



Know the Facts: SAT vs. ACT



The SAT, in a nutshell:

A test of mental endurance, with a greater emphasis on abstract reasoning and vocabulary. The SAT has its own language, and its often abstract questions may feel foreign to students used to high school exams. With the right preparation, however, students can learn SAT “tricks” and strategies that can significantly raise their scores. In addition, students who struggle with self-pacing might benefit from the shorter SAT sections.



The ACT, in a nutshell:

A test of speed and focus. The ACT is generally more straightforward than the SAT, and presents content in a more familiar format. The longer sections and tighter time intervals make time management key. With the right guidance, students can develop smart, durable testing habits that will lead to a higher score on test day. Students who struggle with abstract or tricky language might benefit from the ACT’s more direct style of questioning.

	SAT	ACT
Section Score	200-800	1-36
Total Score	600-2400	1-36
Timing	3h 45m	2h 55m (3h 25m with essay)
# of Sections	10 short	4 long
Math	tricky wording	tougher concepts
Grammar	required essay	optional essay
Reading	vocabulary	no vocabulary
Science	no science	science section
Guessing Penalty	-0.25 points per missed question	no penalty for missed questions





Applerouth's Path to a Higher Score



Find your baseline score

Before you invest energy in studying, the first step is to find the test that is best for you. Establish your **baseline scores** using practice SAT & ACT tests. You can also use your PSAT and PLAN scores as a good comparison point.



Set a specific, attainable goal

In test prep, specificity is key. "Do better!" is too vague a goal for **anyone** to accomplish easily, let alone a busy high schooler. Identify a score that will make you competitive at a particular college or for a particular scholarship. Put all of your test prep efforts in the context of attaining this goal.



Practice early, and practice often

Cram jobs are not very effective on college admissions tests. More than anything, tests like the SAT and ACT measure your ability to take tests like the SAT and ACT! This means you can significantly increase your scores by improving your test-taking habits. Like all habits, though, these take time to develop. An hour each day is far better than a marathon session on the weekend.



Take timed practice tests to chart your progress

Since your goal is better habits on the day of the test, you should recreate test day conditions as much as possible. This means **timed practice!** There is a secret behind almost every major score increase, and it lies in this study pattern:

- 1. Timed Practice:** Set a timer, and take a practice section.
- 2. Look for Patterns:** Identify 1 or 2 specific issues. For example:
 - "I missed a lot of comma questions!"
 - "I spent forever debating over those tough questions."
- 3. Target Issues:** Identify specific solutions and set small goals:
 - "Tonight, I practice punctuation questions until I miss only 1 or 2."
 - "If I'm stuck for 45 seconds, I'll circle my best guess and move on."



Reward yourself for each victory

Test prep doesn't have to be thrilling, but it should be empowering. The path to snagging a scholarship or getting into a dream school is dotted with small accomplishments. Recognize each one – you're that much closer to your goal!





Applerouth's Helpful SAT Tips



Preparing for SAT Critical Reading

- For the 19 sentence completions, **vocab is king!** Learn the most frequently tested SAT words and word roots. You can use logic to eliminate answer choices, but nothing trumps knowing the words.
- For the passages, **active reading is the key.** Get your hand moving: underline key ideas, star main points, and take notes in the margin.
- Many students see big gains by reading just the intro, skipping to the questions, and using line references to read only the relevant information. Experiment, and find what works best for you.

x^2

Preparing for SAT Math

- Consider **multiple problem solving approaches.** The more ways you can approach the first step of a problem, the more success you'll see on the SAT.
- Students often forget they were asked to find " $2x + 3$ " and circle the answer that's just " x ". Avoid this trap by **circling what you're solving for!**
- Tackle problems **one step at a time.** You don't have to see the whole path to the right answer – just the first step. Do what you can, step-by-step, and **lead yourself to the answer!**
- **Write down everything!** Without learning any new content, you can move faster and score higher by improving your written work.



Preparing for SAT Writing

- Correct grammar errors yourself; then **look for a match** in the choices. This will help you avoid all of the smart-sounding traps in the answer choices.
- Don't be lured into fancy or wordy choices. When it comes to grammar, **shorter is sweeter!** And be especially wary of choices that use the word "being" to sound smart. "Being" is almost always wrong on the SAT.
- **Be comfortable with choosing "No Error"** – it's correct about 20% of the time. In general, you can "hear" grammar errors before you can say precisely say what they are. Often, if a sentence "sounds" fine, it is.





Applerouth's Helpful ACT Tips



Preparing for ACT English 45 minutes / 75 questions

Time challenge: Light – focus on learning grammar rules.

- **Commas are pauses:** Rather than memorize a bunch of comma rules, simply read punctuation problems to yourself and **exaggerate a pause** when you see a comma. If it sounds wrong to pause there, the comma is likely wrong.
- **Cut the redundancy:** If two words mean the same thing, cut one.
- The right answer to every rhetorical skills question is the one that **stays on topic** and **transitions smoothly** between ideas.



Preparing for ACT Math 60 minutes / 60 questions

Time challenge: Moderate – spend 30s for #'s 1-20, 60s for 20-40, and 90s for 40-60.

- Begin your work by **copying any formulas** or equations in the problem. If it's a word problem, translate the words into math one line at a time.
- Tackle problems **one step at a time**. You don't have to see the whole path to the right answer – just the first step. Do what you can, step-by-step.
- **Write down everything!** Without learning any new content, you can move faster and score higher by improving your written work.



Preparing for ACT Reading 35 minutes / 40 questions

Time challenge: Moderate – use active reading to cut down on re-reading.

- **Active Reading:** Read with your pencil. Underline key ideas and write brief notes in the margin. When you move on to the questions, you'll remember the passages better and be able to locate the correct answers more quickly.
- **Eliminate wrong answers first:** It's easier and faster to use process of elimination than it is to debate which answer is the MOST correct. Every wrong answer has at least one word that does not match the passage. Hunt for those words and cross them out. The choice that's left is your right answer.



Preparing for ACT Science 35 minutes / 40 questions

Time challenge: High – skip to the questions, keep the pace, and practice a lot!

- **Skip the passage:** Let key words in the questions guide you to the right answer in the figures. Scan the passage only when you can't find a key word in the tables and graphs. Don't be intimidated: it's just a matching game.

