

SAT vs ACT (Current versions)

The SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) and the ACT (American College Testing) are both accepted by US college admissions panels. The aim of the tests is to provide an objective and quantifiable measure of the student's ability.

Please note that an increasing number of US colleges are now SAT/ACT test-optional: that is to say that they de-emphasise the use of standardized tests by making admissions decisions about substantial numbers of applicants without using the SAT or ACT. For an up-to-date list, see <http://fairtest.org/university/optional>.

Which test is more widely recognised?

Both are accepted by US colleges and universities. There is no preference of one test over the other.

Which test is better for me?

Whichever is better suited to your own test-taking style – look at both and decide.

Useful quiz to help you decide:

<http://arborbridge.com/quiz-which-test-should-you-take-the-sat-or-act/>

What is the structure of the tests?

ACT	SAT
Offered in HK: Sept, Oct, Dec, April, June	Offered in HK: Oct, Nov, Dec, Jan, May, June
Duration: 2hrs 55 mins	Duration: 3hrs 45 mins
4 multiple choice tests	3 separate sections – some questions multiple choice, others are not
Optional essay – 30 mins	SAT 2 subject tests – some colleges require up to 3

What is the test content?

ACT	SAT
Section 1: English (language mechanics and rhetoric)	Section 1: Maths (numbers + operations, algebra + functions, geometry + measurement, data analysis, statistics + probability)
Section 2: Maths (algebra to advanced trigonometry)	Section 2: Critical Reading (sentence completion/multiple choice + long passage-type questions)
Section 3: Reading (arts and literature)	Section 3: Writing Short essay on an assigned topic
Section 4: Science (evaluation and problem-solving)	
Section 5: optional essay	

How are the tests scored?

ACT	SAT
Section 1: 1-36 points	Maths: 800 points
Section 2: 1-36 points	Critical Reading: 800 points

Section 3 1-36 points	Writing: 800 points
Section 4: 1-36 points	Maximum composite score: 2400 points
Optional essay: 1-36 points	
Maximum composite score: ACT (No Writing): 144 ACT (Plus writing): 180	

How do I register?

SAT and ACT tests need to be taken at one of the examination centres around Hong Kong. FIS is not an examination centre for these tests.

ACT	SAT
Register online and see HK test centres: http://www.actstudent.org/regist/outside/	Register online and see HK test centres: https://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-international-dates
5 test centres in HK	Over 20 test centres in HK
2012-13 Cost: ACT (No Writing): US\$35.00 + US\$30.00 (international testing fee) ACT (Plus Writing) US\$50.00+US\$30.00 (international testing fee)	2012-13 Cost: SAT: US\$51.00 SAT II Subject Test US\$24.50 (per test)

Which SAT II subject tests are available?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> German |
| <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. History | <input type="checkbox"/> German with Listening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> World History | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Math Level 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish with Listening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Math Level 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Modern Hebrew |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biology/EM | <input type="checkbox"/> Italian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry | <input type="checkbox"/> Latin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physics | <input type="checkbox"/> Chinese with Listening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French | <input type="checkbox"/> Japanese with Listening |
| <input type="checkbox"/> French with Listening | <input type="checkbox"/> Korean with Listening |

What are the average global scores for SAT/ACT?

SAT: around 1500 / 2400

ACT: 21/36

What other advice can help me choose between SAT and ACT?

- ACT questions tend to be more straightforward.
- The SAT has a stronger emphasis on vocabulary; some of the words tested can be purposefully obscure. Some FIS French Stream students have noted that for this reason, they find the ACT much more suitable for them.
- The ACT is more subject-based, whereas the SAT uses very particular question types to assess problem-solving skills. In this sense, again, the ACT is more straightforward.
- There are no additional subject tests for ACT, whereas SAT II tests are required by many colleges for students choosing SAT.

- The ACT has a Science section, while the SAT does not.
- The ACT tests more advanced maths concepts: in addition to basic arithmetic, algebra I and II, and geometry, the ACT tests your knowledge of trigonometry. However, the questions are more straightforward than those in the SAT.
- The 30-minute ACT Writing Test is optional on test day, but required by many colleges. The 25-minute SAT essay is required and is factored into your writing score.
- The SAT is broken up into more sections, and part of the skill is to be able to jump in and out of the different sections without losing focus.
- The ACT composite score is more important than subscores, unlike SAT. So the ACT may be better if you are stronger in one area and weaker in another.

How can I prepare?

Past test papers are available online. If you are self-disciplined, you should be able to make good progress by working through these on your own. If you require more structured guidance, you can engage with a tuition centre in HK, e.g. Kaplan, NTK, ArborBridge, The Edge (which can be expensive!)

There are also SAT guides with past questions in the FIS library.

The Khan Academy offers free SAT guidance online. Its mission is to offer equal opportunity to all students, regardless of income: <https://www.khanacademy.org/test-prep/sat>

When should I take the tests?

Most students take the ACT/SAT twice in L6/1ere, and a 3rd time if necessary in the autumn of U6/Terminale. It is not advisable to take the tests too many times. Firstly, too much test-taking will have an adverse effect on the student's IB/French Bac studies. Secondly, some colleges demand to see all test scores. If the tests are taken too early and generate poor scores, this may disadvantage the student.