

Information about SAT and ACT test preparation for PCS 10th and 11th Graders

PCS students who are college bound will become interested at some point in taking the SAT or the ACT. Those tests are sometimes an admissions requirement for U.S. colleges or universities.

As of this year, there are only about 50 colleges in the U.S. that actually require students to submit an SAT or ACT score including Brown, Dartmouth, Florida State, Georgetown, Georgia Tech, Harvard, MIT, Ohio State, Purdue, Texas A&M, West Point, University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Texas, and Yale University. Be sure to check each college's website to find out for sure if it requires an SAT/ACT score, or not. Otherwise, it is often optional.

For all the colleges who say that they are "test score optional" on their websites, they are sincere about it. They now have five years of reading applications, some with scores, some without, and the data that they have accumulated over the years has helped them to verify that test scores alone are not necessarily predictors of success for their students.

No college in the U.S. cares which of these two tests a student takes. It is totally up to the student to decide.

Ideally a student will take this test in May or June of 11th grade or the beginning of 12th grade. That is perfect timing for a college application.

Some students take the test one time, and then decide to take it again to see if they can get a better score. That's fine! Taking it a third time, however, starts to get a little obsessive.

There are a lot of ways to prepare for these tests. In fact, just being in school is the best preparation of all! Beyond that, there are many free resources available to help you study and practice for taking this test.

Here are a few introductory comments:

Don't start test prep too early: in most cases, the fall/winter of junior year is the right time to start test prep in order to plan for tests to be taken in May or June of junior year (that is when most college admission testing is done). Besides, the students may not have even learned all of the math and all of the English skills at the level they'll be tested on if they attempt to take the test too early.

Beware of test burn-out, which typically happens when a child begins prep and/or official testing too early in the process. The goal is for the student to peak (i.e., be able to earn their best-possible scores) either by the end of junior year or beginning of senior year. It is rare for a student to be able to peak early in the junior year (or before), so it is counterproductive to start the testing calendar for the student too soon and can even lead to declining scores later on.

The most important part of a college application will always be the transcript, never the test scores. While scores play a role, a student's record over their years of high school matter most in college admissions decisions.

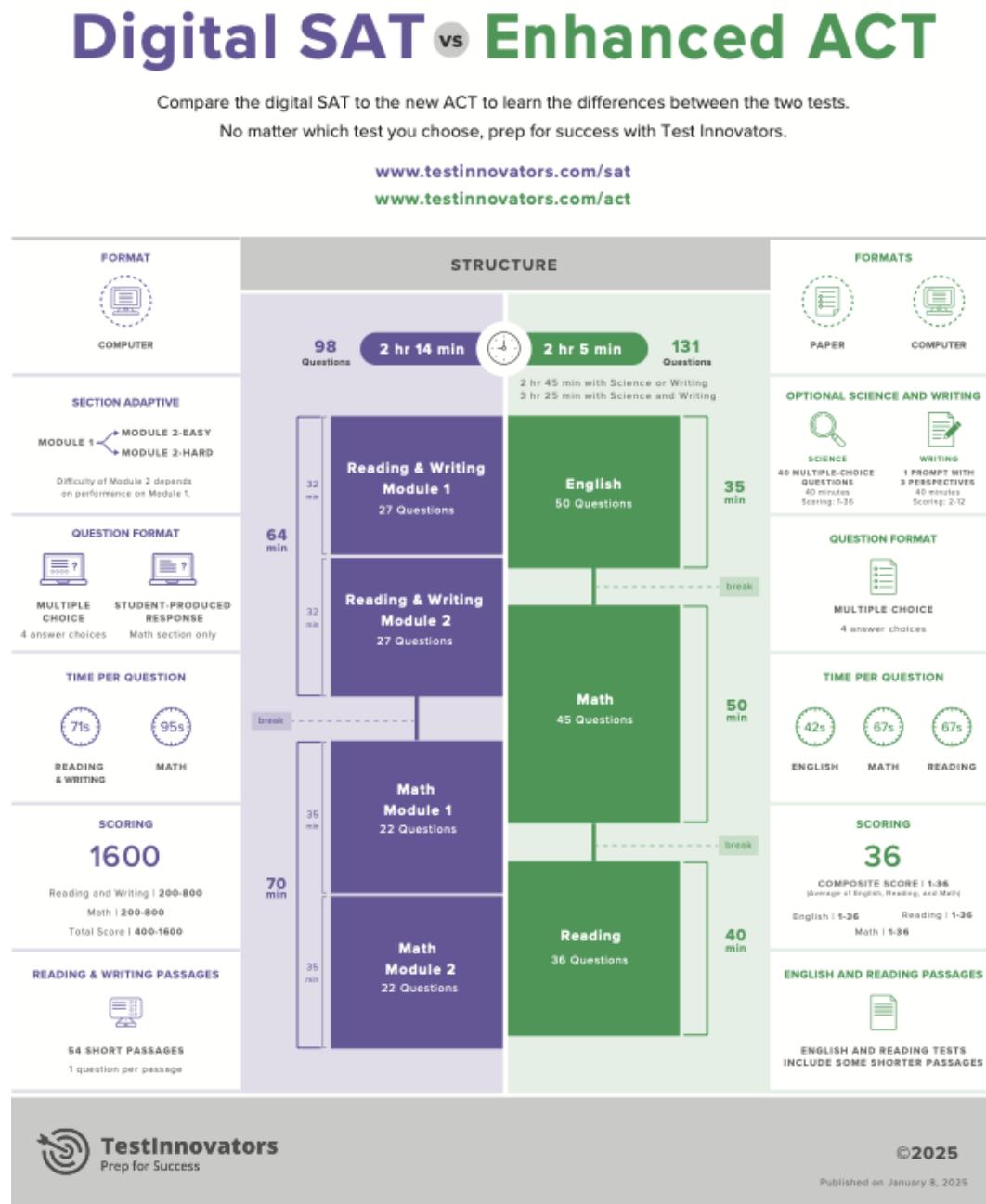
Starting test prep earlier rarely results in the kids ending their whole process earlier. So, in the

