timing structure, which can benefit some students, but as we'll see, it's also a more complicated test.

The Digital SAT



Why Digital testing?

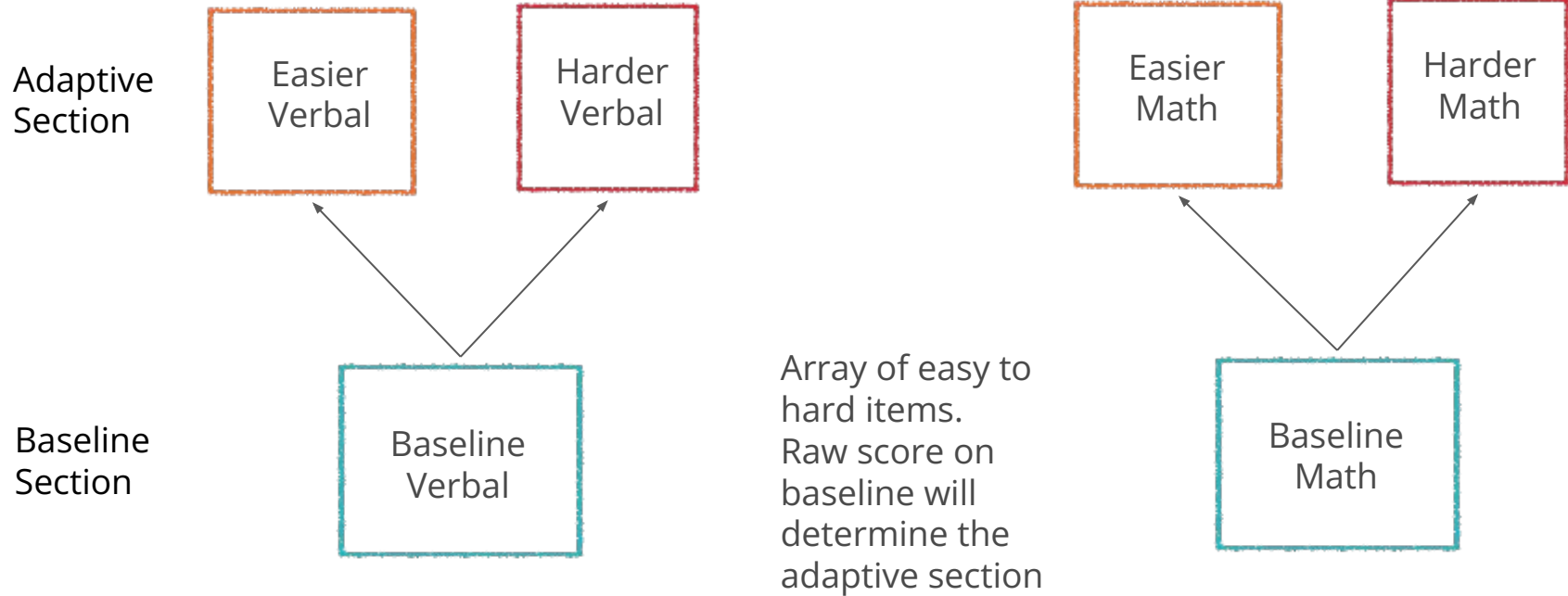
Digital tests have lots of potential advantages over paper ones.

- Eliminates the need for human proctors to manage time; makes the test **more consistent and reliable**
- Eliminates issues with bubbling or gridding in answers, or **the need for scantrons**;
- Makes it easier to schedule school-day tests or offer **SATs on demand**;
- **Increases test security**, making it less likely whole test administrations will need to be cancelled;
- **Improves accommodations** available for students with learning differences
- Results will be available **faster** (within days, not weeks)
- Test can be **more efficient**, saving students time (and focus!)

What does “adaptive” mean?

