

**THIS IS ONLY A TEST!!!**

We are now conducting a  
test of your academic ability.

This is not the end of the world.

This is only a test called the  
“SAT” or “ACT”.

Prepare yourself and you will  
survive!



Contrary to popular belief, the SAT's or ACT's are not the single most important factor in gaining college admission. The results of these tests are just one small part of an overall assessment that college admission counselors make of your academic promise.

You should also keep in mind that you have probably taken hundreds of tests and done well on them during the last 12 years. You are an experienced test taker. To perform successfully on yet another test, all you need to do is approach it the way you did important tests in the past: find out what the test will be like and prepare accordingly.

## **WHAT THE TESTS ARE LIKE**

Both the SAT and ACT are tests designed by private, nonprofit companies to measure the abilities you need to succeed in college. More than 90% of U.S. colleges require you to take one or the other.

Although both tests are multiple-choice, they are far from identical. The SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) is made up of verbal and math sections. The verbal questions test your vocabulary, verbal reasoning, and understanding of what you read. The math questions test your ability to solve problems involving arithmetic, elementary algebra and geometry. These verbal and mathematical abilities are related to how well you will do academically in college. The SAT is produced by the College Entrance Examination Board (often called The College Board) in New York City and is administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which is located in Princeton, New Jersey.

The ACT (American College Testing) Assessment consists of four tests: English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning. It is produced and administered by the American College Testing Program in Iowa City, Iowa.

The purpose of both college entrance examinations is to give colleges a way of comparing students equally on a nationwide basis. These tests were developed at a time when high school courses were far from standardized (they've become a little more so now). Colleges wanted to be sure that the grades the students earned in high school reflected their ability and not the difficulty level of the courses.

College entrance test today serve much the same purpose, although so far lesser extent. Research shows that your high school record (including grades, activities, and recommendations) is the best predictor of college success. Your record not only shows how you performed academically over time, it also reveals other success factors such as your creativity, special talents, and motivation. Colleges know this, and so they weigh your record heavily in making admission decisions. To them, SAT and ACT scores simply add confirmation to your high school record.

The colleges you apply to will state whether they accept the SAT, ACT, or either for their entrance exam. According to a Princeton Review survey of competitive colleges and universities, most schools accept either.

With a few exceptions, the ACT is more commonly preferred by mid-western, mountain, and southeastern colleges, while the SAT is the choice of northeastern and western schools. If your high school does not offer the test you need for a college's requirements, you should contact the testing organization and find out how you can make the best arrangement for taking the test.

## **PREPARING FOR THE TESTS**

According to both test companies, the best way to prepare for college admission tests is to take a good selection of solid academic courses in high school, to work hard at these courses, and to read widely. But, there are also ways to prepare in the short term. They involve mental, emotional and physical training.

## MENTAL TRAINING

There are a variety of materials that can help you prepare your thought processes for the SAT/ACT's. The materials include:

**THE TEST BULLETIN**—When you register for the SAT or ACT, you will receive a test bulletin. Reading this bulletin will familiarize you with the content and organization of the test and will provide you with some test-taking tips.

**ACTUAL TESTS**—The more familiar you are with the format of the test, the less time you will need to decipher directions, and the more time you'll have to analyze test questions. Both testing services provide their own testing booklets that contain actual tests used in the past as well as tips on how to take the tests.

When you work with these tests, try to take several under the same time limits you will face on test day. This will teach you how to pace yourself.

**PREPARATION BOOKS**—Commercial preparation books introduce you to each section of a test and suggest strategies and logical thinking processes for completing the exercises. Although the sample test questions they supply are not actual questions from previous tests (only The College Board and ACT provide those) they are similar enough to be helpful. In many cases, the test-taking advice these books offer is more thorough than is the SAT/ACT practice test materials. In fact, the advice can be extremely helpful.

Preparation through books requires a great deal of self-discipline. You must spend hours at a time sitting alone, taking tests and reading tips and instructions. Of course, that process mimics the actual test process, so it's good practice!

**SOFTWARE**—If you own a personal computer, you might also consider investing in test-preparation software. Some students like the immediate feed-back they get from a computer program. It lets them see at once whether or not an answer is correct. Most programs immediately review the reasoning behind each answer as well.

