



Fast Facts @ Handbook 2020



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Table of Contents

Topic	Page
Feedback Form	2
1. Test Preparation Options	3
2. Time Line for Standardized Test Preparation	4
3. Types of College Admissions Applications	5
4. Application Documents	6
5. Other Application Requirements	7
6. Admissions Policies	8
7. Financial Aid Basics	9
8. ACT Test Dates	12
9. SAT Test Dates	13
10. SAT/ACT Accommodations for Students with Disabilities	14
11. Which Test Should a Student Take?	15
12. Comparison Chart: SAT vs. ACT	16
13. Schools That Do Not Require the SAT or ACT	18
14. Helpful Websites/Books	21
15. SAT and ACT Scores at Various Colleges and Universities	22

Feedback Form

We would appreciate your comments about this Fast Facts Handbook, including any additional information you would find useful.

1. Which colleges would you like to have added to the SAT/ACT Scores list?

2. Is there any additional information you would like added to this handbook? Some possibilities include:

- Listing of college application fees_____
- College application dates_____
- College application requirements_____
- Listing/Overview of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (state university system)_____
- More college data, i.e., size, tuition, special scholarship programs_____
- Unusual college admission programs, i.e., state colleges that offer in-state tuition to talented out-of-state students_____
- Other information (please list)_____

3. Do you want pages that are set up to be copied and handed out to students? _____

4. Other Comments:

Please copy this page and fax your feedback to A+ at 215.886.0155.

Thank you for your assistance.

1. Test Preparation Options

Whether they intend to or not, students do prepare for the SAT or ACT. Almost all students take the PSAT at least once before attempting the SAT. Some students do nothing else to prepare. Both the SAT and ACT make extensive materials available at no cost; however, some students go into the test without even reading the basics.

All students should prepare in some way. At the very least, they should become familiar with the basic structure of each test and how it is scored; in addition, they should practice some sample questions. This may be accomplished in as little as an hour. For some students, this may be sufficient preparation. Most students, however, need to dedicate substantial time to the preparation process, and there are many options available. No matter what type of preparation a student chooses, parents and students alike need to remember that an unmotivated student will not learn.

Individual Tutoring

One-to-one instruction is the most expensive form of preparation. However, for many students, it is also the most effective way to increase test scores. One-to-one instruction provides the customization, structure and individual accountability required for them to apply themselves to the task. Because the ratio is one-to-one, instruction can be tailored to fit the individual student's needs and modified as necessary throughout the course of the program. This form of preparation also facilitates communication between the instructor, student and parents.

Finally, individual tutoring is often more efficient than group preparation. Many students find that with one-to-one instruction, compared to group preparation, they can achieve the score improvement they seek in about half the instructional time. As with group courses, references are recommended.

Group Preparation

Group preparation is available in many forms and varies widely in cost. Some schools offer on-site classes given by test-prep companies, including A+ Test Prep, during or after school. School classes can be a problem for some students as they may find it difficult to pay attention or ask questions when surrounded by friends. If students can pay attention and complete the work, group classes like these may be of great benefit. Other group courses are offered by community groups, individuals and test-prep companies. It is important to compare the number of classes, total number of class hours, size of classes and materials when evaluating the cost and possible outcome of a course. Asking for references is also recommended.

Self-Directed Preparation

A student should go to a bookstore to purchase a test-prep book. The cost of this test prep is the cost of the book, usually around \$20. However, to get any benefit, the student must *use* the book – read the chapters, take the pre-test, do the practice exercises and follow up with a post-test. Most people, not just teenagers, are not very good at this level of self-tutoring. Parental involvement, if possible, is important. Note: students must be sure to use the most up-to-date book available.

Another method of self-preparation is to use free test-prep websites. Some sites provide extensive preparation, including vocabulary-building exercises and tests, and they keep a record of the student's progress. Some even send e-mail reminders to keep the student on track. In addition to these free sites, many of the pay-for-services sites have no-cost trial sections or practice questions. The College Board and ACT websites offer practice questions with very good answer explanations.

When to Prepare

Most juniors take the PSAT in October and receive their results in December. Many juniors take the SAT or ACT for the first time in January or February, respectively. Preparation for these tests should begin in October or November. A senior who plans to take a test in September (ACT), October (ACT/SAT) or November (SAT) should begin preparation during the summer. Preparation for the SAT Subject Tests should coordinate with the proposed test dates. Two important reminders: 1. The SAT and SAT Subject Tests cannot be taken on the same day; 2. All SAT Subject Tests are not available on all test dates and at all locations.

2. Time Line for Standardized Test Preparation

Ninth Grade

- Do **not** begin formal preparation for standardized tests. Work on vocabulary development. Read as much as possible. Reading should include both class reading and personal reading. Reading is a skill that improves with practice.

Tenth Grade

- If the PSAT is given to sophomores, review score reports and work on improving weak areas. Continue reading for pleasure and developing vocabulary.
- If 10th grade PSAT scores indicate possible qualification for the National Merit Scholarship Program (www.nationalmerit.org), PSAT preparation should be considered. That preparation should begin during the summer before 11th grade to allow completion prior to the mid-October test administration.

Eleventh Grade

- Take the PSAT in October. Students should be encouraged to treat the junior year PSAT as a diagnostic exam for the SAT (which it is) and to take it seriously. When score reports come back, strong and weak points can be assessed.
- Begin formal or self-directed test preparation after receiving PSAT scores. Preparation is most effective if taken in manageable lessons over time rather than cramming shortly before taking the test.
- Juniors should take the ACT or SAT for the first time in the spring. Keep in mind that it is not possible to take the SAT and SAT Subject Tests on the same day. Also, students who are enrolled in AP classes may want to avoid the May SAT because it may be given in the same week as the AP exams.