- The new SAT will be **SECTION-adaptive**, as opposed to QUESTION-adaptive. Students will see reading/writing and math each twice. Section One will be set, and Section Two will vary based on how the student performs in Section One.
- The second module will adapt in only one of two ways- the questions will be, on average, easier than the baseline, or harder than the baseline
- In adaptive testing, there’s **no single, set test form**
- **Earlier questions** can affect students’ scores more than later ones

Adaptive Sections



Why students like it

- Shorter Test (less cognitive endurance)
- Shorter Passages (less working memory focus, less skimming and scanning texts)
- More time per question (less processing speed focus)
- Always have a calculator (less hand calculation)
- Faster Results (less stress from waiting!)

80% of the students in College Board's pilot (sample size of 5500+ students) preferred the digital test.

ACT Changes



ACT Changes

The ACT has announced that they will be introducing a new, shorter version of the test that will be available in both digital and paper formats.

Here's their current timeline for the shorter version:

- April 2025: ACT National (Online Only)
- September 2025: ACT National (Paper/Online) & International
- Spring 2026: State & District Testing (School Day Testing)

ACT Changes

What We Heard	How the ACT is Improving	What This Means for the Testing Experience
"The test is too long, I need more time!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reducing the number of questions overall (44 fewer questions to be exact.)• Reducing the test length from up to 195 minutes to 125 minutes.• More time per question.• Reducing the number of math question answer choices from 5 to 4.	A test that's more manageable so students can shine, while also maintaining the integrity and rigor of the ACT that colleges rely on and trust to aid in the admissions process and get students placed into the right courses.
"The science section scares me."	Students can now choose to take the ACT with or without science.	More choice and more flexibility, allowing students to tailor their experience to fit their needs. This gives them more control over their testing experience.
"I want to show off my science and math skills for my major."	The score report will include a science score and a STEM score if students choose to take the science section.	If a student is planning to take science courses in college, they still have the option of taking the ACT with science to showcase their skills and work toward their future goals.
"I don't want to test on a computer. I still want paper."	The choice is still theirs! The ACT is available via paper/pencil or online.	Students can test the way they feel most comfortable and show off their best performance. <i>Note: If choosing to test online, these enhancements will be made available beginning with the April 2025 ACT test. These enhancements to the test will take effect, regardless of testing mode, beginning with the September 2025 ACT test.</i>

Source: ACT.org

Testing and College Admissions



The Test Optional Tsunami



Admission Testing Policies

Test Required

Test Optional

Test Flexible

Test Blind

***Note: UGA, GA Tech, and Zell Miller Scholarship are all test required**

Augusta, Georgia State, Georgia Southern and Kennesaw State universities will require test scores from students applying to the 2026-27 academic year.

Admission Testing Policies

Notable schools that have reinstated testing requirements:

- Brown
- Dartmouth
- Harvard
 - Yale
- Georgetown
 - MIT
 - Caltech
- Public university systems of Florida and Georgia

What does Test Optional Mean?

- It simply means submitting your scores is not required.
- **It does NOT mean test-blind.**
- When colleges don't have test scores to consider, they will look more closely at:
 - Rigor and GPA
 - Other testing (AP exam results, for example)
 - Essays and Extra Curricular Involvement
 - Counselor and Teacher Recommendations
 - Demonstrated Interest

Should I send in my test scores with my application?

Consider the following questions:

Are the scores going to add value to the application?

Are they something you want the admissions office to see?

Strategic submission is becoming the new normal

- Pre-pandemic only 4% of students were strategic submitters,
- 2020 cycle 24% of students chose to submit their scores to some colleges and not to others. (Common App Data)
- You may not submit or withhold scores to all the schools on your list. Treat each decision separately.
- You may submit scores to a likely option, but withhold scores from highly competitive reach schools where your scores are not as competitive.

Think of it as submission optional.

To submit or not to submit to optional schools?

