



Preparing for college **entrance exams**

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Your scores on the ACT or SAT are essential components of your college applications. They're a key factor in determining your chance of admission and any potential scholarship offers. So, you know preparing for the tests is essential. But what's the best approach? And how do you choose which test to take?

Admissions experts recommend taking both the ACT and SAT in order to find out which test best fits your learning and test-taking style. "My advice is to try both as every student is different. One student may perform equally well on both exams, while another may see a much higher score on one test or another," said Ashley Dudgeon, director for undergraduate admissions at Midway University.

It's smart to ask your high school guidance counselor for information on free or fee-based tutoring programs and test prep classes in your area, which can help guide and target your preparation for the exams.

Plan to take both tests by your junior year so that you have ample time to retake the exams in hope of improving your score, experts advise. "I recommend that students plan to take the ACT and the SAT early, so as to provide a good baseline and to identify areas in which the student excels as well as opportunities for growth," said Aarika Gunn, an admissions counselor at Western Kentucky University.

To prepare, Natasha Ramsey, associate dean of academic success at Midway University, encourages students to utilize the sample exams and preparation guides available online on the ACT and SAT test sites, ACT.org and collegeboard.org, respectively.

It's also smart to ask your high school guidance counselor for information on free or fee-based tutoring programs and test prep classes in your area, which can help guide and target your preparation for the exams. "It is not uncommon for us to have a student score 7 points higher in English, or 10 points higher in reading [on the ACT] from one test to the next," said Winni van Gessel, a college planner with Class 101 in Lexington, which offers

assistance with test prep and admission, scholarship and financial aid applications. "Through our structured classes, students learn where their weaknesses lay and what to study, and they become very motivated to address those areas and never make the same mistakes again."

Before locking yourself away with vocabulary flashcards or practice tests, take a moment to first familiarize yourself with the the basic test format and scoring rules for both the ACT and SAT. This will help you adopt smart test-taking strategies for each.

For instance, with the introduction of the revised SAT last year, "there is no longer a penalty for wrong answers on the SAT, which allows students to make an educated guess even if they're not certain of the answer," said Gunn. (The ACT has never penalized for wrong answers.) So, for both tests now, it's always better to guess, rather than leaving any question blank. And, bonus: Gunn says that on the newest version of the SAT, many of the former, notoriously obscure vocabulary words "have been swapped out for more common words with multiple connotations."

"More than 20 percent of the questions in the English section of the ACT ask for the correct punctuation in a sentence," van Gessel said. So, reviewing punctuation rules is key. Brushing up on geometry rules is also a smart strategy to increase your performance on the ACT Math section, he said.

To maximize your chance of improving your score on the SAT, van Gessel suggests students complete "drills with vocabulary in context" and practice math without depending completely on a calculator. "The SAT has a section of math [that must be completed] without a calculator. Students have to learn to rely less on their T1-84 and more on their skills on paper," he said.

Finally, remember: Most colleges and universities use only your highest ACT or SAT score in determining your admission and potential for merit-based scholarships. So if your first results are lower than your goal score, don't lose hope. Simply keep studying and schedule a retest date. ■

TEST DATES

ACT Test

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Late Registration Deadline
April 8, 2017	March 3, 2017	March 17, 2017
June 10, 2017	May 5, 2017	May 19, 2017
Sept. 9, 2017	TBA	TBA
Oct. 28, 2017	TBA	TBA
Dec. 9, 2017	TBA	TBA

SAT and Subject Test

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Late Registration Deadline
Mar. 11, 2017*	Feb. 10, 2017	Feb. 28, 2017
May 6, 2017	April 7, 2017	April 25, 2017
June 3, 2017	May 9, 2017	May 24, 2017
Tentative:		
Oct. 7, 2017	TBA	TBA
Nov. 4, 2017	TBA	TBA
Dec. 2, 2017	TBA	TBA

* SAT only