Summer Between Eleventh and Twelfth Grades

- Summer is a great time to do standardized test preparation. Formal lessons can begin in July or early August to prepare for the fall testing season.

Twelfth Grade

- Retake the SAT or ACT in September or October if necessary. Take SAT Subject Tests. Students may want to take the ACT or SAT one last time in November or December. (December scores may arrive too late for some application deadlines – check with individual colleges and universities.)

- Make note of all deadlines. Do not assume one school's dates will be the same as another's. Score reports take time to be received by schools. If a school's application deadline is February 1 and the SAT is January 25, the school will not receive scores on time. An earlier test should be taken.
- If they haven't already been sent, have SAT or ACT test scores sent to schools. Schools need scores directly from the testing agencies, not copies of student reports or scores on high school transcripts. This takes time; allow 3 to 5 weeks for receipt of scores.

General Comment

- Pay attention to test registration deadlines. Late fees are costly, and testing centers do fill up.

3. Types of College Admissions Applications

There are a number of ways in which schools manage their admissions application process. Each admissions scenario can result in acceptance, rejection, deferral, or placement onto a waiting list.

Early Decision

An Early Decision application made to one school by a school-specified deadline, often November 1. Applicant agrees to attend the school if accepted. This is a binding application. Regular applications may be made to other schools. Applicants are notified of their status by mid-December, allowing time for applications to be made to other schools if they are rejected or deferred. IF accepted, applicants are required to withdraw applications made to other schools. Applicants who are deferred will be considered in the regular application pool and still have a good chance of being accepted. Students who are deferred or rejected are freed from the Early Decision contract and may apply to other schools. Students are free to apply elsewhere if the school cannot meet the student's financial needs. Applicants should pay close attention to a school's early decision policies; some schools only accept or reject--no deferrals. Some highly competitive schools, including Harvard and Princeton, no longer have Early Decision programs.

Early Action

Multiple Choice Early Action

Application due by a school-specified date; schools send decisions by a school-specific date. Both dates are prior to the school's regular deadlines. Students may apply to more than one Early Action school. Acceptance is non-binding and may be sent out later than Early Decision acceptances. Applicant is free to make regular applications to other schools.

Single Choice Early Action

Like the Multiple Choice applicants, students apply early but may only apply to one Early Action institution and to no Early Decision institutions. Acceptance is non-binding and may be sent out later than Early Decision acceptances. Applicant is free to make regular applications to other schools. Note: This is becoming the favored early application system for highly competitive schools, including Yale and Stanford.

Rolling Admissions

Applications are sent in at any time. Schools evaluate complete application packages and respond quickly, sometimes in two to three weeks. Student has until spring to accept or reject decisions. In general, applications to schools with rolling admissions should be made as early as possible.

Regular Admissions

All applications are due by a specified date, usually sometime between January 1 and February 15. Decision letters are sent out to all applicants on the same date, usually April 1. Students have until a third date to accept or reject the school's offer. Students who are wait-listed may be accepted after this third date, as space becomes available.

Early Admissions

Student enters college before completing high school, usually after the junior year. Not all schools offer Early Admission. Each school has its own procedures and requirements.

Candidates Reply Date Agreement (CRDA)

CRDA is used by many colleges and universities. It specifies May 1 as the date that accepted students let a school know of their intentions to attend. Not all schools use this date, however. The acceptance letter will specify the date.

4. Application Documents

Common Application/Universal Application/School Application

The Common Application is a standardized application that is currently accepted by 346 schools. Most of these schools also offer a school-specific application. When a school elects to accept the common application, it states that it will not give preference to one application type over the other. There are now 125 schools that use only the common application. All schools that use the Common Application require at least one essay. Please note that many schools that take the Common Application also have a school-specific supplement. In addition to the Common Application and school-specific applications, there is also the Universal College Application, which is currently accepted by 82 schools.

The Common Application is available on-line (www.commonapplication.org) and may be submitted to schools electronically or downloaded and mailed. The student is responsible for checking each school's additional requirements and for submitting the application and the required supporting materials, as well as the appropriate fee, to each school. Like the Common Application, the Universal Application is available on-line (www.universalcollegeapp.com). Rules and procedures are similar to those of the Common Application. Some schools accept both applications. It may save time and money to apply using the Common or Universal Application.

School-specific applications are available on-line for many colleges and universities. Some schools prefer students to submit applications electronically, and may reduce or eliminate application fees for electronically submitted application. For example, Bryn Mawr College (\$50) and Drexel University (\$75) waive fees for on-line applications. Counselor forms and letter of recommendation forms are also available on-line for some schools and on the Common Application site. These may be submitted electronically. The applicant can track these submissions on-line as well.

Transcripts and Test Scores

Students should submit their requests for transcripts to their high schools as soon as possible. Most seniors are applying to colleges at the same time, so a backlog can develop in the school office. Students should allow time for their high schools to process transcript orders. Transcripts will need to be sent two or three times for some students, as colleges and universities usually want updated records at a semester or year's end.

The student may report test scores on his application, but it is necessary to ask the testing service to send official copies to each school. Applications are not complete without them. The ACT and the SAT have definite, published time requirements for sending scores. It is possible to have scores sent more quickly, but this is quite expensive. In addition, some schools do not accept rush scores.

Letters of Recommendation

Many colleges and universities require letters of recommendation. The number varies by school, but most require a minimum of two, one from the school's guidance counselor and one from a teacher. Guidance counselors write recommendations for many students and should be given adequate lead-time to get letters completed. Teachers also receive a large number of requests and should be given several weeks to prepare a letter. A polite reminder is sometimes necessary.

