SAT/ACT Comparison

The tests have a LOT in common! For example, both tests…

- have 5 sections that always go in the same order, with the essay at the end.
- count how many questions you get right, with no penalty for wrong answers.
- reward the same general good testing strategies.
- cover much of the same material and reward the same kind of preparation.

There are some **differences**, too. Compared to the ACT, the SAT…

- gives you 30-40% more time per question.
- might feel a bit trickier or less straightforward (but not necessarily "harder").
- lacks a Science section.
- includes some fine differences within the various sections:

Writing and Language vs. English
- Two passages will include a graph or chart.
- Questions are not aligned with text.

Reading
- Questions are mostly (but not all) in order.
- Two passages will include a graph or chart.
- Two questions from each passage — the "Evidence" questions — ask you which line(s) from the passage best support the answer to the previous question.

Math
- Includes a 25-minute no-calculator section.
- Includes grid-ins, not just multiple-choice questions.
- 4 answer choices; on Guess-and-Check questions, use B and C.
- Several additional topics, including some foundational statistics.

Essay
- A completely different prompt, task, rubric, etc.

Scoring Comparison (SAT/ACT Concordance Chart)

ACT (36)	SAT Section score (800)	SAT Total score (1600)
36	790-800	1590-1600
30	680-690	1370
26	620	1240
21	540	1080
18	480-490	970
15	420-430	850

SAT Scoring Structure

The scoring structure for the SAT converts your *raw score* (the number of questions you get right) into several different *scaled scores* (the scores colleges actually get that indicate your performance compared to other test-takers).

Raw Score
You earn 1 point for each correct answer. There is no penalty for wrong answers, so never leave a question blank! Fill in blanks at the end of each passage, and with 2-3 minutes to go on each section to ensure you do so without any errors.

Scaled Score Type	*Description*	*Score Range*
Total Score	Sum of the two section scores.	400-1600
Test Scores (3)	Reading, Writing and Language, and Math.	10–40
Section Scores (2)	Evidence-Based Reading and Writing, and Math.	200–800
Subscores (7)	*Reading and Writing and Language:* Command of Evidence and Words in Context. *Writing and Language:* Expression of Ideas and Standard English Conventions. *Math: Heart of Algebra,* Problem Solving and Data Analysis, and Passport to Advanced Math.	1–15
Cross-Test Scores (2)	Analysis in History/Social Studies and Analysis in Science. Based on selected questions in the Reading, Writing and Language, and Math Tests. These scores show how well you use your skills to analyze texts and solve problems in these subject areas.	10–40
SAT Essay Scores (3)	Reading, Analysis, and Writing. Each category is graded from 1-4 by two separate readers.	2–8

SAT: Two Things About the Test

Context is meaningful.
If you read [College Board's materials](#) regarding the new SAT, they're very proud of their attempts make questions more context-based than they were previously. For example, the Writing and Language questions now refer to passages and emphasize relationships with the tone and content of the passage, where they used to refer to stand-alone, out-of-context sentences. Reading and Math questions are designed the same way.

To answer context-dependent questions, you should always follow two basic principles:

1. Don't answer questions without considering the passage, chart, graph, etc. — whatever information is present. Many questions are *purposefully designed* so that you need this additional information!

2. Context-dependent questions can also make things easier for you: you can extrapolate the meaning of a word from how it's used in a sentence or passage; you can figure out appropriate phrasing from the tone of the rest of the passage; and so on.

There are lots of graphs and charts in all sections.
If you have already prepared for the ACT, you are mostly ready for this element of the SAT. Data representations won't be as complicated as those in the ACT Science section.

Either way, the process you must follow is the same: always evaluate a graph or chart by first looking at its title, axes, units, scales, and keys. Any representation in a graph or chart is meaningless without knowing what it actually shows. Once you understand the title, axes, units, scales, and keys, you can see what the graph or chart actually shows.

In other words: look at everything else first and the actual data last.

SAT: Introduction to Reading

The [Reading Test](#) is made up of long-ish passages accompanied by 10 or 11 questions each.

Evidence Questions
Generally, two questions from each reading passage will ask you exactly this:

> Which choice provides the best evidence for the
> answer to the previous question?

Each Evidence question, therefore, refers to a "regular" question. There will be 9 Evidence questions, plus 9 questions that they refer to. That means that 18 questions, or more than a third of the Reading Test, consist of Evidence question pairs. They are worth strategizing around.

