



Felsted

Applying to American Universities *A Guide for Parents*

The USA is one of the most complicated systems to apply to, and preparation for an American application begins in earnest at the start of the Lower Sixth.

Felsted supports students with bespoke, timetabled lessons during the co-curricular slot, alongside utilising expert support from partners including The University Guys, UES, Aspire Sporting Scholarships and established contacts from universities in the US.

The school can provide all the support necessary for these applications, and it is not necessary to engage outside consultants at additional cost.

It is also worth noting that if a student is considering applying to America, they should look at the Canadian system, which is cheaper, provides a similar style of education, does not require admissions tests, and comes with a 3 year postgraduate visa to work in Canada. Students with a French passport can study in Quebec for Canadian resident fees.

The work students complete throughout both years of Sixth Form is considered in their US application, so we urge all students to maintain motivation and focus, as their reports and grades are sent to universities to support their application.

Choice:

There are around 4500 universities (which offer postgraduate study) and colleges (which offer undergraduate study only) in the USA. The most prestigious universities are the Ivy League, and these are generally more competitive than Oxford and Cambridge for UK students to get into. We encourage students to have a broad range of choices which may include 1 or 2 Ivies, but also other schools. The US system places a great emphasis on 'fit' and takes a much more holistic view of the application than UK universities, looking at the student's contribution to society and school as well as their academic profile. Students should seek to find schools which are similar in terms of their offer, as this indicates they have thought thoroughly about fit. The group of 63 universities which are members of the AAU are considered to be equivalent to Russell Group, so most students will select most of their choices from here.

(<https://www.aau.edu/who-we-are/our-members>)

American universities and colleges have a more 'hands on' approach to learning than those in the UK, so students often feel much better supported and with more contact time. This is certainly a consideration if a student struggles with independent learning.

How to apply:

Most applications are completed through the College Board Common Application, although some universities use different systems. For their application a student will need to complete a standardised test - either the ACT or the SAT; write an essay, which is more personal and reflective than the UCAS personal statement, submit both whole school and teacher recommendations, and may have to also answer supplementary questions for each choice.

The first step for each student is to identify which of the tests is most suitable for their learning style and abilities, and they should complete a diagnostic test, which takes about an hour to complete. We assist them with accessing this. Once they have identified which test they will do, they will have guided support in terms of the learning required and practice tests.

Some universities are test optional, which means that a test result does not need to be declared, although if a student has an excellent score, or is applying for a merit based scholarship, it is advised that they declare their score. The numbers of universities going test optional has increased for 2021 entry due to coronavirus, and it is widely expected that this will continue for 2022 entry.

Students complete their applications for a January submission date, unless they choose Early Action or Early Decision. Early Action means they can apply to several of their choices by 1st November and receive a decision about acceptance. They may be deferred to be considered with the wider pool in January if the college is not sure at the early stage. Early Decision can only be used with one university, and, if accepted, a student is contractually obligated to attend that university. If Early Decision is being considered, it is vital that the financial costs have been considered before applying.

SAT v ACT:

What is the SAT?

The SAT has four sections, as well an optional essay. The first section will be Reading, followed by Writing and Language, then the no calculator section of Math, followed by the Math section you're allowed a calculator on. If you decide to take the SAT essay, it'll be the final section of the exam. Most SAT questions are multiple choice, but five questions on Math No Calculator and eight questions on Math Calculator will be grid-ins.

When you take the SAT, you'll get a 5-minute break after about every hour of testing. That means you'll get a break after the Reading section and a second one after the Math No Calculator. If you're taking the Essay section, you'll also get a break before starting. The total time of the SAT is 3 hours if you don't take the essay, and 3 hours and 50 minutes if you do take the essay.

The following chart breaks down the format of the test.

Order	Section	Time in Minutes	# of Questions	Time per question
1	Reading	65	52	75 seconds
2	Writing and Language	35	44	48 seconds
3	Math No Calculator	25	20	75 seconds
4	Math Calculator	55	38	77 seconds
5	Essay (optional)	50	1	
	Total:	3 hours, 50 minutes (3 hours without essay)	154 (+1 essay prompt)	

How Is the SAT Scored?

When you take the SAT, you'll be given a total score between 400 and 1600. The SAT has two major sections: Evidence-Based Reading and Writing (combined from Reading + Writing and Language), and Math. You can earn a scaled score of between 200 and 800 points on each section. But where does the scoring scale come from?

You start with a raw score for each topic area. Your raw score is simply the number of questions you answered correctly; skipped or wrong questions do not add or subtract from your raw score. That number is then converted into a scaled score through a process called equating—the College Board is a bit cagey about how exactly this works, but it's based on years worth of data rather than how people do on a specific test date.

The average SAT score is 1068, with some variation from year to year, but what counts as a good score for you will really depend on where you're looking to apply. To get into a top-tier school you'll likely need to score about 1400 or higher, but for the local branch of the state university you might be just fine with a 1050.