Students should try to select teachers who know them well as students. Students should ask for letters in a way that allows teachers to gracefully refuse. Teachers who do not want to write letters of recommendation usually do not feel that they can write favorable letters, and therefore students should not insist.

It may be helpful for students to provide a resume or list of extra-curricular activities to those writing their recommendation letters. This provides the letter writer with a better sense of the total student. If a college or university supplies a form for recommendations, the form should be given to the teacher. If there is no required format, the teacher should be informed of that also. Students should supply addressed envelopes and postage. Some schools accept electronic letters.

Application Essays

Competitive schools require application essays from applicants. Most schools also provide suggested or required topics. As on the SAT and ACT, writing off-topic is simply bad form. If multiple topics are given, students can practice on more than one essay and submit the strongest. If a school asks for one essay, students should send one essay and no more. The common application can be a time-saver because a student may need to write only one essay.

5. Other Application Requirements

Interviews

Many schools suggest interviews for applicants who live within a reasonable distance. Some schools require interviews for all applicants. Others only request interviews with particular students. Most colleges are reasonable; if an interview at the school is a hardship, most will forego the interview or arrange an interview closer to the student's home. Often schools ask local alumni to interview applicants.

Arts Majors' Requirements

Students who plan to enter the fine arts, music or performance arts usually are required to submit portfolios, tapes, videos or auditions.

Application Fees

Application fees range from no fee at all to \$75 or so, with many in the \$35-\$45 range. Some schools offer fee waivers to students in whom they are interested. All schools have fee exemption policies for needy applicants, but students should not assume that they will qualify for a fee waiver at all schools. Fee waiver applications are generally sent to the schools by the high school counselor on behalf of a student rather than by the student. A student's application is not considered complete until the fee is received or fee waiver is granted.

6. Admissions Policies

Admissions Indexes

Some schools use admissions formulas or indexes for admission. Most are a balance of GPA or class rank and SAT/ACT scores. These are plugged into the formula, and this produces an index number. The schools have established index numbers at which students will be admitted, deferred or rejected. Scholarships are also awarded using this system. The most openly publicized indexes are used by some state university systems. If the formulas have been made public, applicants may pre-assess themselves.

Students who do not meet the automatic acceptance number should not be discouraged from applying. Even schools that use admissions indexes consider other factors in evaluating applicants who do not make the automatic admission cut, including letters of recommendation, difficulty of high school courses, extracurricular activities, interviews, and essays.

Many schools do not use strict admissions formulas, because in addition to wanting academically talented student bodies, they want diverse student bodies. For example, the University of Pennsylvania may not accept all valedictorians from Montgomery County. They may select one or two of those applicants and reject the others in order to accept valedictorian applicants from Nebraska and Georgia, thereby creating geographic diversity.

Recently, admissions indexes have been in the news as they were applied to affirmative action. Some schools awarded applicants extra points for their race, school districts or disabilities. This procedure has been challenged in courts, sometimes successfully, and most of these index factors have been changed or eliminated. Many colleges and universities have developed other means to ensure equal opportunity.

Some schools use a form of indexing for awarding scholarships. For example, a school might state that any accepted applicant would be awarded a scholarship if his GPA or test scores were at or above a predetermined level. If these types of awards exist, they will be listed on a school's financial aid information page.

The Application Process

Even if schools do not use publicly available admissions formulas, they do establish priorities for consideration and may use internal indexes as a tool to help evaluate their applicants. For most schools, grades, GPA, and class rank are the most important criteria. Many schools provide a profile of their most recent entering class, including test scores (mean, median and/or mid-50% cluster) and GPA and class ranking distributions. These are helpful guidelines for students. Often, schools also include the number of applications received, the number accepted, and the number or percentage of students who actually enroll.

Each school states what it needs for consideration. Students need to understand that an application is not complete and will not be evaluated until all required items are received by the school, including the application fee. Meeting deadlines is critical.

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Applications may ask students to fill in their test scores and GPA, but they also require official copies of high school transcripts (i.e., sent by the high school directly to the college or university) and test scores (sent by the testing company directly to the college or university). These requirements all take time to fulfill and should be requested early in the process.

Students should try to send in all application material as a packet, but some items such as test scores or first semester senior year grades may not be available. Schools know this and expect that some items will arrive later. It is extremely important, however, that the application and all available supporting materials be submitted before the deadline.

7. Financial Aid Basics

There are two major categories of financial aid: need-based and merit-based. Need is the difference between the total estimated cost of attending college for one year and the family's expected contribution. Merit aid is awarded to students who meet particular criteria, usually without consideration of need.

How Need is Determined – FAFSA

Virtually all schools use the FAFSA ("Free Application for Federal Student Aid"); the FAFSA is required for all federal and most state awards. The form is available on-line as well as at libraries and can be requested by phone. Applying on line at www.fafsa.gov is easiest since the website checks the form for math errors and omissions. The website also has a worksheet to assist parents in gathering required information. Once the information is gathered, completing the form is relatively easy and quick.

Federal Methodology uses the information supplied on this application to determine how much a family can be expected to contribute to the student's education for the year of the application. This amount is called the Expected Family Contribution (EFC).

As the name implies, applying under FAFSA is free. It is not necessary to pay someone to complete the form. The application may be submitted after January 1 of the senior year. Applicants should not wait for acceptance letters to begin the financial aid process. Nor should parents wait until they have filed their income taxes to complete the form. Estimates are permitted.

How Need is Determined – Other Forms

In addition to the FAFSA, some schools have their own financial aid forms. Applicants should be very careful to check each school's requirement. The most common additional form is the Financial Aid PROFILE that is processed by the College Board as part of its College Scholarship Service (CSS). Here, schools use *Institutional Methodology* to determine the amount of expected family contribution (EFC), using additional information acquired from these forms. This service has a fee. Do not use the service unless it is requested.

