



Taking the SAT and the ACT

How to Do It and Who Should Take Both

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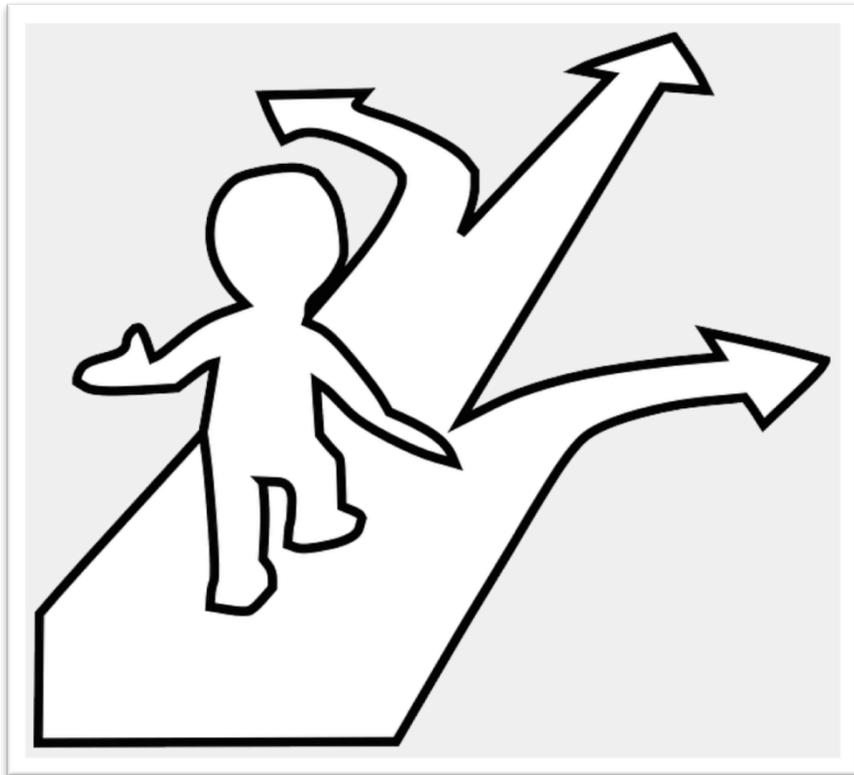


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INTRO

Taking the SAT and the ACT



The SAT and ACT may both be college entrance exams, but the way they test students on their college readiness is subtly different.

Most students will do better on one test than the other, so **why would you want to go through the hassle of taking both exams?** And is it even feasible to do so?

We'll answer both of these questions in this ebook.

1: Why Take Both?

> **Key Point:** Most students should only take **either** the SAT or the ACT.



First and foremost, it must be emphasized: **the default should be to take either the SAT or ACT, not both.** Students sometimes think the more the merrier, or that a consistent score across the tests is more impressive than a high score on just one. This is just plain wrong - taking [both the SAT and ACT](#) is usually unnecessary, and trying to do so can negatively affect your scores [on both exams](#).

Even though most students will only ever need to take one exam or the other, however, there are a few cases where it makes sense to take both the SAT and ACT.

2: Different Program Requirements

- > **Key Point:** Colleges accept both tests equally now, but different score thresholds might make one test better than the other for specific schools.



While at this point colleges view SAT and ACT scores as equally valid, some schools may have **higher standards** for one test than for the other.

For instance, if you compare percentile ranks of the scores of accepted students at School A, you might find that the **middle 50%** of students at School A have **90-99 %ile**

ACT scores, but only 85-95 %ile SAT scores. This means that you can get admitted to School A with a lower score, percentile-wise, on the SAT than on the ACT. The same is true in the other direction for other schools.

Important Note About Score Percentiles

For the most part, the differences between admitted students' SAT and ACT percentiles at a school are **not large enough** to warrant taking both tests. Any slight advantage you might get from having two scores will likely be cancelled out by your scoring lower on both tests than you would've had you taken only one or the other.

As a good guideline, if the percentiles of a schools' middle 50% of ACT vs. SAT scores are **less than 10 points apart**, it's **not worth** taking a second test you weren't planning on taking in an attempt to game the system.

Read more about possible reasons discrepancies between accepted student score percentiles on the SAT vs. the ACT and what it means for you in [our article](#) about what Ivy League schools think about the ACT.

