



Comparing the SAT (Current and Redesigned) to the ACT

A guide from Summit Educational Group

When it is released in 2016, the new SAT will be a significant change from the current test. Also, the redesign will affect how we determine whether a student is better-suited for the SAT or ACT. Below is a broad comparison of the new SAT to the current SAT and the ACT.

	Current SAT	New SAT (Spring 2016)	ACT
Description	The new SAT will require similar skills and test similar content to that of the ACT and current SAT. Many of the changes to the new SAT's format will make it look a lot like the ACT, but the SAT will retain its focus as an aptitude test. Among the biggest changes to the SAT are a sharper focus on critical-thinking, an emphasis on real-world problems, a new scoring system, and an overhaul of the essay section. Overall, the redesigned SAT will place a bigger emphasis on problem-solving and understanding context. Comparatively, the ACT will remain more of an achievement test, requiring a broad knowledge of many concepts, as well as considerable speed and endurance.		
Format & Length	10 short sections: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 Critical Reading; 3 Mathematics; 3 Writing (including Essay); 1 experimental (not scored) Questions have 5 answer choices Total testing time: 3 hours, 45 minutes 	5 long sections (comprising 3 "tests" and an optional essay): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing & Language; Reading; 2 Math; Essay Questions have 4 answer choices Total testing time: 3 hours, 50 minutes (with essay) 	5 long sections (comprising 4 "tests" and an optional essay): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English; Mathematics; Reading; Science; Writing (optional essay) Most questions have 4 answer choices (Math has 5) Total testing time: 3 hours, 25 minutes (with essay)
Scoring	Combined score: 600-2400 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical Reading: 200-800; Math: 200-800; Writing: 200-800 Writing score comprised of Multiple Choice and Essay subscores. ¼-point deduction for incorrect answers 	Combined score: 400-1600 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence-Based Reading and Writing: 200-800; Math: 200-800 Essay score reported separately "Cross-Test Scores" report performance on Science and History/Social Studies across entire test No deduction for incorrect answers 	Composite score: 1-36 (average of 4 tests) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English: 1-36; Math: 1-36; Reading: 1-36; Science: 1-36 Writing score not factored into Composite score Combined English/Writing score provided separately: 1-36 No deduction for incorrect answers
Writing/ English	Identify and correct errors in single sentences <ul style="list-style-type: none"> standard English grammar and usage punctuation not tested Limited and predictable set of errors	Revise and edit a piece of writing for, logical structure, and effective rhetoric <ul style="list-style-type: none"> standard English grammar and usage punctuation logical structure effective rhetoric includes informational graphics 	Revise and edit a piece of writing for, logical structure, and effective rhetoric <ul style="list-style-type: none"> standard English grammar and usage punctuation logical structure effective rhetoric commonly confused words
Math	Arithmetic, Algebra I and II, Geometry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> apply core math skills to solve mostly non-standard, "tricky" problems formulas provided 10 Grid-In questions (no answer choices)	Pre-Algebra through basic Trigonometry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> strong emphasis on Algebra Calculator prohibited on one section 12 Grid-In questions (no answer choices) 1 Extended Thinking question (4 points)	Pre-Algebra through basic Trigonometry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> math tested in straightforward manner extensive range of concepts tested emphasis on word problems formulas not provided
Reading	Vocabulary-based sentence completions Total of 7 short and long reading passages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> many inference, tone, purpose questions questions follow order of passage 	Vocabulary de-emphasized 4 long passages and 1 paired passage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 passages include diagrams/charts 1 passage from U.S. "founding document" 	4 long passages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> very little emphasis on vocabulary straightforward questions that require close reading of passage order of questions is random less time per question
Science	The current SAT does not have a Science section.	The new SAT does not have stand-alone Science section, but Science questions will be included throughout the Math, Reading, and Writing & Language tests.	40 questions distributed over 7 passages <ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasis on charts, diagrams, etc. Science is a reasoning test—rarely requires prior science knowledge
Essay	25 minutes, always the first section <ul style="list-style-type: none"> broad theme can be approached formulaically or creatively 	50 minutes, always the last section <ul style="list-style-type: none"> analyze a passage and evaluate author's reasoning and rhetoric students' opinions discouraged Essay is scored on 2-8 scale on three traits (Reading, Analysis, and Writing) 	30 minutes, always the last test <ul style="list-style-type: none"> narrow topic "relevant" to high school students demand a more structured response optional, but required by most schools