Many states use the FAFSA to determine state aid, but others use supplemental forms as well. Each state sets its own requirements and deadlines. Parents and students should check state requirements for all schools.

Time Is of the Essence

Deadlines are real and must be respected. Ignoring them can be deadly to a student's prospects for financial aid. Allow plenty of time for mailed documents to be received by the schools. Submit electronically if possible.

Merit Awards

Merit awards, or merit scholarships, are awarded on the basis of predetermined criteria. Such scholarships are, for the most part, awarded by individual schools. In addition, some corporations, fraternal and social organizations, and ethnic organizations award scholarships. In dollar amounts, they range from token awards to substantial support for students. Most are based on academic achievement and are awarded by colleges, but a few may be won through essay writing or some other form of competition. There are numerous books and websites that list these scholarships and their requirements.

Some schools have automatic scholarships. If an applicant meets established GPA/class ranking and standardized test scores, he qualifies for a scholarship. As a part of applying to a school, an applicant should also look into the school's financial aid programs. Almost all scholarships require that the recipient maintain a specific GPA to retain the award from year to year. Some of these awards, especially very generous ones, require high GPAs – 3.5 for example – to be maintained.

Any student interested in investigating scholarships should spend some time in the library, bookstore, or on-line. There are many reputable search sites, including www.studentaid.gov, a government-sponsored site.

Types of Financial Aid Awards

There are three major types of financial aid: (1) grants and scholarships, (2) loans and (3) work/study. Grants are gifts of money that are not paid back. Grants are untaxed for the most part. Grant funding comes from the federal government or state governments and from college or university monies. Scholarships are also free money, but like merit awards, carry the responsibility to maintain a minimum GPA.

Loans are of various types. Many are given to the student in his name. The federal or state government may subsidize interest, and repayment does not begin until the student quits or finishes school. Interest rates are usually lower than that of loans secured by parents. Although there is a lot of negative press on the student loan burden of recent graduates, most people are able to repay loans. In most cases, monthly loan payments will be much less than monthly car payments, for example. Many people repay loans earlier than required. However, no one should take on loans that are not truly needed.

Work/study is a jobs program; students are hired to work at a part-time job at their school for a wage. The federal government subsidizes these wages. Some schools have their own work/study programs as well, increasing the number of available jobs. While some work/study students bus tables in school cafeterias and wash dishes in the kitchen, many students are hired to work in libraries and offices or as helpers to faculty members. Schools try to match student talents and career plans with on-campus jobs. Hours are limited to prevent a job from becoming a burden to the student. Work should not be viewed negatively. Studies have shown that college students who work an average of 8 to 10 hours per week perform better in school than those who work more hours or do not work at all.

Financial Aid Packages and Renewals

After acceptance, a student receives a financial aid package. A financial aid award may include a scholarship, grant, loan or job, or any combination of the four. Award packages may change from year to year, depending on the student's need and developing skills and talents. A student who had a grant and a loan for the freshman year may receive a scholarship instead of the grant or loan after a good academic year. If a student's family's financial situation has changed, or if an additional sibling has entered college, the awards will be adjusted accordingly. In order to do this, an application for financial aid must be submitted each year that a student is enrolled in school. Scholarships may be withdrawn for poor performance and are not usually reinstated if grades later improve.

It Should Not Cost Money to Get Money

Be aware of scholarship and financial aid scams. Some websites ask for money to enroll in scholarship searches; others ask for money in order to qualify for an award. Reputable companies do not award scholarships based on any payment of money. In addition, no one can guarantee a scholarship. Any scholarship search service that requires fees in advance or that purports to guarantee scholarships should be avoided. In most cases, industrious students and parents can perform their own Internet searches for scholarships.

In Summary

- Pay attention to deadlines. Financial aid agencies are serious about their dates.
- Complete all forms as much as possible. If an applicant cannot complete a line on a form, a note should be included explaining the omission.
- Don't pay to get financial aid information. Information is free for virtually all financial aid.
- Unless a student has unlimited funds, it is worth applying for aid. Even families with good incomes and assets may qualify for some aid. Good students from all income levels may be awarded scholarships.
- Parents and student should set up a financial aid file since a new application for financial aid is required for each school year. Having information, especially passwords and user names, ready is a time-saver.

8. ACT Test Dates

Test Date Registration Deadline Late Registration (Late Fee Applies)

February 7, 2009*	January 6, 2009	January 7 - January 16, 2009
April 4, 2009	February 27, 2009	February 28- March 13, 2009
June 13, 2009	May 8, 2009	May 9 - May 22, 2009
September 12, 2009**	Dates not yet established for registration/late fees.	
October 24, 2009		
December 12, 2009		
February 6, 2010*		
April 10, 2010		
June 12, 2010		

* Test not given in New York State on these dates.

**Test available only in limited states. It is available in Pennsylvania.

Non-Saturday test dates are available for each of these dates. Please consult the website for more information and instructions for applying for non-Saturday testing. After the late fee date, only standby status is available. It is advisable to register for the writing section while registering for the test. Writing can be added later but test centers are often closed.

9. SAT Test Dates

Test Dates Registration Deadline Late Registration (Late Fee Applies)**

January 24, 2009	December 26, 2008	December 27, 2008 - January 9, 2009
March 14, 2009*	February 10, 2009	February 11 - February 24, 2009
May 2, 2009	March 31, 2009	April 1 - April 14, 2009
June 6, 2009	May 5, 2009	May 6 - May 19, 2009
October 10, 2009	No dates available for registration/late fees	
November 7, 2009		
December 5, 2009		
January 23, 2010		
March 6, 2010*		
May 1, 2010		
June 5, 2010		

Sunday testing available for the day immediately following the regular testing date. (Except October 2009 – Sunday date October 18.) Please consult the website for more information and to apply for non-Saturday testing. If a student misses the late registration date, he or she may be able to take the SAT as a standby. Fees for standby include the regular registration fee, the late fee and the standby fee.