end, all you've done is dragged the process out longer.

Make a plan and be efficient with time spent on test prep: you want your student to spend the time on test prep that is needed to do his/her best, but not a second more than that.

There are close to 1000 colleges -- including selective and highly selective schools -- that have either test-flexible or test-optional policies, giving students the chance to apply to colleges without submitting standardized test scores.

First, let's go over the two tests' formats. Here is a graphic created by TestInnovators.com:



So, how can you decide which of these two tests to take?

One way to figure out which of these tests to take is by remembering back to when you took the PSAT and/or Practice ACT. Did either one feel more “right” for you than the other?

Another way would be to sign yourself up on both companies’ websites and try their free, on-line practice tests. Then we can compare your experiences taking them and your scores and see which one seems to have gone better for you.

Finally, you may just want to go and actually take both tests. Get your score on each one of them. Choose which score is better, and that will be the one you send to a college. You do not have to send the other score to any college if you don’t want to, so there is no risk.

Once you decide which test to take, how can you do some test prep for it ahead of time?

1) Both test companies offer you free test prep services. For the SAT, it is Khan Academy. Go to <https://www.khanacademy.org/digital-sat> and begin. One of the great features of the Khan Academy is that it can sense the areas of the SAT you seem to be having a little trouble with and it can give you extra tutorials and extra practice in just those areas. For the ACT, go to the ACT Academy: <https://academy.act.org/> We recommend that you do these prep programs because they are free and because they are most aligned with what you’ll see on test day.

2) If that is not enough test prep for you, then go to the PCS College Office in Room 701. We have a lot of free SAT and ACT practice books that you can use. They are published by The Princeton Review, Kaplan, and Barron’s.

3) If that is *still* not enough test prep for you, then PCS teams up every year with SAB to offer a test prep course. We hire a tutor and have a course that is comprised of four practice tests and seven class sessions. The classes meet between February and April of 11th grade so that you can take the test in May.

4) Finally, some kids ultimately hire private tutors, but these can be quite costly and we cannot guarantee the quality or the style of any tutor or tutoring service.

Here are two statements that I copied and pasted from the SAT and ACT companies’ websites for what they say about test prep:

To prepare for the ACT:

When it comes to preparing for the ACT test, there’s no single magic solution.

There are several things you can do in the months leading up to the ACT that will help you achieve the score you want.

- **Take challenging classes.** The best way to prepare for a college entrance exam is to take challenging courses in high school. The more challenging the class, the more prepared you’ll be for the test.
- **Take a practice test.** Taking a practice ACT test (PDF) allows you to familiarize yourself with the format and types of questions asked. Schedule study time. Set aside small

amounts of time for studying over an extended period. Schedule it on your calendar so you don't lose sight of it between homework assignments, extracurricular activities, and fun.

- **Keep a positive attitude.** Practice positive thinking. Imagine yourself sitting in the quiet test room and filling in correct answers.
- **Know yourself and your abilities.** Don't stop progressing in your strong subjects and be sure to spend time practicing your skills in areas where you can most improve.
- **Consider using ACT test prep materials.** ACT test prep materials can help you become more familiar with the test format, gain confidence and be ready on test days. Take a look at all of our test prep options to find free online practice tests, helpful study guides, interactive study tools, and more.

