

SAT or ACT or Both (Making an Educated Choice)

By Mick Rosenblum

In a number of articles, I have discussed the fact that, for decades, people have erroneously believed that the ACT is an easier test than the SAT. Indeed, based upon a number of fundamental misconceptions, many students, parents, and educational professionals, have come to believe and disseminate this myth. As a result, even in light of the new SAT format, parents and students often blindly harbor the notion that the ACT is the better choice.

That said, I must stress that fact that I have absolutely no preference for either the ACT or the SAT. I prep students for either test, and many of my students elect to maximize their options by taking both. What is important, however, is that parents select an SAT or ACT for the right reasons and avoid basing their decisions on misguided information. In order to help you make your decision, I would like to offer you a simple side-by-side comparison of the nature and content of both tests. In that way, you can begin to make your own informed choices. Please take a moment to look at the table below:

SAT				ACT			
Section	Time (minutes)	Questions	Minutes/Question	Section	Time (minutes)	Questions	Minutes/Question
Reading	65	52	1.25	English	45	75	.6
Writing and Language	35	44	.8	Math	60	60	1
Math (no calculator)	25	20	1.25	Reading	35	40	.88
Math (calculator)	55	38	1.45	Science	35	40	.88
Total	180	154	1.17	Total	175	215	.81

Although one can argue that the SAT Reading Test and The SAT Writing and Language Test are remarkably similar in style and content to the ACT Reading Test and the ACT English Test, respectively, the SAT Math Tests (two sections) are not as concept-based as is the ACT Math Test. Furthermore, the SAT does not house a Science Test; the ACT does, however. The essays are now optional for both the SAT and ACT and are relatively comparable in length and difficulty (although there are differences between the two), so I did not include them in the table. Incidentally, to avoid confusion, I should point out that both the SAT and ACT refer to their individual sections as “tests.”

Most significant, perhaps, is the fact that, although both the SAT and ACT are identical in the number of test sections and are roughly the same in total time, the numbers of questions and the time-per-question favor the SAT rather dramatically. Unfortunately, many people are prone to make hasty, cursory comparisons of the SAT and ACT. Such comparisons will undoubtedly lead those folks to astonishingly erroneous conclusions such as, “because the SAT houses two math tests and the ACT only one, the SAT is more ‘math heavy’ than the ACT.” A detailed comparison, however, would lead one to exactly the opposite (and accurate) conclusion. The two SAT Math Tests present fifty-eight (58) total questions in eighty minutes (with a break in between the two sections). The ACT presents sixty (60) questions to be completed in a single sixty minute period! Clearly, the SAT Math Tests offer a much better time-per-question ratio and time management opportunity than does the ACT Math Test. Incidentally, there are several other important differences to consider, and I will be happy to discuss them with you if you are interested.

Sadly, I have found that many, of the people and organizations who routinely recommend one test over the other know little or nothing about the nature of either test. In fact, I have even found this to be true of many of the colleges and universities themselves, the very institutions that require such tests! This is why I urge you to consider the facts rather than the myths. Call me and I will be happy to answer any of your questions and guide you through your decision-making process.