

# About the ACT and SAT

## **ACT\*** (Paper Exam)

**\*The Current ACT (discussed in this handout) will be phased out in 2025. The first new, enhanced ACT will be offered in April 2025. In April, June and July 2025, students will have the option of taking the new, enhanced online ACT, or the current, paper ACT. July 2025 will be the last test date that students will be able to take the ACT discussed in this handout. As of September 2025, only the enhanced ACT will be offered. To learn more about the new ACT test format, please read *About the New 2025 ACT* handout found in KEY INFO on the HSDQ student homepage.**

The ACT is a four-sectioned multiple-choice test given over three hours. The test is divided into English, Math, Reading and Science sections, with the option of a fifth section, the Writing test. Each section, with the exception of the Writing test, is strictly multiple-choice and is scored out of a possible 36 points. The Writing score is a separate score and is not included in the overall composite score.

### **How is the Test Scored?**

Scores are calculated solely on the number of correct answers. Incorrect answers do not result in any additional point penalties, and unanswered questions are marked as incorrect. Therefore, students should always guess on questions they are unsure of. The raw scores are then translated to a 36 point scale. This converted score is used when calculating a student's composite score. The composite score is the average of the four section scores.

### **Do Students Have to Submit all ACT scores?**

Most colleges consider the ACT to be a "Score Choice" test. Students may take the test as many times as they choose, and report ONLY the test dates they choose. Colleges do not see any taken, but unreported, scores. Today, most colleges Superscore the ACT: students submit two or three exams and the colleges take the highest section scores from each, creating a final Superscore. ACT will generate a Superscore report if requested by the student.

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## What is the Format of the ACT Exam?

### **English: 45 minutes**

- 75 multiple-choice questions testing all areas of English grammar and writing

### **Math: 60 minutes**

- 60 multiple-choice questions testing the understanding of pre-algebra through pre-calculus
- The math on the ACT is very straightforward math. It goes in order of difficulty, and focuses on algebra, trigonometry, geometry, and exponents.

### **Reading: 35 minutes**

- 40 multiple-choice questions. Four 800-900 word reading passages
- Passage topics are Prose, Social Science, Humanities, and Natural Science

### **Science: 35 minutes**

- 40 multiple-choice questions that test the ability to read and interpret graphs and charts, understand experimental design and draw conclusions from data presented
- Minimal science knowledge is required for this section

### **Writing (optional): 40 minutes**

- Persuasive essay
- Tests reasoning, organization and mechanics of writing

## What is tested in the English Section?

The ACT English section assesses a student's understanding of writing, language, and grammar.

This section presents students with five passages, each with various sentences or portions of sentences underlined. Students have nine minutes to complete each passage.

The English questions can be grouped into "rhetoric" (style) questions and "mechanics" (grammar) questions. The rhetoric questions ask students to rearrange paragraphs, insert or delete various sentences, and choose the most logical transitions throughout the passage. Rhetoric questions focus on the cohesiveness and fluidity of the passage as a whole. Mechanics questions assess a student's understanding of sentence structure, including but not limited to punctuation, verb and pronoun agreement, tense, relative pronouns, and parallelism.

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## **What is Tested in the Math Section?**

The ACT Math section assesses a student's understanding of mathematics through the pre-calculus level.

The questions are arranged in order of increasing difficulty. Calculators are permitted on the test, but formulas are not provided. Timing is important in this section, because even though students are allotted one minute per question, they must be careful not to spend too long on the easier (first 30) questions, as the second half of the test is more difficult and often more time consuming.

## **What is Tested in the Reading Section?**

The ACT Reading section consists of four long passages with ten multiple-choice questions following each of the passages. These questions are detail oriented and very specific. This is an extremely fast-paced section: students have only approximately 8.5 minutes to read each passage/answer the 10 questions.

## **What is Tested in the Science Section?**

The ACT Science section assesses a student's ability to read and interpret scientific charts, graphs and data. The section usually contains six or seven passages, so students can only spend approximately five minutes per passage.

In most cases, six of the seven passages will be strictly chart/graph interpretation. The seventh passage (not necessarily the last passage in the section) is a reading comprehension passage that we like to call the "Fighting Scientists." In this passage, two opposing viewpoints, theories or hypotheses will be presented, and questions will ask students to compare and contrast the underlying ideas of each. Some assume that because this section is called "Science," extensive understanding of science is necessary. False! The science section DOES NOT require extensive outside scientific knowledge. Information necessary to answer the multiple-choice questions will be presented graphically or in tables, and students must simply find it. Many questions require students to extrapolate data or notice patterns within the charts (i.e. as temperature increases, metabolism increases).

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## SAT (Digital Exam)

The Digital SAT is composed of two sections: Reading/Writing and Math. Students have 64 minutes to complete the Reading/Writing section and 70 minutes to complete the Math section for a total of 2 hours and 14 minutes. Each section is divided into two equal length modules. The first module of each section (reading/writing and math) contains a mix of easy, medium, and hard questions. Based on how students perform on the first module, the second module of questions will either be easier or more difficult.

Compared to the ACT, the SAT provides 68% more time per question.

### How is the Test Scored?

Scores are calculated solely on the number of correct answers. Incorrect answers do not result in any additional point penalties, and unanswered questions are marked as incorrect. Therefore, students should always guess on questions they are unsure of. The raw scores are then translated into an 800-point scale. The two section scores are added together for a total maximum score of 1600.

### Do Students Have to Submit all SAT scores?

Most colleges consider the SAT as a “score-choice” test. Students may take the test as many times as they choose, and report ONLY the test dates they choose. Colleges do not see any taken, but unreported, scores. Today, most colleges Superscore the SAT: students submit two exams and the colleges take the highest section scores from each, creating a final Superscore.

### What is the Format of the SAT Exam?

Two Reading/Writing Modules – 39 minutes each, 66 questions total

Two Math Modules: 43 minutes each, 58 questions total

### What is tested in the Reading/Writing Section?

The Reading/Writing Modules test students on reading comprehension, rhetoric, and language use by having students engage with academic and literary texts. Skills on the Reading/Writing test are split into the following four categories:

*(From CollegeBoard Suite of Assessments)*

- **Information and Ideas:** Measures comprehension, analysis, and reasoning skills and knowledge and the ability to locate, interpret, evaluate and integrate information and ideas from various texts and infographics.
- **Craft and Structure:** Measures the comprehension, vocabulary, analysis,



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synthesis, and reasoning skills needed to understand and use high-utility words and phrases in context, evaluate texts rhetorically, and make connections between topically related texts.

- **Expression of Ideas:** Measures the ability to revise texts to improve the effectiveness of written expression and to meet specific rhetorical goals.
- **Standard English Conventions:** Measures the ability to edit text to conform to core conventions of Standard English sentence structure, usage, and punctuation.

## **What is tested in the Math Section?**

The math questions are divided into four categories that appear in each module. Questions are arranged from easiest to hardest.

- Algebra (13-15 questions)
- Advanced Math (13-15 questions)
- Problem-Solving and Data Analysis (5-7 questions)
- Geometry and Trigonometry (5-7 questions)

Most questions are multiple choice, but there are a few questions that require students to produce their own answer. Approximately 30% of the math questions are word problems. These in-context questions require students to consider a science, social studies, or real-world scenario and apply their math skills and knowledge, along with an understanding of the context, to determine the answer to each. *(From CollegeBoard Suite of Assessments)*

A graphing calculator is integrated into the digital test experience, and a formula chart is provided.