Typically, we develop our own answers first without referring to the answer choices. We do Evidence question pairs differently for two reasons:

- The suggested lines in the Evidence question make allow us to more quickly find the right part of the passage to answer the "regular" question.
- Even if we get the "regular" question right without looking at the suggested lines, maybe we did so by looking at different lines than what the test writers had in mind. That would mean re-doing the entire process for the Evidence question; this is not a good use of time!

The result is the steps that follow.

How should you do SAT Reading passages?
1. Read the question stems.
2. As you do, <mark>circle all of the question pairs</mark> (regular question + Evidence question immediately after).
3. Read that passage. I do not currently have a preference regarding whether you taking notes as you read; for now I will leave this to you, through experimentation.
4. Answer the questions in order, but feel free to skip one and come back to it before you leave the passage.
5. For each question pair: read the first question, refer to the lines provided by the Evidence question, and find the choice that answers the first question. Then you'll have the answers to both.
6. Bubble in an answer for every question before you move on to the next passage.

SAT: Introduction to Writing and Language

SAT Writing and Language is just like ACT English. If you've already done ACT prep, you don't have much work to do here — and if you're doing the SAT first, the coming transition to ACT English should be an easy one. The SAT basically copied the ACT's material and formatting, so all of the rules and strategies you learn will apply to both tests. Just remember the SAT's emphasis on context and always read the whole passage before answering any questions. Here's what you should know:

Basic grammar and punctuation rules are important.
You'll be asked many questions about fundamental grammar topics like verb tense, parallel construction, subject-verb agreement, run-on sentences, and pronouns, and about proper punctuation comma use with commas, apostrophes, dashes, and semicolons.

Questions about organization, phrasing, and "sound" follow rules, too.
Don't think that you just have to go by "feel" on these questions. There are strategies for figuring out where a sentence should be placed within a paragraph; which phrase is the most relevant to include; and so on. There are learnable techniques for all of the SAT question types!

How should you do SAT Writing and Language passages?
1. Read the passage.
2. Notice any passages with numbered sentences; they will be in brackets like [1], [2], and so on. This means there will *definitely* be a question about the ordering of the sentences in that paragraph, or about where to insert a new sentence.
3. Notice anything that sounds weird — maybe mark with an ×, if you'd like. But don't answer questions yet.
4. Take the time to review any attached charts or graphs.
5. Go back to each question.
6. Err on the side of re-reading more than necessary as you prepare to choose your answers.

SAT: Introduction to Math

The Math Test includes a 25-minute no-calculator section and a 55-minute section on which calculators are allowed. Given the no-calculator section, *ensure that you review basic math skills* that you probably haven't done by hand in a while: for example, long division, operations with fractions, fraction/decimal/percent conversion, and so on.

Questions fall into one of four categories:

Heart of Algebra — 35%
The new SAT strongly emphasizes what it calls Heart of Algebra — in other words, linear equations, linear inequalities, and functions, alone or in pairs. Ensure that you are an expert on everything about linear equations, linear inequalities, and linear functions — solving them, graphing them, their various forms (standard, point-slope, slope-intercept), and solving pairs of them using substitution and elimination.

Problem Solving and Data Analysis — 30%
Questions on the problem-solving side of the Problem Solving and Data Analysis category will focus on real-world situations involving percent change and ratios. More questions will involve data analysis — basically, beginning statistics including measures of central tendency, measures of spread, confidence intervals, and the various ways to describe relationships between variables.

Passport to Advanced Math — 25%
The Passport to Advanced Math category includes typical topics from late Algebra 1/beginning Algebra 2: exponents and radicals, solving quadratic equations, functions, rational expressions, and so on.

Additional Topics in Math — 10%
What Additional Topics in Math really means is geometry; why the section isn't called "Geometry," nobody knows. We'll discuss later which geometry relationships you really need to memorize, and which ones you can rely on the reference information for. This category also randomly includes operations with complex numbers ($a + bi$).

How should you do SAT Math questions?
1. Do the Multiple Choice questions first; go until they start to get tough.
2. Then switch to the Grid-Ins; go until *those* start to get tough.
3. When the Grid-Ins get tough, switch back to the rest of the Multiple Choice.
4. Save the toughest Grid-In questions for last.
5. You can always skip and come back to any question that trips you up.
6. Know the rules for the Grid-In answer format.
7. Put an answer for every question before time is up.