*No SAT Subject Tests given on these dates

**Late registration dates given for on-line and phone registrations. Registration by mail requires an earlier postmark date. Consult the website.

SAT Subject Test

Up to three Subjects Tests may be taken in one day.

Language tests with listening are administered only on the November test dates. No reading-only language tests are administered on the November test date. Spanish and French reading tests are administered on all other dates except March.

Subject Tests in Literature, US History, Math 1, Math 2, Biology E/M, Chemistry, and Physics are administered on all test dates except March.

Check the website for World History, German, Modern Hebrew, Italian, and Latin as these tests have very limited availability.

10. SAT/ACT Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Both the ACT and the College Board (for tests including the SAT, PSAT, SAT Subject Tests and AP exams) may provide special testing accommodations for students with provable disabilities. The application and approval process is complex and time-consuming for each test. Fortunately, most students who require special accommodations have already been assessed and have the proper certifications on file with their schools. These are permanent certifications as long as the student stays in the same school district and the student's needs do not change. After being certified by the testing agency, the student is provided with an identification number that is used on test registration forms. *Observational note: The ACT seems to be stricert in granting accommodations than the SAT. Do not assume that having an accommodation from the College Board guarantees an accommodation from the ACT.*

The school contact should encourage students who are known to have disabilities to begin the certification process well before any test dates, allowing a couple of months' review of the application. A student who will be taking the PSAT with accommodation should begin the application process in early summer.

A student who has been approved for accommodations is not required to use them. If a student wishes to take a test without accommodation, he should register for the test, but should not provide his special identification number on the form.

The only accommodation available for standby students is 50 percent extended time.

Types of Disabilities

Any student who currently has an IEP, 504 or other accommodation plan in place may consider special testing. Disabilities include visual or hearing impairment, medical, physical, and psychiatric conditions, and learning disabilities. All applications for accommodations must be completed by the student's school; students do not submit this application. Please note that in most cases the ACT and the College Board will not provide accommodations for a student unless he/she is already receiving accommodations at school.

Limited English language proficiency is not considered to be a disability, nor is any disability of a temporary nature, i.e., a broken arm. If a temporary condition such as an injury occurs, the testing agency should be contacted to re-schedule the test if necessary.

Types of Accommodations

For the visually impaired, accommodations include large-type test booklets, readers, Braille booklets and answering devices, magnification devices, dictation, and large block answer sheets. For the hearing impaired, they provide audio amplification and sign presentations. Other learning /testing disabilities are accommodated by extended time, extra breaks, multiple-day testing, specific time of day testing, small groups, individual testing, special furnishings, and alternative test sites with an approved proctor.

Some accommodations permit the student to be tested in the regular testing sites. Others require special venues and special testing dates. Please be sure to specify any special needs, however small they may seem.

Score Reporting

Score reports for students tested with accommodations are received in the same manner as score reports for students who test without accommodations. Score reports are not flagged for accommodations. If a student is tested with any accommodation that has not been previously approved, those test scores will be cancelled.

11. Which Test Should a Student Take?

The SAT and ACT are accepted by almost all colleges and universities. Some students submit scores from both.

So Which Test is Right for your Student?

Although a comparison chart of the two tests is a starting point for selecting either test, the best way to decide if the ACT or the SAT is better for a particular student is for the student to take a practice test. If a student is tempted to take the ACT instead of the SAT because he hears that the ACT is easier, he should look into the test before actually taking it. Neither test is easy. Both are a fairly grueling way to spend a long Saturday morning.

Every student should visit the testing websites (www.collegeboard.com and www.act.org). Both have good preparation sections. For more information, students may also visit school libraries or the public library to check out test prep books – and read them! It does not take long to become familiar with the types of questions asked and to make a thoughtful decision about which test to take.

Most juniors take a standardized test in the spring with the idea that it can be retaken in the fall of the senior year. If you retake the ACT or SAT, do some preparation beforehand. There is often some minor improvement with a second testing, but most students can increase their performances substantially with some serious preparation. Above all, students should not obsess about test scores. They remain only one facet of the college application, and for most schools, they are not the most significant or deciding factor. High school grades, class rank, and the degree of difficulty of courses taken are substantially more important.

There are also a growing number of colleges and universities that do not require standardized test scores. Many of these schools are very selective but have chosen to concentrate on grades and class rankings and have other requirements, such as the submission of graded research papers. If standardized testing is a real problem for a student, one of these schools might be the answer. See page 20 for a partial list of such schools.

If test scores and grades are not high enough to get a student into the school of his dreams, there may still be alternatives. It is possible to enroll as a freshman at one school and transfer to another after the completion of the student's freshman or sophomore year. A student planning to transfer after a year or two at college should check with his desired school for transfer requirements. For most colleges, transferring is a fairly simple process. Some schools, especially those with high retention rates, for example Ivy League schools, accept very few transfers. Princeton University accepts no transfers.

Another consideration in selecting an admission test is that some schools accept submission of the ACT with Writing instead of the combination of SAT and SAT Subject Tests. Check with individual schools as these requirements can change from year to year.

