

Tests Overview

By Susanna de Chenonceau, M.Ed., College Counselor

What

For college applications at most schools, you need to submit scores for the ACT or the SAT. No school requires both. All schools accept either one. Schools do not prefer one test over another. Students typically take both tests once, their favorite (haha) test a second time, and then submit their best score. Some schools require no test scores at all, so check out: fairtest.org. Some of the most competitive schools also require 2-3 SAT Subject Tests.

When

Prep for tests starting in the summer before Junior year. Begin testing in November, December or January of your Junior year. Order the optional answers report so that you can see your weak spots. Take the ACT and SAT each once (most likely), then choose your stronger test and take that test a second time to try to improve your first score. Students typically send their second score. You DO need to prep on your weak spots in between tests or your score won't go up. "Your score won't go up because you show up!"

Prep

Everyone is prepping for the ACT or SAT, and so should you. You don't want to send in raw scores against everyone's prepped scores. You have several options for test prep:

1. Buy a book and study on your own. Try to get a book with a CD-Rom of practice tests. Good brands are CollegeBoard, Princeton Review, and Kaplan. This is boring and difficult, but wow is it the least expensive method.
2. Use a cool test prep study app like Edupath.
3. Take a class. These usually go 6-10 weeks just before you test. I recommend the summer before Junior year, in August and September. Sometimes a local high school offers classes, or try Princeton Review or Kaplan. Choose a test prep center whose only business is prepping for these tests; I do not recommend a learning center which tutors in many subjects. You need specialized training; this is important. This will cost 500-1000\$. Many test prep centers offer reduced rates if you cannot afford their fees; be sure to ask!
4. Work one-on-one with a private ACT/SAT tutor, not a general tutor. This is the most costly method, but it is the most efficient because you cannot zone out and you don't have to listen to anyone else's questions. Ask to meet a tutor before hiring them, or go with recommendations from friends. Many tutors also offer free or low cost sessions for students in need, so you can always ask if there are any

special rates for low income or first generation college students, and don't be shy about telling people if you are on free/reduced lunch. Teachers want to help students!

Test Timeline

Sophomore Year

Try to get some Subject Tests out of the way if you can in May/June; do test prep in summer.

Junior Year

Focus on Subject Tests and completing ALL testing by June of Junior year. Take first ACT and SAT in Nov-Dec-Jan; order the optional answer report. Take your preferred test a second time in Feb-Mar-Apr. You only need to send the ACT or SAT to your colleges; all colleges accept either test.

Senior Year

September is the last possible test date if you want to apply Early Decision/Action. Avoid testing during Senior year. It is miserable for you and the results are usually not great.

Take the Test

The night before the test, do not go out! Pack your bag before bed, go to bed early, and get great sleep. The morning of the test, do not do anything abnormal - if you never drink coffee don't start today. You want your body to be normal at the test center. Also, DO eat a breakfast of protein - eggs, yogurt, cheese, bacon. Avoid sugar because you will fall asleep halfway through the test. Be sure to drink water so that your brain can fire as fast as possible.

Remember to Bring

- a water bottle
- a snack
- pencils
- your calculator
- your test registration materials
- your school ID or driver's license

Send Scores to Colleges

Once you have evaluated which of your scores is stronger, the ACT or the SAT, log onto that test site and send your scores to each of your colleges. Send your best scores only, unless the college super scores and that would help you, and also unless that college requests to see all of your scores, as some colleges do. If the fees to send these scores are difficult, fee waivers are available from your guidance counselor and from ACT and SAT, so be sure to ask.

SAT Test Waivers Available

- Up to two registrations for the SAT and up to two registrations for the SAT Subject Tests.
- If test fees become a problem, be sure to talk with your school counselor and/or your colleges.