

## *Five Clear Differences Between the SAT and ACT*

First things first: you aren't likely to score differently on these two tests. In study after study, students who took the ACT and the SAT scored in extremely similar percentiles on both. And, since both tests are graded on a curve – your final score is basically just your percentile converted to another number – you aren't going to cheat the system by choosing one over the other.

What's more, at this point, virtually every college accepts both tests. The SAT is more prevalent at elite universities – but submitting the ACT won't hurt your chances of admission. (In fact, a number of states now require high school students to take the ACT.)

That said, here are some key differences between the ACT and the SAT to consider...

### **The SAT vs the ACT**

- **Aim.** The ACT tries to test *knowledge* of high school subjects – hence, the questions tend to be considered more straightforward. The SAT, by contrast, attempts to identify *reasoning skills*. Rather than just test general knowledge, the SAT tests problem-solving and comprehension. Therefore SAT questions are considered slightly more obtuse than ACT questions.
- **Sections.** The ACT has four sections: English, Math, Reading, and Science. The SAT has three sections: Writing, Critical Reading, and Math. The SAT has a greater emphasis on vocabulary, while the ACT focuses more on grammar.
- **Time.** The ACT is 2 hours 55 minutes, with 215 questions, all multiple choice. There is also a 30-minute optional essay. The SAT is 3 hours 45 minutes, with 170 questions. Some questions in the SAT math section require answers to be written in a grid as opposed to multiple choice, and there is a 25-minute mandatory essay.
- **Essay.** The ACT tends to give rather specific prompts for its optional essay (“What should X do about Y?”), while the SAT gives prompts that are more vague and more open (“Why do you think X acted this way?”).
- **Scoring.** The ACT is entirely multiple choice – save the optional essay – while the SAT has a mandatory written section, and the aforementioned math section that requires answers be written in. Also, the ACT has no penalty for wrong answers (reminder: answer every question – an entire point will be deducted if you leave an answer blank), while the SAT penalizes ¼ point for every wrong answer (reminder: only guess in questions where you can eliminate one of the four options).

As you can see, each test will appeal to slightly different students. It's worth looking into whether your desired colleges have a preference for the SAT, the ACT, or both. But remember, you can't go wrong with either.