12. Comparison Chart: SAT vs. ACT

	SAT	ACT
Who Uses Which Test	All colleges now accept both tests.	
Number of Questions	170 questions	215 questions
Overall Time	3 hours 45 minutes	2 hours 55 minutes without essay 3 hours 25 minutes with essay
Test Organization	10 sections: 3 math, 3 reading comprehension, 2 grammar, 1 essay and 1 experimental section in math, reading or grammar – difficult to identify – not included in score	4 sections plus optional essay; an experimental section is given on some dates and is identifiable; one subject per section
Section Lengths	25 minutes: essay, 2 math, 2 reading, 1 grammar and 1 experimental; 20 minutes: 1 math and 1 reading; 10 minutes: grammar	Grammar, 45 minutes; math, 60 minutes; reading, 35 minutes; science, 35 minutes; and essay, 30 minutes
Type of Questions	There are 10 student-produced response questions in the math section. The rest of the test is made up of 5-choice multiple choice questions. Questions are arranged from easy to hard in each section except reading, which follows the passage.	All 4-choice multiple choice except Math - 5 choices No difficulty order except Math – easy to hard
Penalty for guessing	1/4 point subtracted for incorrect answers	No penalty for incorrect answers
Scoring	Each subject receives a score of 200-800; 3 scores added for a composite score of 600-2400. Essay scored 2-12 and is included in the writing score.	Each subject receives a score of 1-36; scores averaged for a composite score of 1-36. Essay is scored 2-12 and is included in Combined English score.
Essay	25 minutes, first section of test. Topics: general truths, sayings, historic quotes; essays are available to schools.	30 minutes, last section of test (optional); Topics: subjects of concern to high school students; essays are available to schools.

A+ Test Prep and Tutoring Fast Facts Handbook

	SAT	ACT
Subjects/Skills tested	Math through the first semester of Algebra II, Reading, Vocabulary, and Grammar. Questions require much decoding.	Math through basic trigonometry Reading, Grammar and Science. Most questions are straightforward
Calculators	Scientific graphing calculator allowed	Scientific graphing calculator allowed
When Offered	Seven times each year: January, March, May, June, October, November, December Most students test on Saturday; Sunday is available for documented religious reasons	Six times each year: February, April, June, September (limited locations), October, December Most students test on Saturday; non-Saturday is available for documented religious reasons
Where Offered	Both tests are given at most area high schools at least once a year. Some schools offer both tests each time offered. Subject tests cannot be taken on same day as SAT. SAT test dates differ from ACT dates.	
Ease of registration	Easy, on-line, by mail, by phone	Easy, on-line, by mail, by phone
Preparation	Practice questions on-line at ACT and SAT websites, books in library and for purchase; on-line practice for free; group classes and individual tutoring are available for both tests.	
Fees	\$45.00 for regular registration; includes scores sent to 4 schools, each additional school \$9.50 Essay included in registration Late registration \$23.00 Standby testing \$38.00 Changing date, place or type of test \$22.00 Scores free on-line; by phone \$12.50	\$31.00 for regular registration; includes scores sent to 4 schools, each additional school \$9.00 Add \$15.00 for writing Late registration add \$20.00 Standby testing add \$40.00 Change place \$20.00 Scores free on-line, early release \$12.00
Score Choice	Beginning with the March 2009 SAT, score choice is permitted. Students can opt to have a single test date for SAT or a single SAT Subject Test result sent to colleges. Available to classes of 2010 and later.	Send selected test result to selected schools. Test scores cannot be broken down by subject and sent separately. Some schools will use multiple test results to create a composite; others use a single score date only.
Other tests	SAT Subject Tests are required by some schools	Some schools accept ACT with writing instead of SAT Subject Tests.
Question/Answer Service	For some test dates, students may receive a copy of their test booklet and a printout of their answers and the correct answers. See websites for available dates and fees.	

13. Schools That Do Not Require the SAT or ACT

There are a growing number of colleges and universities that do not require submission of SAT or ACT scores. Fair Test (www.fairtest.org) includes a list of 730 schools on its website. Included on the list are De Vry Institute and ITT Technical Institutes, schools that focus on older students such as Pierce College, and distance (on-line) learning schools. There are also many specialized schools, including the Julliard School and the Boston Architectural College, as well as seminaries and other religious training schools. This list provides only a starting point, however. All the schools on the list offer bachelor's degrees. The list is followed by a long list of footnotes, and many schools have multiple notations that qualify their test-free classification. The list includes a number of highly selective schools that truly do have alternatives to the SAT or ACT. Any student who does not want to use test scores should be careful to check each school's admissions guidelines.

A school that does not require standardized test scores usually has alternative requirements. The most common alternative requirement is that students submit a graded paper with the grade and comments from the teacher. Schools usually ask for a research paper written in 11th or 12th grade. Some schools ask for more than one paper. High class rank and GPA may also excuse a student from submitting test scores.

The list that follows is a selection, compiled from the Fair Test list and other sources, of schools in the Mid-Atlantic and New England regions that offer standardized test score alternatives. Most still accept standardized test scores and for many of these schools, most applicants still submit SAT or ACT scores. It is necessary to know the rules before applying. Some schools have a space on their application where the student declares the intention to make an alternative application. Students should be cautioned - *many of these schools will consider scores if they are sent.*

Mid-50% SAT scores (Verbal/ Math) and ACT scores (composite) are provided if available.