**COACHING COURSES**—For students who feel that self-study is not enough, there are test-training courses that will formalize your studying for the test, give you the support of other students, and let you interact with a teacher. Courses can be especially helpful if you're a poor test-taker. Also, a teacher's insight can prove to be very instructive when you encounter those questions you cannot work out on your own.

If your school offers a free SAT or ACT course, by all means take it. However, many test-training programs are run by private companies that charge a fee. Most times, these courses cost hundreds of dollars. You should consider a program like this only if it is within your family budget and you are willing to put the required time and effort into the course.

No matter what materials you use, you should begin your test preparation several months in advance. For fall testing, begin early in the summer. For spring testing, begin when school starts.

Try to study three or four times a week for 30 to 60 minutes each session. This is called **distributed learning**, and is more effective than cramming the night or even the week before the test. Cramming will confuse more than help you, and may make you so tired you will score lower than you should.

## **EMOTIONAL TRAINING**

Test anxiety can start long before your test date and last until you've actually received your scores. That's a lot of suffering and it's unnecessary. A little emotional training can relieve much of this anxiety.

More often than not, the anxiety is caused by negative self-talk. Here are just a few examples of the things students say to themselves:

"I always mess up on tests like this one."

"My scores will be lower than my friends' scores, even though I do better in school."

"Nothing I can do will raise my scores high enough to be accepted into \_\_\_\_\_ Univ."

"I'll freeze. . . . I know I will."

Some anxiety can actually help your performance by keeping you alert and motivated; just ask any athlete, actor, or public speaker. Beyond a certain level, however, anxiety can cause a number of problems. It interferes with your ability to concentrate, causes sleep and eating disorders, and makes you forgetful. In other words, anxiety can affect you in ways that will lower your test scores.

Overcoming is not that difficult. To counteract negative self-talk, use positive self-talk. That's right. You just may talk yourself into better scores by saying to yourself such things as:

"I've done everything I can to get ready. I'm Sure I'll do my best."

"My score on this test won't affect how friends and family think about me."

"Ninety-five percent of the people who take the test score as well as they should.

I'll probably do the same."

"Colleges look at a lot more than just test scores. My record can stand on its own merit."

Positive self-talk works best when you start early, several weeks before the day of the test, and do it often. If you have friends who are taking the test at the same time as you, teach them to use positive self-talk as well. That way, you can boost one another's spirits.

## **PHYSICAL TRAINING**

Your body also needs to be in good shape for your mind to work well. You should lay off the junk food and caffeine-laden drinks for a few days before the test. Too much sugar, grease and caffeine can make you feel more worn out. On test day, eat a healthy, high-energy breakfast. You might try a bowl of cereal or eggs, as well as toast and juice. You don't want to eat too little and become light-headed or eat so much that you get drowsy halfway through the test.

Get into a good sleeping routine before the test. For about a week, try getting to bed early enough to sleep eight hours and still wake up by about 6:00 a.m. Your goal should be to awaken early on test day ready to take on the world!

## **ZERO-HOUR TEST TIPS**

When you're actually taking the test, try this three-step strategy for each section:

1. **Make a first pass through all the items in a section.** Answer all the questions you feel you know. Don't waste time on questions you are unsure of. The point is to be sure you answer all the questions you can.
2. **Make a second pass through the section and try to answer the questions you might be able to work out.** Again, don't waste time on an item if you don't have a clue about how to answer it.
3. **Finally, if there is time, have a go at the items that have stumped you.** Try to work the answer out, and if that doesn't work, eliminate answer choices you know are wrong and then take your best guess.

This three-step approach accomplishes several goals. It gives you the chance to answer all the items you know, keeps you from wasting too much time on troublesome items, and ensures that you answer every question with at least your best guess.

When you are taking the test, be sure you work on every page. The pages in test booklets sometimes stick together. Work carefully and be sure the answer space you fill in corresponds to the item you are answering.

## **A FINAL REMINDER**

SAT and ACT scores will not keep you out of college as long as you have other credentials to make your case. Will low test scores keep you out of your first-choice college? Possibly, but only if you are stretching the match between your qualifications and the requirements of the college. The best practice is to allow yourself several preferred colleges. Then, do all you can to build your personal portfolio, including preparing sensibly for your SAT or ACT test.