

Introduction

Many parents have questions on which college entrance exam their student should take. This page is provided to give information on both tests, so that parents and students can have an informed conversation about both tests.

SAT and ACT Comparison Chart

Note: This chart was up-to-date as of September 2019. As the tests change, this chart will become obsolete.

	SAT	ACT
Accommodations to Test at Telos	Test at Telos on a Saturday only	Test at Telos over multiple days in a 2 week window.
Score Range	400 to 1600	1 to 36
Guessing Penalty	None since 2015 changes	None
Standard Time	3 Hours (plus 50-minute optional essay)	2 Hours 55 Minutes (plus 45-minute optional essay)
Test Sections	English Reading Math without Calculator Math with Calculator Optional Essay	English Math Reading Science Optional Essay
Cost	Around \$70	Around \$70
Non-Essay Question Type	Multiple Choice Free Response	Multiple Choice Only
Which Colleges Take	All Colleges Accept Typically, East Coast Prefers ¹	All Colleges Accept Typically, West Coast Prefers
Where To Take If Student Does Not Have Accommodations	Jordan High School Sandy, Utah West High School Salt Lake City, Utah	Orem High School Orem, Utah Timpanogos High School Orem, Utah

¹ Almost all colleges will accept either the ACT or the SAT. They will not give preference to a student because he/she took the “right” test. However, East Coast Schools will speak in terms of the SAT and West Coast Schools will speak in terms of the ACT when they give admissions guidance to potential students.

Essay: Should your student take the essay? Depends on which school he/she wants to go to. Most schools do not require the essay, but those that do are usually big-name schools. For example, all the UC schools require the essay. Rule of thumb—always take the essay.

Differences Explained

Why take the ACT?

1. The ACT has a science section. Science, however, is a misnomer. The science section tests a student’s ability to read graphs, interpret data, and draw conclusions based on scientific evidence. It does not test specific scientific knowledge regarding Biology, Chemistry, Physics, or Earth Science. The science section may include reading that relates to a specific scientific discipline, but the test is really determining if a student can read and interpret data. Students who feel that interpreting data is one of their strengths should consider the ACT.
2. The ACT allows students to use a calculator on all questions in the math section. Additionally, the ACT has only multiple-choice questions—no short answer questions (excluding the essay, of course). The SAT has two math sections—one where calculators are permitted, and one where calculators are not permitted. In addition, there are several short answer math questions on the SAT which do not give students a list of possible answers. Students who feel the need to use a calculator, or who feel that they need possible answers to choose from on all questions might consider the ACT.
3. The ACT has hundreds of study materials available. The ACT publishes many of their past tests, which allow students to use real test questions in their own test prep experience. This is perfect for the student who wants to spend hours and hours prepping for one of the tests. This link will take you to one of the past ACT tests offered as study materials: <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/360031/prepact20182019.pdf>

Why take the SAT?

1. The SAT is a time-friendlier test. The SAT gives students more time per question than the ACT. This chart shows how much time a student has on each section of the ACT vs SAT:

Test Section	SAT	ACT
English	35 minutes for 44 questions (47.7 seconds per question)	45 minutes for 75 questions (36 seconds per question)
Reading	65 minutes for 52 questions (1 minute, 15 seconds per question)	35 minutes for 44 question (52.5 seconds per question)
Math No Calculator	25 minutes for 20 questions (1 minute, 15 seconds per question)	Not Applicable
Math With Calculator	55 minutes for 38 questions (1 minute, 26 seconds per question)	60 minutes for 60 questions (1 minute per question)
Science	Not Applicable	35 minutes for 40 questions (52.5 seconds per question)
Essay	50 minutes for 1 prompt	40 minutes for 1 prompt

2. The SAT has a scholarship. If a student can score within the top 1% of the test takers in the country, they qualify for the National Merit Scholarship. There are other requirements for this scholarship, other than SAT score. It would be wise to contact the College Board for more information on this.
3. SAT has a free online test course. This is offered through Khan Academy, a free online prep course that students can enroll in at any time. Many tutors, however, feel that the materials on this course are a little weak. You can learn more about Khan Academy at this link: <https://www.khanacademy.org/sat>.