Pennsylvania

Chatham College – accepts a resume instead of test scores

SAT: V510-620/M470-580; ACT: 22-27

Dickinson College – test scores are optional for admission, but are required for scholarship consideration

SAT: V600-690/M590-680; ACT: 26-29

Franklin & Marshall College – applicants must submit two graded papers and complete no-scores option form

SAT: 580-670/M590-690

Gettysburg College – must complete no-score option form; scores required for scholarship consideration

SAT: V600-680/M610-670; ACT 27-30

Muhlenberg College – accepts a graded paper and personal interview instead of test scores; scores required for scholarships, honors, and special pre-med programs

SAT: V560-660/M560-660

Susquehanna University – accepts two graded papers instead of scores; also requires college prep courses

SAT: V530-620/M540-630

Ursinus College – no test scores if in top 10% of class or a 3.6 GPA in a high school without rankings; graded paper required

SAT: V550-660/M560-660; ACT: 22-28

New Jersey

Drew University – a graded paper may be submitted instead of test scores; BA/MD program requires scores

Thomas Edison College – no test scores required

New York

Bard College – test scores optional

SAT: V650-750/M590-690

Hamilton College – accepts SAT, ACT, SAT Subject Tests, AP/IB or applicant can submit all; school will select the most favorable combination. Subjects must include quantitative and verbal topics.

SAT: V620-710/M640-710

Sarah Lawrence College – a graded paper is requested; no standardized tests required for admission

Union College – requires test scores as well as a graded paper, but accepts SAT, ACT or SAT subject tests.

SAT: V570-660/M590-680; ACT: 24-29

Connecticut

Connecticut College – SAT is optional, two subject tests or ACT, with or without writing, is required

SAT: V630-700/M620-700

Massachusetts

Cambridge College – does not require scores

College of the Holy Cross – SAT and ACT are optional but will be considered if submitted

SAT: V630-670/M580-680;

Mount Holyoke College – test scores are optional; college assigns only 10% weight in selection process to scores

Wheaton College – test scores not required, but will consider if submitted

Vermont

Middlebury College – accepts SAT, ACT, SAT Subject Tests, AP, or IB scores.

Maine

Bates College – test scores optional for admission, but must be submitted before entering school for placement

SAT: V630-710/M640-710

Bowdoin College – scores optional; 20-25% of applicants do not submit; however scores must be submitted after acceptance for course placement.

SAT: V640-740/M4650-720

14. Helpful Books and Websites

The College Board College Handbook, 2009, 46th Edition, College Board, 2008.

The Insiders' Guide to the Colleges 2009: Students on Campus Tell You What You Really Want to Know, 35th Edition, Yale Daily News, St Martin's- Griffin, New York, 2008.

www.nacacnet.org

National Association for College Admissions Counseling; website has an area for students and parents with information and numerous links. Also includes articles and past issues of organization newsletter

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool>

National Center for Educational Statistics website – COOL (college opportunities on-line) pages on many schools including admissions information, test scores, costs and college profiles

www.fairtest.org

Provides information about schools with alternatives to SAT/ACT. Although there are a few schools which do not use test scores at all, the majority of the schools on this list still use scores in some way

www.fafsa.ed.gov

Official site for the federal financial aid application form; print out or apply on-line

www.fastweb.com

Scholarship matching; financial aid information with many links

www.finaid.com

Financial aid information including a needs calculator, many links

www.collegeboard.com

Overview of SAT, SAT Subject Tests, on-line registration, scores, practice questions, practice test, test dates, registration, college information, financial aid information

www.act.org

Overview of the ACT test, including writing, test dates and registration, practice questions, college information

www.commonapplication.org

Official website for the common application, get information, download the application, apply on-line and more

www.universalcollegeapp.com

Official website for this alternate application, get info, download info and apply on-line

www.number2.com

Free on-line test prep for SAT and ACT plus a vocabulary builder

www.gocollege.com

Free on-line test prep for SAT and ACT

15. SAT and ACT Scores at Various Colleges and Universities

College/University	Mid 50% Reading	SAT Mid 50% Writing	Mid 50% Math	Mid 50% Composite*	ACT Mid 50% English	Mid 50% Math	ACT Essay**	SAT Subject Tests / Comments
Albright College	450-560		450-560	18-22			R	Test optional
Amherst College	670-780	670-780	670-780	30-35	29-35	28-33	R	SAT + 2 Subject Tests or ACT w/writing
Arcadia University	500-610	500-600	490-590	20-27	20-27	18-26	Y	not required
Boston University	600-690	610-700	620-710	27-31	25-31	25-29	Y	SAT + 2 Subject Tests or ACT w/writing (Check required)
Brown University	670-760	650-760	680-770	27-33	28-34	27-34	Y	SAT + 2 Subject Tests or ACT w/writing
Bryn Mawr College	620-730	630-720	580-680	27-31	27-33	25-30	R	SAT + 2 Subject Tests or ACT w/writing
Cabrini College	440-530		430-520	16-21			N	not required
Carnegie Mellon University	610-710	610-700	680-780	28-32	27-33	27-33	Y	2 Subject Tests required - Subjects based on major
Cedar Crest College	490-580	470-570	480-580	20-27	19-27	20-26	N	
Chestnut Hill College	440-550	440-540	420-530	*			N	
College of New Jersey	560-650	560-660	580-680	*			N	
College of William and Mary	630-740	620-710	620-710	27-32	27-33	26-30	N	Subject Tests optional
Columbia University	660-760	660-750	670-780	28-33	28-34	27-34	Y	2 Subject Tests - Subjects based on major
Cornell University	620-730	630-720	660-760	28-32	28-34	27-33	Y	2 Subject Tests - Subjects based on major
Dartmouth College	670-770	670-770	680-780	28-34			Y	2 Subject Tests - student choice
Davidson College	630-730	630-720	630-730	28-32			R	2 Test suggested only
Delaware Valley College	460-560	450-550	460-560	20-25	18-24	19-24	Y	
DeSales University	480-590	470-590	490-600	19-22			N	
Dickinson College	600-690		590-680	27-30	26-32	25-30	N	Tests optional used for scholarship
Drew University	520-650	530-650	510-630	20-25	20-25	19-25	N	Tests scores or graded paper submission
Drexel University	530-630		560-670	23-28	22-28	23-29	N	
Duke University	650-760	660-750	680-780	29-34	29-34	29-34	Y	SAT + 2 Subject Tests or ACT w/writing
Eastern University	460-590	460-590	450-570	15-24	22-Nov	16-25	N	
Elizabethtown College	500-620		500-630	*			N	
Franklin & Marshall College	600-690		630-700	*			R	Test scores or 2 graded writing samples

