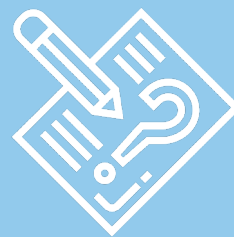


EA College Counseling: STANDARDIZED TESTING



ACT VS SAT: *What's the difference?*

The SAT and ACT exams are both widely accepted at all U.S. colleges and universities. While both exams demonstrate college readiness, the tests vary in structure and timing as well as content and scoring.

	ACT	SAT
<i>Widely accepted at all U.S. colleges and universities</i>	YES	YES
<i>Measures critical thinking and analytical skills</i>	YES	YES
<i>Length of exam</i>	approx. 3 hours	2 hrs. 15 min.
<i>Assessment type</i>	tests understanding of HS curriculum	aptitude test
<i>Exam sections</i>	English, reading, math, and science	English, reading, and math
<i>STEM score</i>	YES	NO

Each exam requires different strategies. Before selecting which exam to invest time and energy in preparing, we recommend taking a full-length practice ACT and SAT test. Then, speak to your EA college counselor to select the exam that is best suited for you.

DO I ACTUALLY NEED TO TEST?

Your EA college counselor can provide advice about what to do about testing. If a student is **historically not a strong tester**, they might consider not testing at all or postpone testing until they have a firmer sense of the colleges they are considering.

The testing landscape has become increasingly complicated. While there are about 1,800 test-optional or test-free colleges, there are now a growing number of colleges that prefer applicants to submit test scores, require test scores if students' GPAs fall below a specified benchmark, or require testing of all applicants. [Fairtest.org](https://fairtest.org) is an excellent resource for staying on top of application testing policies.

TO SEND OR NOT TO SEND? THAT IS THE QUESTION.

Because every institution has different testing requirements, score submission methods, and score averages, the answer to send or not to send your scores is "it depends."

Generally, if your scores are **above or fall within the mid-50% range** for testing, you will likely want to submit them. If your scores are **below or in the lower half of the mid-50% score range**, you may want to consider applying test-optional if available. Your EA counselor is here to help you strengthen your application, with or without scores.

TEST-FREE VS TEST-OPTIONAL

There are a number of institutions, like the University of California (UCs and Cal States) that do not consider ACT or SAT scores when evaluating applications and make admission decisions without scores. These schools are **test-free**. Admission decisions are made without test scores for ALL student applicants.

If a school does not require standardized test scores when evaluating applicants, they are considered **test-optional**. Admission decisions can be made without test scores. If students believe their test scores are indicative of their academic potential, they may submit their test scores. The decision to submit scores or not is for the student to make.

TEST PREP FAQ

Where does test prep fit into this?

Each winter and spring, EA offers sophomores and juniors multiple opportunities to take practice SATs and ACTs. Families receive feedback about whether to prep for either test so they can make an informed decision.

If I take the tests, do I need to prepare?

That's a matter of personal preference. While studying for any exam is a good idea, it is your choice *how* and *to what extent* you study. You may choose to use a test prep company, or you may not.

What is the timeline for standardized tests and exam preparation?

Students often start testing in fall or winter of junior year. If a student opts to take their first ACT or SAT at that time, students might prep the summer after sophomore year when there are fewer commitments. When students wait until spring of junior year to begin testing, there is still plenty of time. The choice and pace of testing is an individual decision. In a test-optional world, this schedule generally does not need to be accelerated for athletes.

MANAGING TEST STRESS

Look at the big picture. Standardized testing is just one piece of the college admission puzzle. Try your best AND remember your scores do not define you. They will not be the only reason you are (or aren't) admitted to any particular college.

Practice self-care. Take breaks, breathe, exercise, and meditate.

Reward yourself. Give yourself small rewards when you stay focused on your studies.

Find a quiet and clean place to work. Messiness can increase anxiety. The right space will help you concentrate.

Your test scores are not for public consumption. The only folks who need to know how you are doing are you, your family, your college counselor, and your tutor (if applicable).

TEST PREP RESOURCES

Our list of test prep companies and resources will help you research the program that best suits your student's learning style, your calendar, and your budget.

[EXPLORE TEST PREP](#)

WHAT TO ASK: TEST PREP

As you take time to learn about test prep companies' approaches and fee structures, consider asking these 10 questions:

What is the pricing? If finances are a concern for your family, do they offer financial aid or discounts for families?

What does the contract include? How many sessions are offered, and what is the student prep timeline?

Be cautious if the test prep company makes a score (and any other sort of) guarantee.

If your student doesn't hit the number they want, what support is offered?

If the tutor thinks your student has reached their limit, can you break the contract, or will they encourage you to sign up for other tutoring services with the company?

Does the company offer individualized tutoring and/or classroom instruction? Will they create a personalized study plan based on the student's strengths and weaknesses? How do they assess progress? If instruction is structured as a class, what is the class size?

What training and experiences do the tutors have? What is their approach to teaching?

If a tutor is not a fit with your student, can you change?

What kind of practice materials and resources do they provide for SAT/ACT preparation? Do they offer access to official SAT practice tests, and how do they incorporate those tests into the lessons?

How is the company/tutor modifying their test preparation to accommodate the digital SAT and adaptive testing?

REACH OUT.

The EA College Counseling team is always here to help. If you have any questions along the way, please do not hesitate to reach out to your EA college counselor!