

SAT / ACT Prep Online Guides and Tips

New SAT vs ACT: Comparison Charts

Posted by [Alex Heimbach](#) | Aug 3, 2015 8:00:00 AM
[SAT VERSUS ACT](#), [NEW SAT](#)

The SAT and the ACT are both recently underwent updates: the ACT got a new writing test and some minor content tweaks, while the SAT was fully redesigned.

General Test Structure

As you'll see in the chart below, **the redesigned SAT is radically streamlined**—there are now only four sections and the scoring has returned to the original 400-1600 (instead of the 600-2400 scale used from 2005-2015). The wrong answer penalty has also been eliminated.

The ACT format, meanwhile, is essentially the same. The essay is slightly longer, however.

	New SAT	ACT
Total Time	3 hrs (plus 50 min for essay)	2 hrs 55 min (plus 40 min for essay)
Number of sections	4 plus essay	4 plus essay
Sections	Reading: 65 min	English: 45 min
	Writing and Language: 35 min	Math: 60 min
	Math (No calculator): 25 min	Reading: 35 min
	Math (with calculator): 55 min	Science: 35 min

	Optional essay: 50 min	Optional essay: 40 min
Scoring	Two section scores, Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (includes Reading and Writing and Language) and Math, on a 200-800 scale combined for a total score from 400-1600	Four section scores scaled from 1-36 averaged for a composite from 1-36
Wrong answer penalty?	No	No

Reading

Since the new SAT includes only long passages and the ACT recently added paired passages, **the two tests' reading sections have become much more similar.**

Nonetheless, there are still some **major differences in the types of questions** they ask: [the evidence questions on the redesigned SAT](#) are especially different from ACT reading questions.

	New SAT	ACT
Time	65 min	35 min
Format	4 single passages and 1 pair, 10-11 questions each	4 passages, potentially including 1 paired passage, 10 questions each
# of questions	5 passages, 52 questions	4 passages, 40 questions
Time per passage/question	13 min/75 sec	8 min, 45 sec/53 sec
Passage types	1 U.S. or World Literature, 2 History or Social Studies, 2 Science	1 Prose Fiction or Literary Narrative, 1 Social Sciences, 1 Humanities, 1 Natural Sciences

Question types	Main Idea, Vocab-in-Context, Inference, Evidence Support, Data Reasoning, Technique, Detail-Oriented	Main Idea, Vocab-in-Context, Inference, Detail-Oriented
Key skills	Reading comprehension, inferring ideas, identifying evidence	Reading comprehension, inferring ideas, locating details

SAT Writing and Language/ACT English

SAT Writing and Language (formerly SAT writing) is the other SAT section that the redesign made **markedly more similar to its ACT equivalent**. The College Board ditched Identifying Sentence Errors and the rest of its unique question styles for an [ACT-style passage structure](#).

However, the new SAT writing section **still doesn't include [the big-picture organization](#) and [main idea questions](#)** that the ACT English section does.

	New SAT	ACT
Time	35 min	45 min
Format	4 passages, 11 questions each	5 passages, 15 questions each
Total # of questions	44 questions	75 questions
Time per passage/question	8 min, 45 sec/48 sec	9 min/36 sec
Content	Standard English Conventions: 20 questions (45%), covering sentence structure, conventions of usage, and conventions of punctuation	Usage and Mechanics: sentence structure (20-25%), grammar and usage (15-20%), and punctuation (10-15%)

	Expression of Ideas: 24 questions (55%), covering development, organization and effective language use	Rhetorical Skills: style (15-20%), strategy (15-20%), and organization (10-15%)
Key Skills	Understanding grammar rules, expressing ideas clearly, connecting sentences logically	Understanding grammar rules, connecting sentences logically, recognizing overall structure and argument

Math

The **redesigned SAT math section focuses on a limited set of topics**, primarily algebra. The diminished presence of geometry sets the new SAT math section apart from the one on the ACT, which is still roughly a third geometry and trigonometry questions.

Redesigned SAT math also includes [a no-calculator section](#), a significant number of data analysis problems, and simpler wording for questions.

	New SAT	ACT
Time	80 min	60 min
Format	Divided in to two sections No calculator: 20 questions (4 grid-ins), 25 min With calculator: 38 questions (9 grid-ins), 55 min	1 section, all questions multiple choice
Total # of questions	58 questions	60 questions
Time per question	No calculator: 75 sec	1 min

With calculator: 87 sec

Content	Heart of Algebra — 33%	Pre-algebra — 20-25%
	Problem Solving and Data Analysis — 28%	Elementary algebra — 15-20%
	Passport to Advanced Math — 29%	Intermediate algebra — 15-20%
	Additional Topics in Math — 10%	Coordinate geometry — 15-20%
		Plane geometry — 20-25%
	Trigonometry — 5-10%	
Key Skills	Doing simple calculations without a calculator, translating word problems, analyzing data	Memorizing formulas, translating word problems, working quickly without making errors

Science

The redesigned SAT still **doesn't have a separate science section**, but it does include science questions in all three of the other sections.

Those questions are primarily focused on reading charts and graphs, while ACT science tests a wider range of skills.

	New SAT	ACT
Time	N/A	35 min
Format	No specific section, 2 passages in reading (21 questions), 1 passage in Writing (6 questions), and 8 questions in Math	~7 passages, with 5-7 questions each
Total # of questions	35 questions	40 questions

Time per passage/question	Varies by section	5 min/53 sec
Content	Varies by section	Data Representation — 30-40% Research Summaries — 45-55% Conflicting Viewpoints — 15-20%
Key Skills	Understanding scientific ideas, reading charts and graphs	Doing simple calculations without a calculator, reading charts and graphs, analyzing experimental design

SAT Essay/ACT Writing

The [ACT writing section](#) (the essay) is the one part of the test that's **undergone major changes**. You're still presented with an issue and asked for your opinion on it, but you're also given three perspectives on the topics and asked to analyze them.

The **new SAT essay**, on the other hand, is **more similar to the type of papers you write in English class**: the prompt asks you to read and analyze a persuasive essay.

	New SAT	ACT
Time	50 min	40 min
Optional?	Yes	Yes
Format	Presented with an essay or article and asked to analyze the author's argument	Presented with 3 viewpoints on a topic and asked to analyze those ideas as well as argue for your own perspective

**Grading
Criteria**

Writing, Reading, and Analysis

Ideas and Analysis, Development
and Support, Organization, and
Language Use and Conventions

Scoring

Given a score from 2-8 for each
dimension

Score from 1-12, based on average
of scores from the four domains