3: Evenly Balanced Scores

> **Key Point:** Take both tests if you're scoring equally well on realistic practice tests for both and have a lot of time to study.



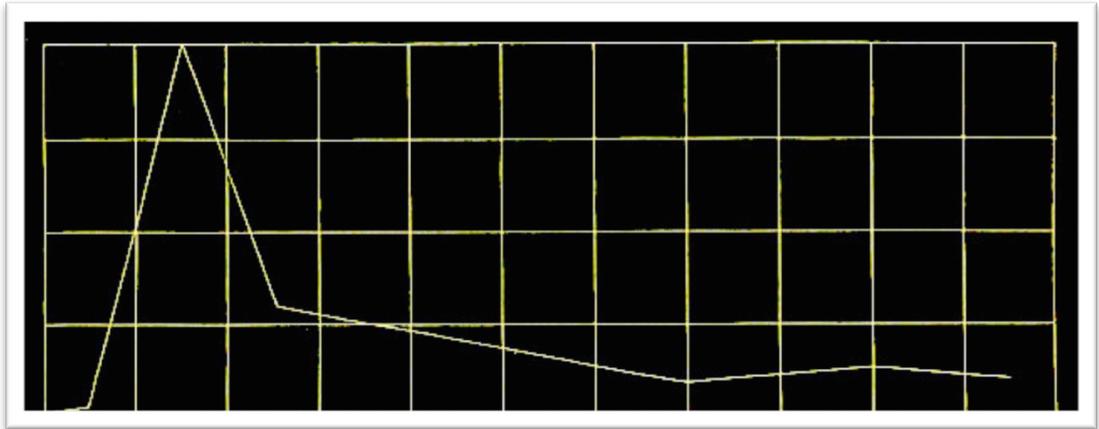
If you've taken [realistic SAT](#) and [ACT practice tests](#), have gotten equivalent percentile scores, and have excess time to study, then you might want to consider taking both tests.

There is some [score variation](#) between different test dates, so if you have a **good day** with one test and a **bad day** with the other, you could potentially **score relatively higher** on either the SAT or ACT on test day. This strategy is

only useful if you have excess time to study, however. Otherwise, the time you spend trying to keep up both your SAT and ACT scores could be better spent nudging your higher scoring test [towards perfection](#).

4: Oh No, Score Plateau!

- > **Key Point:** Consider taking both tests if your score on one test has leveled out.



Imagine this situation: you've been studying hard for the SAT, taking regular practice tests and practice questions, but for some reason, your score isn't increasing any more.

After a certain point, further [score increases](#) can be difficult for students who have managed to **improve** low ACT or SAT scores, but can't seem to move their scores up to the **next level**. Whether they want to accomplish this for specific

college applications or just for their own personal satisfaction, it can be highly frustrated to get stuck with a score that won't seem to budge, no matter what you do.

If you have plenty of time left to study, you might want to consider at least **trying out a practice test for the exam you're not planning on taking**. For example, if you've been studying for ACT but can't seem to crack a 28 on ACT Science, taking the SAT may be to your advantage **because of the differences in format between the two tests**.

5: How to Take Both

- > **Key Point:** Spend most of your prep time on the test you do better on; allocate at least 20 hours of studying to your secondary test.



Your first priority should be the test you're better at, since you want to put in the most effort where you'll get the most reward.

We recommend against studying for the two tests at the same time, but given many students' busy schedules this may be unavoidable. If that is the case, then you need to focus your

studying. **Spend 60-90% of your time on the test you're better on, or an even higher percentage if you're studying more overall.**

You should also allocate **at least 20 hours of studying** to your secondary test. Keep in mind that this includes taking full-length practice tests, which each eat up 3-4 hours of time, so this isn't as daunting as it might appear.

AND NOW WHAT?

Through this guide, you've learned a lot about choosing whether or not to take both the SAT and the ACT. Make sure you consider your specific situation and determine whether or not it matches any of the ones we've outlined here before deciding to take both tests.

We at PrepScholar believe we've built the best SAT and ACT prep program in the world. But even if you don't work with us at PrepScholar, we hope you found this guide useful.

Next up: Read our free Ebook on the PrepScholar system today: [Click here to get your Ebook!](#)

or **call us** at **1(866) 811-5546**, where one of our Academic Advisers will walk you through the best options for you and your family.

We'd love to hear from you.

Finally, if you found this guide helpful, please share it with any other people who might benefit.

Good luck!

-The PrepScholar Team