What is the ACT?

The ACT is made up of four sections plus the optional writing test:

ACT English Test: 75 questions related to standard English. Topics include rules of punctuation, word usage, sentence construction, organization, cohesion, word choice, style, and tone. Total time: 45 minutes. Students read passages and then answer questions related to sentences that have been underlined in those passages.

ACT Mathematics Test: 60 questions related to high school mathematics. Topics covered include algebra, geometry, statistics, modeling, functions, and more. Students can use an approved

calculator, but the exam is designed so that a calculator is not necessary. The math test does not cover calculus. Total time: 60 minutes.

ACT Reading Test: 40 questions focused on reading comprehension. Test-takers will answer questions about both explicit and implicit meanings found in textual passages. Where the English Test is about proper language usage, the Reading Test digs in to ask about key ideas, types of arguments, differences between fact and opinion, and point of view. Total time: 35 minutes.

ACT Science Test: 40 questions related to the natural sciences. Questions will cover introductory biology, chemistry, earth science, and physics. The questions typically aren't highly specialized for any field, but more about the process of *doing* science—interpreting data, understanding research processes, and so on. Total time: 35 minutes.

ACT Writing Test (Optional): Test-takers will write a single essay based on a given issue. The essay prompt will provide several perspectives on the issue that the test-taker will need to analyze and synthesize and then present his or her own perspective. Total time: 40 minutes.

Total time: 175 minutes without writing; 215 minutes with the writing test. There is a 10 minute break after the Math Test, and a five minute break before the optional Writing Test.

How is the ACT scored?

The ACT is scored out of a total of 36 points.

The importance of ACT scores should not be underestimated. Colleges certainly take many factors into consideration when they make an admissions decision, but scores on the ACT or SAT are the easiest tool with which to compare students from different high schools. Also, colleges often use the scores when choosing scholarship winners and merit aid recipients.

Put yourself in the shoes of an admissions officer for a moment. Which should you value more: Applicant A's semester in France or Applicant B's solo performance in the all-state symphony? It's a hard call. But a 34 on the ACT is undeniably more impressive than a 28.

Also, realize that most schools make their ACT data public, and they know that their reputations depend upon high numbers. A college won't be considered "highly selective" or "elite" if its students have an average composite ACT score of 19.

So what is a good ACT score? The exam consists of four parts: English Language, Reading, Mathematics, and Science. Each category receives a score between 1 (lowest) and 36 (highest). Those four scores are then averaged to generate the composite score used by most colleges.

Very few students get a perfect ACT score, even those who get into the country's top colleges. In fact, anyone scoring a 34, 35 or 36 is among the top 1 percent of test-takers in the country. That said, for the country's most selective colleges and universities, you should be aiming to get an ACT composite score of 30 or higher.

The cost of study:

The average cost of a university education in the US ranges from \$25,000 pa to \$60,000 pa (inclusive of living costs). This compares with an estimated cost of £24,000 pa in the UK for tuition and living costs for a UK student.

There are a large number of scholarships available, based on skill, sport, or merit. These are competitive, but we can assist students in seeking out some good options. There are some scholarships available at certain schools for specific nationalities, so it is also worth looking for these. Financial Aid is also available, and we can offer advice and support to parents when completing the relevant documentation. It is really important to consider these factors when making choices.

TIMELINE:

Autumn Term L6

- Students have an introduction to the US University and Colleges System
- Introduction to testing and guidance on which tests to complete
- Register for first SAT or ACT tests
- Initial research on college choices, using the Unifrog platform to help filter

Spring Term L6

- Either late in the Autumn term or early in the Spring term, the student should complete their first SAT or ACT.
- Support continues with practising for these tests
- More refined thinking about college choices based on the scores from the initial tests
- Initial consideration of the Common App essay process

Summer Term L6

- A second SAT or ACT test should be completed, which should show an improved score.
- Work begins in earnest on the Common App essay prompts, with training and guidance from UES and The University Guys.
- Students finalise college choices
- Students choose 2 subject teachers they wish to write their subject recommendations

Autumn Term U6

- Final drafts of Essays
- Work on supplementary questions
- Early decision and Early Action applications prepared by the start of the October Half term, ready to submit prior to the 1st November deadline.
- Regular application students should have their application complete by the end of the Autumn term ready to submit prior to the January deadlines.

Once applications have been submitted, the school is required to send a mid-term transcript of progress, and students need to submit their final results statements. If a student has an offer, and falls short of their predicted grades, they may have to write a statement to the university to explain the discrepancy in order to be admitted. Therefore it may be that the school submits different (realistic) predicted grades for the US application than for UCAS (which expects optimistic grades).

For a wealth of information about applying to America you can visit the following websites:

<https://www.theuniversityguys.com/knowledge/guides/>

<https://www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk/university>

Ms Scofield is primarily responsible for the support of any international applications, and if you have any queries you should contact her in the first instance, via careersadmin@felsted.org