The ACT Academy is the official, free on-line test prep so you have to start with that.

- The Official Beginner's Guide for ACT is a great first step to success on the ACT® test. Learn the best strategies to prepare, receive online access to a PreACT® Diagnostic test, and access to both a printed and online ACT practice test.
- The Official ACT Prep Guide is the most robust guide from the makers of the ACT® test.
- ACT® Online Prep is an online tool that offers a personalized learning path and daily goals to help students stay on target and track their progress.
- ACT® Rapid Review is an online classroom that provides students with live or on-demand instructions from an expert teacher.
- Free ACT prep tools include the Preparing for the ACT printable practice test, online subject test practice, and ACT® Academy™, a free online learning tool and test practice program that offers personalized exercises and two full-length practice tests.

• Learn about [all the ACT Test Prep options](#).

To prepare for the SAT:

Study with Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy

It's no surprise that one of the best ways to prepare for the SAT is to study, and we recommend you use the official resources created by the makers of the SAT. College Board partnered with Khan Academy for a new and improved approach to SAT test preparation that's tailored to you and absolutely free. It's called [Official SAT Practice](#), and it's the most comprehensive and official SAT study resource available. Khan Academy creates a study plan and guide just for you based on your PSAT/NMSQT® or past SAT scores along with your upcoming test date. We recommend you spend 6–20 hours preparing for your first SAT. Make sure you reserve enough time to take at least one full-length practice test (about 4 hours if you practice the essay as well), and give yourself time to review the concepts you're struggling with.

To access your personalized study plan, make sure your College Board and Khan Academy accounts are linked.

Take a full-length practice test

Taking a full-length SAT practice test is one of the best ways to prepare for your SAT, and College Board makes several full-length practice tests available for free on Official SAT Practice. Taking a practice test that follows the same timing parameters you'll experience on test day gives you a strong indication of how you'll score on the real SAT. Our research shows that your score on an official, full-length practice test taken after studying and within a couple weeks of your test date is highly predictive of the score you'll receive on the actual SAT. Practice test results will also provide you with insight on what you need to work on as you approach the real test.

Once you've decided which test to take and you're buzzing along in your test prep, the time will come for you to register for the actual test. The students need to be the ones who do the registering, *not their parents!* If any student needs help registering for an SAT or ACT, then we will be happy to help them do that, or a parent can help them, but the parents should never do it in the place of a student. The students will need to make their own user IDs and passwords and put them in a safe, accessible place. The registration questionnaires from both companies usually take about 45 minutes for a teenager to complete.

Below are the dates that the tests are offered in 2025-26. You can choose a date to take it and then see if you want to do a retake on a second date. One common practice here at PCS is to take the test once in the spring, see your score, and then decide if you want to take it again at the end of the summer or in the early fall.

ACT: September 6 October 18 December 13 February 14 April 11 June 13 July 11

SAT: August 24 September 13 October 4 November 8 December 6 March 14 May 2 June 6

Here are some popular test-related “rules of thumb:”

Kids should register for their own tests. They should make up their own username and password and should keep them in a safe place so that they can use them to gain access to their accounts from their home computers as well as the school computers.

Kids should do all the free practice opportunities first before deciding what, if any, additional test prep they feel they need.

Kids should not report their scores to any colleges right away. The current practice is to wait until all of your testing is done, see which scores turned out best, and then send only those best scores to a college. Some colleges do “super-scoring” and that is based on your making a careful selection of which score sets you want to send them.

Fewer and fewer colleges are even requiring these tests. The number of colleges that are going “test score optional” goes up every year in the U.S.

This is from Education Week:

“The College Board released new data Monday showing that students who used its free online practice course through Khan Academy for as little as six to eight hours gained 90 points on average between their PSAT and SAT scores.

Students who used the College Board’s “Official SAT Practice on Khan Academy” for 20 to 22 hours averaged improvements of 115 points over their PSAT scores, company officials said. That’s nearly double the 60-point average gain of students who didn’t use the free test preparation.

The new data come from a College Board analysis of the redesigned 1600-point SAT, and the assessment company studied test administrations over the next year and examined the impact of Khan Academy practice on 250,000 students’ scores.”

https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/college-board-reports-score-gains-from-free-sat-practice/2017/05?r=1316879807&cmp=eml-enl-eu-news3&_cldee=bW1hbm5AcGNzLW55Yy5vcmc%3D&recipientid=contact-5d39e4413bf9e111892400505683000d-38ef262fadae448480c6f46704caac01&esid=2e5d102a-743a-e711-8de0-005056bf0011