



Strategies for the SAT & ACT

College & Career **Pathways** 2026

How colleges evaluate your scores

- The best single time out
- or
- Super-score method (the best mix on each section)



Suggested testing timeline

- ACT or SAT in early spring.
- Assess scores over the summer.
- Retake SAT/ACT, if necessary, late spring or fall.



Digital Testing in 2025/2026

- SAT is fully digital (since March 2024). ACT offers both digital and paper formats.
- SAT uses computer adaptive testing – the ACT remains linear (same questions for everyone).
- SAT: ~2 hours 14 min. ACT: ~2 hours 5 min (core). Both much shorter than before!
- *ACT Science section is now optional; Writing also optional for both tests.*



Guessing strategy

Guess!

ACT: No penalty for guessing on either test! Answer every question. ACT Math now has 4 answer choices (down from 5).

With fewer questions on the Enhanced ACT, each question counts more. Take your time and be accurate.

SAT: Adaptive testing means your Module 2 difficulty depends on Module 1 performance. Answer every question.

ACT percentile score chart

Score	ENGLISH	MATHEMATICS	READING	SCIENCE	COMPOSITE	STEM	Score
36	100	100	100	100	100	100	36
35	99	99	99	99	99	99	35
34	97	99	97	99	99	99	34
33	95	98	95	97	98	98	33
32	93	97	93	96	97	97	32
31	92	96	90	95	95	96	31
30	91	95	88	94	93	94	30
29	88	93	85	92	91	93	29
28	87	91	83	91	89	91	28
27	85	88	80	88	86	88	27
26	82	83	77	86	82	84	26
25	79	79	74	82	78	80	25
24	75	74	71	77	74	75	24
23	70	68	66	70	69	69	23
22	64	64	60	64	63	64	22
21	59	60	54	56	58	58	21
20	53	56	48	49	51	52	20
19	47	52	43	42	45	45	19
18	43	47	37	36	39	38	18
17	39	40	31	29	32	30	17
16	35	30	27	23	26	23	16
15	29	18	22	17	20	15	15
14	23	9	17	13	14	9	14
13	18	3	12	9	8	4	13
12	14	1	8	6	4	2	12
11	10	1	4	4	1	1	11
10	6	1	2	2	1	1	10
9	3	1	1	1	1	1	9
8	2	1	1	1	1	1	8
7	1	1	1	1	1	1	7
6	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
5	1	1	1	1	1	1	5
4	1	1	1	1	1	1	4
3	1	1	1	1	1	1	3
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Mean 20.2 20.6 21.3 20.8 20.9 20.9

S.D. 6.9 5.5 6.6 5.6 5.7 5.3

SAT percentiles for total scores

Total Score	Nationally Representative Sample	SAT User	Total Score	Nationally Representative Sample	SAT User	Total Score	Nationally Representative Sample	SAT User
1600	99+	99+	1170	77	71	740	7	4
1590	99+	99+	1160	76	69	730	6	4
1580	99+	99+	1150	74	68	720	5	3
1570	99+	99+	1140	73	66	710	4	3
1560	99+	99+	1130	71	64	700	4	2
1550	99+	99+	1120	70	63	690	3	2
1540	99+	99+	1110	69	61	680	2	1
1530	99+	99+	1100	67	59	670	2	1
1520	99+	99	1090	65	57	660	1	1
1510	99	99	1080	63	55	650	1	1
1500	99	99	1070	61	53	640	1	1
1490	99	99	1060	60	51	630	1	1-
1480	99	99	1050	58	49	620	1-	1-
1470	99	98	1040	56	47	610	1-	1-
1460	99	98	1030	54	45	600	1-	1-
1450	99	98	1020	52	43	590	1-	1-
1440	98	97	1010	50	41	580	1-	1-
1430	98	97	1000	48	40	570	1-	1-
1420	98	96	990	46	38	560	1-	1-
1410	97	96	980	44	36	550	1-	1-
1400	97	95	970	42	34	540	1-	1-
1390	97	95	960	40	32	530	1-	1-
1380	96	94	950	38	31	520	1-	1-
1370	96	94	940	36	29	510	1-	1-
1360	95	93	930	35	27	500	1-	1-
1350	94	92	920	33	26	490	1-	1-
1340	94	91	910	31	24	480	1-	1-
1330	93	90	900	29	22	470	1-	1-
1320	93	90	890	27	21	460	1-	1-
1310	92	89	880	26	19	450	1-	1-
1300	91	88	870	24	18	440	1-	1-
1290	90	87	860	23	17	430	1-	1-
1280	89	86	850	21	15	420	1-	1-
1270	88	85	840	20	14	410	1-	1-
1260	87	83	830	18	13	400	1-	1-
1250	86	82	820	17	12			
1240	85	81	810	16	11			
1230	84	80	800	14	9			
1220	83	78	790	13	8			
1210	82	77	780	11	8			
1200	81	76	770	10	7			
1190	80	74	760	9	6			
1180	78	73	750	8	5			