A+ Test Prep and Tutoring Fast Facts Handbook

Georgetown University	680-760		670-760	27-32	27-34	26-32	N	3 Subject Tests required
Gettysburg College	610-690		610-670	*			R	Test optional; scores needed after acceptance for placement
Gwynedd-Mercy College	440-530		440-540	17-21	15-21	16-21	R	SAT/ACT writing reviewed as needed
Harvard University	700-800	700-790	700-790	31-35	32-35	30-35	Y	3 Subject Tests required
Haverford College	650-750	650-750	640-740	*			Y	2 Subject Tests - student choice
Holy Family University	430-510	410-490	420-510	19-20	19-20	17-19	Y	
Howard University	460-660	410-650	440-650	20-28			Y	
Immaculata University	440-540		410-530	19-22			R	
Ithaca College	530-630	530-630	540-630	23-28	23-29	23-28	Y	will be considered if submitted
Johns Hopkins University	660-750	660-750	690-790	30-34	28-33	28-33	Y	up to 3 Subject Tests - based on major
King's College	460-570	450-560	460-580	*			N	Test scores or grade paper submitted by high school
Kutztown University	440-530	440-530	440-540	18-22	17-22	17-21	N	
La Salle University	480-580	470-580	470-580	*			R	Subject Tests may be submitted for placement
Lafayette College	580-670	590-680	610-700	24-29			R	recommended may be used for placement
Lehigh University	620-710		660-740	28-32			Y	
Mass Institute of Technology (MIT)	670-770	660-750	730-800	30-34	29-34	31-35	Y	Math 1 or 2 and Bio, Chem or Physics
Millersville University of PA	470-570	460-560	480-580	*			N	
Morehouse College	460-570		460-570	19-24	17-24	18-24	R	
Moravian College	500-600	490-590	500-610	19-23			Y	
Muhlenberg College	550-650	560-660	560-660	24-29			Y	Tests optional req. for scholarships/interview & paper req.
New York University	620-710	620-710	620-720	28-31			Y	2 Subject Tests - student choice most majors -
Penn State Abington	400-520		410-540	17-24	17-23	18-25	Y	
Penn State University Park	520-620		560-660	23-28	23-29	23-29	Y	
Philadelphia University	480-570		490-590	21-25			N	
Princeton University	690-790	690-780	700-790	30-34	30-35	30-35	Y	3 Subject Tests required - Subjects by major
Rice University	640-750	640-730	670-780	29-34			Y	SAT + 2 Subject Tests or ACT w/writing
Rider University	470-570	470-570	480-590	20-24			Y	
Rollins College	520-630	520-620	540-640	23-27	22-27	22-27	N	Tests waived w/ graded paper & portfolio
Rowan University	490-590	480-580	510-620	*			N	
Rutgers University-Camden	480-580	460-570	490-600	*			Y	
Shippensburg U of PA	470-570		470-570	*			Y	Writing for placement only

A+ Test Prep and Tutoring Fast Facts Handbook

St. Joseph's University	520-610		540-620	23-27			N	
Stanford University	660-760	660-760	680-780	28-33	29-34	28-34	Y	2 Subject Tests - student choice
Swarthmore College	680-780	680-760	680-760	27-33	29-34	28-34	Y	SAT + 2 Subject, ACT w/ writing or SAT and ACT (w/wo Writing)
Syracuse University	540-650		570-680	24-29			Y	
Temple University	490-590	480-580	500-600	20-25			Y	
UC Berkeley	580-710	590-710	620-740	34-30	23-31	25-32	Y	2 Subject Tests different areas of study
UCLA	570-680	580-690	610-720	24-30	24-31	25-31	Y	2 Subject Tests different areas of study
University of Chicago	670-770		650-760	28-33	29-33	27-33	N	will be considered if submitted
University of Delaware	520-630	530-630	540-650	*			Y	Subject Tests recommended for honors
University of Maryland	570-680	560-670	600-710	*			Y	
University of Miami	580-680	560-680	600-690	27-31	27-32	26-31	N	
University of Notre Dame	640-750	630-720	660-760	31-34			R	recommended, used for placement
University of Pennsylvania	650-760	670-760	680-780	31-34	29-34	29-34	Y	SAT + 2 Subject Tests or ACT w/writing
U of PA state system	400-540	390-540	410-560	16-23			varies	range for 10 campuses
University of Pittsburgh	560-660		570-660	24-29			N	
University of Richmond	590-680	600-700	600-680	28-30			R	
University of the Arts	470-600	470-580	450-570	18-25	19-26		N	
University of the Sciences	520-600		560-650	23-27			R	
University of Virginia	590-700	600-700	610-720	*			N	2 Subject Tests - strongly recommended
Ursinus College	570-680	560-660	570-670	24-29			Y	recommended
Villanova University	580-680	590-680	610-700	27-31			Y	
West Chester University of PA	480-570	480-570	490-580	*			Y	
Widener University	440-530		450-560	*			N	
Yale University	700-800	700-780	700-790	30-34			Y	2 Subject Tests

*Accepts ACT but scores not reported; usually due to too few scores

** Y=required, N=not required, R=recommended