

# FAQs on Everyone's Favorite Topic: Testing

## Which test should I take?

Colleges that require an SAT or ACT do not need to see both. They do not favor one test over the other either, so take the test that you score better on and/or feel more comfortable with.

## How do I know which test is better for me?

Our advice would be to take a practice test of each exam to get a base score which will help you determine what test you scored better on. Then, you can simply prepare for the exam that better suits your strengths. There is need to prep for or worry about both. Remember, you will want to take these practice tests close together (within a month of each other) so they are a fair comparison. You also do not need to prep for the diagnostic tests, but do give them both equal care so you can get a true base score and comparison. If you score very similarly, then you can pick whichever test feels more comfortable to you. Do you like the timing of the SAT better? Do you like that the ACT only has 25% focused on math? Analyzing your score and reflecting on these types of questions will help you decide which test is best for you. Many test prep companies offer these diagnostics tests for free.

## When should I test?

If you are in Geometry in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, the earliest you will test is the end of junior year. This is because Geometry is on both exams, so you'll want most of that curriculum under your belt. Students in Geometry in 11<sup>th</sup> grade can sit for the April ACT, May SAT, or June ACT or SAT for their first sitting. If the end of the year is too hectic and/or you rather finish Geometry fully, consider your first sitting to be the June SAT or ACT, July ACT, or August SAT. If you are advanced in math and finished with Algebra I, II, and Geometry by the start of 11<sup>th</sup> grade, testing at any time during junior year can work.

## How late can I test?

This will vary by school and deadline, but you can usually take the September ACT and October SAT to still meet the popular early action and early decision deadline of November 1 at most schools. If you are applying regular decision to many schools this may allow you to test through November. Usually, December is the last test date that the vast majority of schools will accept. We strongly encourage you to sit for your first official exam by early summer or fall.

## When should I start preparing for the exams?

This will also vary by each student's individual goals. If you are utilizing formal test prep, please listen to their advice. Generally speaking, students want to prep 6-8 weeks in advance before the test. You will want to stay consistent in your prep and prepare up until the exam. To be clear, it isn't helpful to stop your preparation and practice months before the exam. Multiple practice tests have been shown as a way to really improve scores so students can assess where they need more improvement and get more and more comfortable with the test.

## Do the tests even matter anymore?

Since the start of COVID the testing landscape has been changing rapidly. Overall, they have become less important, but there are still some schools that are fully requiring them (hello Florida and Georgia public

colleges). Additionally, many of the schools that are test optional are releasing their stance on these policies year to year. Because of this, we recommend a student have at least one official test score. This leaves every college option open (especially if your college list is still in development) and gives you a score that you can strategize with and use to your advantage in the case it helps you (and not use if it doesn't).

### What does test optional really mean?

Optional really does mean optional, despite all the rumors you may have heard. If a school has a test optional policy, that means you are fully eligible for admission with or without a test score. So, even if you have a score, you do not need to report it or send to the college if it doesn't strengthen your file. This is where having a score gives you more strategic power. You can send to some schools where it benefits you and choose to omit it at schools where it doesn't help you. Make sure to read the fine print though, as some majors may require (or strongly recommend) a test score at certain schools. For example, engineering and nursing departments tend to still favor test scores. Some schools may also be test optional for admission, but not for scholarship consideration. You'll always want to verify this information on a school's admissions website, but [here is a helpful blog post](#) as a starting point. Moral of the story: test optional really does mean optional, but having a score in hand can be really helpful to strategize with and depending on your college list, major, and scholarship consideration it may be required.

### Do I need to take the test with the writing section?

As of June 2021, the essay is no longer on the SAT and has been becoming less and less relevant over the years. If you are taking the ACT, you most likely do not need to take it with writing as it is only required at a few schools. Always verify requirements on a school's admissions website, but [this article](#) can help you get a quick glance of where this might still be required.

### I decided I want to test and use formal test prep. Who's the best one?

There are many great local options! We think a student's learning style and personality can affect which one is best for them. Because of this we have compiled a wide list of test prep options we trust in the area. You can access this list on the SM website under the testing section of the college counseling page. As noted on the website, [Collegewise](#) and [Future Focused](#) are offering discounts to SM students, so make sure you mention you're an SM student when you call!