SAT percentiles for section scores

Total Score	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing		Math	
	Nationally Representative Sample	SAT User	Nationally Representative Sample	SAT User
800	99+	99+	99+	99+
790	99+	99+	99+	99
780	99+	99+	99	99
770	99+	99+	99	99
760	99+	99	99	98
750	99	99	98	97
740	99	98	98	97
730	99	98	97	96
720	98	97	97	95
710	97	96	96	94
700	97	95	95	94
690	96	94	94	92
680	95	92	93	91
670	93	91	92	89
660	92	89	91	88
650	90	87	90	86
640	88	85	89	84
630	86	82	87	82
620	84	79	85	81
610	81	77	83	78
600	79	73	81	76
590	76	70	79	73
580	74	67	76	70
570	71	64	73	67
560	68	60	71	65
550	65	57	68	61
540	62	53	65	58
530	58	49	61	54
520	55	46	57	49
510	51	42	52	45
500	48	39	47	40
490	44	35	44	37
480	41	32	40	34
470	38	28	36	32
460	34	25	32	29
450	31	22	29	25
440	28	19	25	22
430	24	16	23	20
420	22	14	20	17

Total Score	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing		Math	
	Nationally Representative Sample	SAT User	Nationally Representative Sample	SAT User
410	19	12	17	14
400	16	10	15	12
390	13	8	13	10
380	11	6	10	8
370	9	5	9	7
360	7	4	7	5
350	5	3	5	4
340	3	2	4	3
330	2	1	3	2
320	2	1	2	1
310	1	1	1	1
300	1	1	1	1
290	1-	1-	1-	1-
280	1-	1-	1-	1-
270	1-	1-	1-	1-
260	1-	1-	1-	1-
250	1-	1-	1-	1-
240	1-	1-	1-	1-
230	1-	1-	1-	1-
220	1-	1-	1-	1-
210	1-	1-	1-	1-
200	1-	1-	1-	1-

Practice tests

- Understand directions to save time.
- Both test-makers make actual former tests available.
- Most students experience a moderate improvement from 2-3 whole practice tests.



Math

- Up through trigonometry for both tests.
- Remainders, odds & evens, exponent rules, prime numbers, roots, one-variable algebra, two-variable algebra, functions, quadratic styles, geometry (SAT provides formulas; memorize for ACT), mean/mode/median, combinations, and permutations.
- SAT includes “student-produced response” math questions (~25%). Both tests have a built-in Desmos calculator.

Critical reading

- Prose fiction
Characters!
- Social science
Arguments!
- Humanities
Inspiration!
- Natural science
Why we were wrong!



Passages

- Read passage **first**.
- Write brief notes:
 - 1) Highlight main ideas/topics in each paragraph.
 - 2) Underline key words.
 - 3) Indicate conflict.
- Answer question before looking at answer choices.
- SAT: Short single-paragraph passages with one question each. ACT: Still uses longer multi-paragraph passages.

Multiple choice writing

- Most correct.
- Most relevant.
- Most concise.

TIP: Pick the **shortest** grammatically correct answer.

The Digital SAT combines Reading and Writing into one section with short passages and single questions.



Grammar to know

- Subject-verb agreement
- Pronouns & prepositions
- Punctuation
- Usage (Further or farther?
Much or many?)



ACT Writing (optional)

- Addresses three viewpoints of an argument.
- Focus on clear, organized support for a position, not “clever” writing.
- “Do you know how to put together an essay on the spot?” not “How much do you already know about a topic?”
- Strongly rewards a rebuttal paragraph (second-to-last paragraph).
- Grammar a concern only if systematic or repeated (both ACT/SAT).
- Read once by 2 different readers in 2 minutes.
- Length: at least 2 pages.

Science (ACT only – now optional)

- ACT Science is now optional (as of 2025). Science scores are reported separately and do NOT count toward your ACT Composite. However, some colleges may still require it, especially for STEM programs. Check college requirements!

TIP: If you plan to take ACT Science, prepare for 40 questions in 40 minutes. Focus on interpreting data, charts, and experimental design.



Preparation & resources

- College Board Bluebook App (free digital practice tests)
- ACT Official Prep Guide (updated for Enhanced ACT)
- Khan Academy
- act.org free practice test (Enhanced ACT format)
- freerice.org
- wikipedia.org/wiki/list_of_Greek_and_Latin_roots_in_English
- **BE CAREFUL OF AI GENERATED MATERIALS – STILL A WORK IN PROGRESS!**