

All about the ACT and SAT

As part of the college application process, students must take at least one of two standardized tests, the ACT (originally the American College Testing Assessment Test) and/or the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test).

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HIGH SCHOOL

About the ACT

The ACT

The ACT measures what you know about the subjects you studied in school. According to ACT, Inc., the test includes the following:¹³

- The ACT is administered on 6 test dates within the 50 United States and District of Columbia—in September, October, December, February, April, and June.
- The ACT is a national college admissions examination that consists of subject area tests in: **English, Mathematics, Reading and Science**
- The ACT Plus Writing includes the **four subject area tests** plus a **30-minute writing test**.
- The ACT includes **215 multiple-choice questions** and takes approximately **3 hours and 30 minutes** to complete, including a short break (or just over four hours if you are taking the ACT Plus Writing). Actual testing time is 2 hours and 55 minutes (plus 30 minutes if you are taking the ACT Plus Writing).

NOTE: The entire ACT Plus Writing is a part of the Michigan Merit Examination (MME), the three-day test administered through Michigan high schools to students during their junior year. Students take the ACT with the MME at no cost. The results of the ACT are used to determine student eligibility for the Michigan Competitive Scholarship. Students may also use these same ACT scores to apply to various colleges. For more information about the MME, visit the Michigan Department of Education website: www.michigan.gov/mme.

Cost of the ACT (as of Fall 2012):¹⁴

ACT (No Writing): \$35 Includes reports for the student, the student's counselor (if student authorizes reporting), and up to four college choices (if valid codes are provided upon registration).

ACT Plus Writing: \$50.50 (or free for Michigan students when taken as part of the MME)

Includes reports for the student, the student's counselor (if student authorizes reporting), and up to four college choices (if valid codes are provided upon registration). The \$15.50 Writing Test fee is refundable upon written request if the student is absent on test day or switches to the ACT (No Writing) before the testing begins.

Other fees may also apply. Visit the ACT website for more information: www.actstudent.org.

NOTE: Some students are eligible to have test fees waived. Visit the websites for both tests for details.

- Fee waivers can be requested from the school guidance counselor
- Requirements to qualify for a fee waiver include: currently enrolled in 11th or 12th grade, U.S. citizen or testing in the U.S., U.S. territories, or Puerto Rico, Meet one or more indicators of economic need listed on the ACT Waiver Form.

When to take the ACT

It is suggested students take the exam during their junior year, something Michigan students already do as part of the MME. Taking the test during the junior year will allow time to take it again to improve scores and make any wanted adjustments to the student's senior year curriculum. It can also be used to notify colleges of the student's interests and score so that they will mail information about their schools, scholarships, etc. However the ACT testing organization

13. ACT, Inc: www.actstudent.org/faq/answers/what.html

14. ACT, Inc: www.actstudent.org/regist/actfees.html

states that the test can be taken at least two months ahead of the application deadlines for the colleges, which means the test can be taken during your senior year.

Sign up for the ACT

Registration can be done online or via mail. Registration should be completed at least 1½ months prior to the testing dates. For specific registration information, the student can visit the counseling office at his/her high school or the websites for each test: www.actstudent.org.

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About the SAT

The SAT

The test is administered by the College Board (www.collegeboard.org), a nonprofit membership organization. The test focuses on reading, writing and math, with a leaning towards logical reasoning and verbal skills. The College Board offers the following facts about the SAT.¹⁵

The SAT is a national college admissions examination that:

- Is offered 7 times a year in the United States and 6 times a year at international sites
- Assesses critical thinking and problem-solving skills in 3 areas: **Critical reading, Mathematics, & Writing**
- Takes 3 hours and 45 minutes and three planned breaks are provided throughout the testing period
- Consists of 10 separately timed sections (6 - 25 minute sections, 2 - 20 minute sections, a 25 minute essay, and a 10 minute multiple choice Writing section): **three sections test critical reading** (70 minutes total), **three sections test mathematics** (70 minutes total), **three sections test writing** (60 minutes total), **one variable (unscored) section tests critical reading, mathematics or writing** (25 minutes total)
- Includes three kinds of questions: multiple-choice questions (machine-scored), student-produced responses (mathematics only, machine-scored), essay question.

Check with the college you are interested in to find out which tests you should take to fulfill application requirements because additional SAT subject tests may also be required.

