

ACT vs. SAT

"I have taken the current version of the ACT over 60 times and the present layout of the SAT ten times. The following are the differences between these two national college admissions exams." – Test Prep Specialist Jason Franklin

- 1.) The present layout of the ACT debuted in spring of 1990 and is a college performance test, helping universities identify students that have academic skills sufficient for the rigors of a college education. The current version of the SAT was re-designed by David Coleman, the architect of Common Core, debuted in March of 2016, so it could be used by school districts to monitor Common Core progress, which is why Illinois administers a State SAT to public school juniors.
- 2.) The ACT is a time sensitive test. The SAT gives students plenty of time to complete each portion.
- 3.) The ACT reading test is a "read-recall" test; most of the answers are literally in the reading. The SAT reading test requires students to think at a much higher level as answers are not as obvious. The ACT reading test is 35 minutes and the SAT reading test is 65 minutes.
- 4.) The ACT math test is more challenging. The ACT is heavy on geometry, students can use a calculator the entire time, and every question is multiple choice. The SAT is basic algebra heavy, divided into calculator and no calculator sections, and 13 of the 58 questions are NOT multiple choice – a student must produce their own answer.
- 5.) The ACT has a science test. The SAT does not.
- 6.) The ACT has 215 questions and uses a 36-point scale. The SAT has 154 questions and uses a 1600-point scale. The ACT has a more forgiving scoring system.
- 7.) Students considering STEM fields – science, technology, engineering, and math – should focus on the ACT since the ACT has a science test and harder math exam.
- 8.) Colleges accept both for admissions, but the ACT is used more for scholarship distribution since more money goes to students pursuing STEM majors.
- 9.) Preparing for the ACT also prepares a student for the SAT, but not vice versa, since the ACT is time-sensitive, has a science test, and the more challenging math test.
- 10.) The ACT has four subject scores, the SAT has two. The more subject scores the better when it comes to super scoring which rewards students who take the test multiple times.
- 11.) The ACT is the most popular college admissions test – nationally, internationally, and even in Illinois – among students who plan on attending a four-year college or university immediately after high school.
- 12.) The College Board announced in January 2022 that the current version of the SAT will be terminated at the end of 2023 and will no longer be a standardized test. Most likely colleges will not use it once it is not standardized.

I currently have three daughters in college. All three took the ACT and SAT, but only prepped for the ACT because of the reasons above. When we started negotiating with schools over scholarships, every school encouraged them to re-take the ACT to get a few more points to earn more scholarship money. Not one school told my daughters to re-take the SAT.