

# **Everything you always wanted to know about the SAT/ACT but were afraid to ask!**

The following are some of the FAQ about the SAT/ACT

## ***When and How do students register for Standardized Tests?***

Students register online through the College Board ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)) or ACT ([actstudent.org](http://actstudent.org)) websites.

## ***When should students take a test?***

When should students take, or retake, a test varies, depending on the students' goals, results, and individual colleges' admission requirements. Generally speaking, however, it is best for students to take their first test no later than the spring of their junior year to allow enough time to retake a test if necessary in June and/or October. Ideally, students will have completed three years of English, three years of science, Algebra, Geometry and Algebra 2 by the end of their junior year. Students who have not completed these courses may not be fully prepared or be as successful on either the ACT or SAT as students who have completed such coursework.

## ***Should a student take the SAT or the ACT? What are the differences between these two tests?***

All Colleges and Universities accept both the SAT and the ACT and consider them equally valid. Roughly one-third of students score higher on the SAT than on the ACT, one-third score higher on the ACT and one-third performs about the same on both. So generally speaking, it is a good strategy for students to take both tests if possible. As for the differences between the ACT and the SAT (and the redesigned SAT), this [SAT vs. ACT](#) article contains a clear and easy to understand comparison chart.

## ***What about fee waivers?***

Students who can demonstrate a financial need may request fee waivers from their counselors. To demonstrate financial need students should have already applied and qualified for free/reduced lunch. The College Board will not accept waivers for late or standby SAT registration, only for regular registration. Fee waivers for the ACT or SAT are available in the counseling office.

## ***How do colleges decide which scores to use?***

Admission practices vary significantly regarding test scores, so students should always check with the admission office of the specific college to find out how they handle multiple test results. Some universities will use the highest composite score; other schools will use the student's highest score from any test administration. The College Board now offers students the option of choosing which scores and from which administration they want to submit to colleges. You can find more information at <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-score-choice>

## ***Do all colleges and Universities require standardized tests for admissions?***

While most colleges and universities do require either the SAT or ACT, recent trends have made it optional to submit test scores in some schools. An organization called Fair Test maintains a data base of these test-optional colleges and universities on its website ([www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)), along with information about the debate over standardize testing. Many art schools, most two-year colleges and technical and business schools do not require standardized testing.

***What about nonstandard administration?***

If a student has a documented learning disability or physical handicap that would make it difficult to complete a test under standard administration, the parent and student should initiate the application for non-standard administration through the College Board Services for Students with Disabilities (SDD) for the SAT, <https://www.collegeboard.org/students-with-disabilities>, or through the ACT Services for Examinees with Disabilities at <http://www.actstudent.org/regist/disab/> and contact the school to request the necessary documentation.

To qualify for a nonstandard administration a student must have a 504 Plan or an IEP on file that supports the requested accommodations. The application for nonstandard administration is lengthy (about 6 weeks) and it's up to the College Board to approve or deny these requests, so parents and students should plan early.

***What about SAT Subject Tests? Should all students take a Subject Test?***

Not all students will need to take SAT Subject Tests; students should check with the colleges in which they are interested to see if the tests are required or recommended (and if so, which ones). Students who plan to take Subjects tests should plan on doing so after the completion of their highest level of high school preparation in that subject, regardless of their grade level.

***What is the best form of test preparation?***

Students can prepare on their own, often using free or inexpensive materials such as SAT or ACT Prep Guides from the College Board, Kaplan or the Princeton Review, and free computer programs such as [Khan Academy](#) (which is now partnering with the College Board) and [number2.com](#). Practicing standardized tests online affords students the opportunity to enhance test-taking skills, and take sample tests. Students should definitely visit the College Board and ACT websites for practice activities, questions, and vocabulary building. Even though a preparatory course is not essential to score well on standardize tests, it may prove helpful for some students. A good prep course will help students decrease test anxiety, familiarize students with test directions, and teach them strategies and analytical tools to help them earn higher scores in the math, essay essential writing, and reading comprehension and grammar sections. With that understanding, pricey test courses or private coaching sessions are not required. SAT Prep has been offering very affordable prep courses in our district for many years (<http://satprep.org/>)

Recommended reading: “[Test Preppers, Take Note: Free SAT Study Tools Could Signal Sea Change](#)”.