When to Take the SAT

Students can take the test as many times as they want. However, research shows that taking the test more than twice may not significantly improve the score. Many students take the test in March of their junior year so they can take it again in the fall of their senior year if needed.

Cost of the SAT (as of Fall 2012)¹⁶

SAT: \$50

SAT SUBJECT TESTS:

- Basic registration fee: \$23
- Language Tests with Listening: add \$23 to basic fee
- All other SAT Subject Tests: add \$12 per test to basic fee

15. The College Board: www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/about/sat/FAQ.html#quest20

16. The College Board: www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/sat/calenfees/fees.html

Other fees may also apply. Visit the SAT website for more information: www.collegeboard.com.

NOTE: Some students are eligible to have test fees waived. Visit the websites for both tests for details. Waivers are typically issued to high school guidance counselors so ask at your school!

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HIGH SCHOOL

*The ACT & SAT:
Which test to take & how
to study for it*

Sign up for the SAT

Registration can be done online or via mail. For specific registration information, visit the counseling office of the high school or the websites for each test: www.collegeboard.com.

Which Test to Take

In the past, Midwestern schools in the U.S. more heavily accepted the ACT test while west and east coast schools preferred the SAT. Currently, most schools accept either test. Be sure to look up the testing requirements for each school of interest.

When possible, the student should take preliminary versions of both tests as a sophomore and/or junior. In addition, the student should try to complete full practice tests of both the SAT and ACT. If the student wants to limit his/her study focus, compare scores of both tests and focus on the test that will net the best possible score. In Michigan, many sophomores take a free, preliminary version of the ACT called the ACT PLAN. It covers the same content areas as the full ACT but does not include a writing component. The test results reveal students' strengths and weaknesses in various subject areas.

Students can take the fee-based preliminary version of the SAT, the PSAT, in either their sophomore or junior years. The National Merit Scholarship Program uses the results of the PSAT tests that students take in their junior year to determine if students are eligible for various scholarships.

Because the tests measure different things, some students may do better on one versus the other. The Princeton Review offers a list of pros and cons. Visit their site to read the seven differences they note between the two tests: <http://www.princetonreview.com/college-education.aspx>. The site offers an assessment class that measures which test is right for each specific student. Students can also study for and take both tests.

How to Study for the Tests

There are multiple ways to study and prepare for the ACT and SAT. Below is a list of some preparation options:

- Take advanced classes to provide a knowledge base, habits, and skills for success on these tests.
- Take the preliminary tests, the PSAT and the ACT PLAN, when you are a sophomore and/or junior.
- Search the Internet for or find books with sample tests and test-taking strategies. Michigan eLibrary (MEL) offers a variety of ACT and SAT practice tests free to Michigan residents. Go to www.mel.org, and click on "Test and Tutorials." A Michigan Driver's License or library card is required to access the site. Students who do not have a driver's license can use their parents'/guardians' licenses.
- Purchase preparation software. Attend a preparation class. Get a one-on-one tutor.
- Look for resources that students may qualify for that would help them purchase or significantly reduce the cost of books, software, courses, or one-on-one tutoring.
- 4 Tests: www.4tests.com; March 2 Success: www.march2success.com; Number2.com: www.number2.com

- The ACT: [www.ACTStudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)
- The College Board, Preparing for the SAT: www.collegeboard.com/testing

What to Expect on Testing Day

Talk to the student about things to expect on testing day (long lines so they need to arrive early, what to bring and not to bring to the test, policies [no hats, food, etc], calculators, registration [where to go, what to bring], etc.) The SAT and ACT websites offer excellent test day simulators that can help you prepare the student for test day expectations. (<http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-test-day-checklist>)

Tips for Taking the ACT and/or SAT Tests

Provide as many tips as possible for taking the SAT or ACT tests. Remind the student to stay calm, monitor their testing pace, practice prior to the test, and be familiar with the sections of the test, their duration, and to be familiar with strategies for finding the correct answer. Try to help the student combat fear of the tests. Let the student know that it's ok to not know all of the answers but to do what they know and then try to make a best educated guess on the rest. Help familiarize the student with test strategies such as when is it appropriate to leave questions blank versus taking a guess (will it help or hurt their score), process of elimination, etc. (www.actstudent.org/testprep/tips)

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Which test to take & how
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