- Weak test scores will not enhance an application to a highly selective school
- Strong scores communicate a strength and should be included in an application
- If there are other holes in the application, testing can help provide more context
- Testing may affect merit-based aid and placement

Individual section scores matter

- Even if a student's composite score is in the third quartile for a selective school, it's important to consider the breakdown of the section scores.
- Not all 1400s are created equal. If a student is applying to a selective engineering program and has a 600 verbal and an 800 math, that student should be encouraged to submit those scores while with 600M and 800V, the lower math score may be a red flag for admissions about a weakness in a key content area.

Next Steps



Next Steps

- **Meet with your counselor**
- **Create a college list**
 - Gather data on GPAs and test scores
- **Get baseline SAT/ACT scores**
 - How do these compare to the middle 50th percentile scores from your list of schools?
- **Check your calendar**
 - Plan for three tests and stop once you reach your goal
- **Prep if you need it**
 - Rule of thumb is to start practicing and studying 8 weeks before your official test date

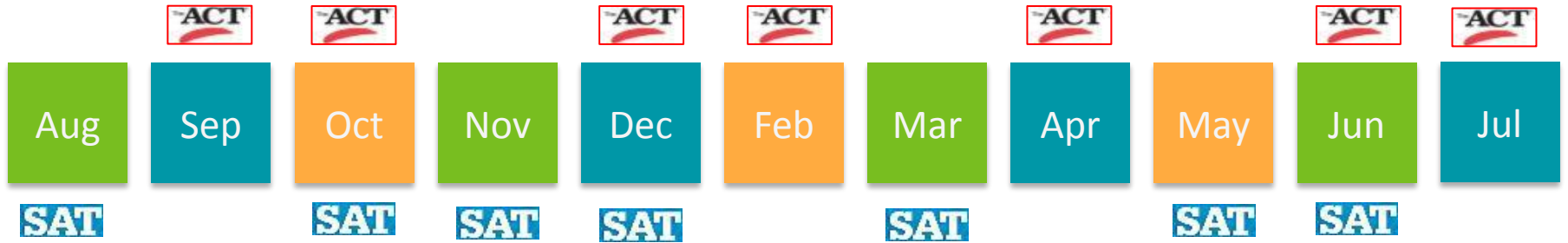
What is superscoring?

Superscoring allows students to combine top section scores from different test dates to form **a new composite score**, the only score to be used in the admissions process.

The vast majority of schools will superscore the SAT, and many will superscore the ACT. Always check with the admissions office of every school your student wants to attend!

Test Date	Verbal	Math	Composite
March	630	670	1300
May	610	630	1240
June	660	650	1310
Superscore	660	670	1330

National testing dates



If possible, plan to test 2-3 times. You may be “one and done,” but you want to build some slack into your plan, just in case. Students usually need to start preparing 8-12 weeks before the test.

Which Test To Try First?

Both of them, ideally, to establish baselines and see which format you prefer (practice, no need to take official tests)

1. Start with your **STRENGTH**. If none,
2. Prep to your **PREFERENCE**.
3. If prep is not yielding results, switch to the other test. If you have to switch, more than 80% of the content transfers

Bluebook is the app for dSAT practice

Download Bluebook

Download requires Windows 10 or later and 250 MB of available disk space.

If you're testing with a school-managed device and you can't complete the download, reach out to someone at your school for help.

 Download for Windows

Installation Instructions

Click the download button above, then follow these instructions to install the app on your device.

- 1** Find Your Download
Open your Downloads folder and double-click on Bluebook Setup 0.9.106.exe. This will create a shortcut to the app on your desktop.
- 2** Open the App
From your desktop, double-click the shortcut (the star icon) to open the app.

<https://bluebook.app.collegeboard.org/>

Testing is typically a Junior Year activity

- The overwhelming majority of students can wait until sophomore year has concluded to begin test preparation
 - **Completing Algebra 2 is beneficial**
- Different students will choose different schedules
 - Consider your busiest season for extra curricular activities and plan around that
- Some students will be ready to begin preparation earlier in the Junior year or even the summer before.
- Waiting until Senior fall to start puts too much pressure on too few test dates.

Q&A



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