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Ruth & Hyman Simon High School

Rabbeim For Life... Education For Life... Torah For Life

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Dear Ateres Yaakov Parents,

There has been much discussion over the new college entrance exam, the ACT, and it's comparison to the SAT. Below please find helpful information about this test which will assist you in making an informed decision as to which test best suits your son's personality. Further information about the ACT can be found on their web site at www.act.org.

ACT–SAT Concordance

The ACT and SAT are different tests that measure similar but distinct constructs. The ACT measures achievement related to high school curricula, while the SAT measures general verbal and quantitative reasoning.

ACT and the College Board (SAT) have completed a concordance study that is designed to examine the relationship between two scores on the ACT and SAT. These concordance tables do not equate scores, but rather provide a tool for finding comparable scores.

Concordance between ACT Composite Score and Sum of SAT Critical Reading and Mathematics Scores		
SAT CR+M (Score Range)	ACT Composite Score	SAT CR+M (Single Score)
1600	36	1600
1540–1590	35	1560
1490–1530	34	1510
1440–1480	33	1460
1400–1430	32	1420
1360–1390	31	1380
1330–1350	30	1340
1290–1320	29	1300
1250–1280	28	1260
1210–1240	27	1220
1170–1200	26	1190
1130–1160	25	1150
1090–1120	24	1110
1050–1080	23	1070
1020–1040	22	1030
980–1010	21	990
940–970	20	950
900–930	19	910
860–890	18	870
820–850	17	830
770–810	16	790

720–760	15	740
670–710	14	690
620–660	13	640
560–610	12	590
510–550	11	530

Estimated Relationship between ACT Composite Score and SAT CR+M+W Score

In addition, provided here is an **estimated** Relationship Table for institutions that also use the SAT (Critical Reading + Math + Writing) Score. This table provides a score on the SAT that is similar to an ACT Composite score. The values given are a very accurate representation of what you might get from a concordance table.

ACT Composite Score	Estimated SAT CR+M+W	Estimated SAT CR+M+W (Score Range)	ACT Composite Score
36	2390	2380–2400	36
35	2330	2290–2370	35
34	2250	2220–2280	34
33	2180	2140–2210	33
32	2120	2080–2130	32
31	2060	2020–2070	31
30	2000	1980–2010	30
29	1940	1920–1970	29
28	1880	1860–1910	28
27	1820	1800–1850	27
26	1770	1740–1790	26
25	1710	1680–1730	25
24	1650	1620–1670	24
23	1590	1560–1610	23
22	1530	1510–1550	22
21	1470	1450–1500	21
20	1410	1390–1440	20
19	1350	1330–1380	19
18	1290	1270–1320	18
17	1230	1210–1260	17
16	1170	1140–1200	16
15	1100	1060–1130	15
14	1020	990–1050	14
13	950	910–980	13
12	870	820–900	12
11	780	750–810	11

What's a Good SAT Score or ACT Score?

So, you just received your SAT or ACT scores and you're not sure what it means. Well, it all depends on the colleges you are considering. A 23 on the ACT or an 1800 on the SAT may be above average at one university but below average at another. The higher your score, the more options are open to you.

The Higher, the Better

The national average for the **new** SAT (which includes the 3rd, writing section) is 1500 and without the writing section is 1010. For the ACT, it's between 20 and 21. Above average SAT/ACT scores will improve your chances of getting into a more selective school.

Scores below an 1100 on the new SAT or a 15 on ACT are considered low at just about any four-year college. You can overcome low scores with good grades or an outstanding application. But even if you're accepted by a four-year college, the school may advise or require you to take some remedial courses as a freshman.

NOTE: Brooklyn, Queens, Yeshiva and Lander College only take the Critical Reading and Math portions of the SAT into account. The minimum SAT score ranges between 1000 and 1100, depending on the college.

Room for Improvement

Unless you pulled in a perfect 2400 or 36, you can always improve your score. Some students are confident that their numbers are high enough to get them into the college of their choice. But unless you're an honorary member of the admissions committee, you never know.

A good SAT score or ACT score can also help you snag additional scholarship money. Even if you have already been accepted to a college, you may want to consider taking the test again (say, in December or January of senior year) for that reason.

ACT Format

The required portion of the ACT is divided into four multiple choice subject tests: English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning. Subject test scores range from 1 to 36. The "composite score" is the average of all four tests. In addition, students taking the writing test receive a writing score ranging from 2 to 12, a "combined English/writing score" ranging from 1 to 36 (based on the writing score and English score), and one to four comments on the essay from the essay scorers. The writing score does not affect the composite score. Sometimes the test includes an experimental section that may be a short version of any of the four major sections.

On the ACT, each question correctly answered is worth one raw point. Unlike the SAT, there is no penalty for marking incorrect answers on the multiple-choice part of the test.

The first section is the 45-minute English test covering usage/mechanics and rhetorical skills. The 75-question test consists of five passages with various sections underlined on one side of the page and options to correct the underlined portions on the other side of the page. More specifically, questions focus on usage and mechanics - issues such as commas, apostrophes, (misplaced/dangling) modifiers, the colons, and fragments and run-ons - as well as on rhetorical skills - style (clarity and brevity), strategy, transitions, and organization (sentences in a paragraph and paragraphs in a passage).

Math

The second section is the 60-minute, 60-question math test with 14 covering pre-algebra, 10 elementary algebra, 9 intermediate algebra, 14 plane geometry, 9 coordinate geometry, and 4 elementary trigonometry. Calculators are permitted in this section only. The calculator requirements are stricter than the SAT's in that computer algebra systems are not allowed; however, the ACT permits calculators with paper tapes, that make noise, or that have power cords with certain "modifications" (i.e., disabling the mentioned features), which the SAT does not allow. Also, this is the only section that has five instead of four answer choices.

Reading

The 35-minute, 40-question reading section measures reading comprehension in four passages (taken and edited from books and magazines) one representing prose fiction (short stories and novels), another representing social science (history, economics, psychology, political science, and anthropology), a third representing humanities (art, music, architecture, dance), and the last representing natural science (biology, chemistry, physics, and the physical sciences), in that order.

Science Reasoning

The science reasoning test is a 35-minute, 40-question test. There are seven passages each followed by five to seven questions. There are three Data Representation passages with 5 questions following each passage, 3 Research Summary passage with six questions each, and one Conflicting Viewpoints passage with 7 questions.

Writing

The optional writing section, which is always administered at the end of the test, is 30 minutes long. All essays must be in response to a given prompt. The prompts are about a social issue applicable to high school students. This test has no effect on the overall composite score. Instead, a separate English/writing score is created. For example, a student were to score a 10 out of 12 on the writing, and the student scored an English composite score of 25 then the score would be affected, but would most likely stay the same. If a student were to score poorly on the writing section, then the score would be reduced from 25 to 23 at the most. A two point demerit is the maximum allowed for a writing penalty. No particular essay structure is required. Two trained readers assign each essay a score between 1 and 6, where a score of 0 is reserved for essays that are blank, off-topic, non-English, not written with no. 2 pencil, or considered illegible after several attempts at reading. The scores are summed to produce a final score from 2 to 12 (or 0). If the two readers' scores differ by more than one point, then a senior third reader decides.

Although the writing section is optional, several schools do require an essay score and will factor it in the admissions decision.

Averages

The chart below summarizes each section and the average test score based on graduating high school seniors in 2009.

Section	Number of questions	Time (minutes)	Average score	College Readiness Benchmark	Content
English	75	45	20.6	18	usage/mechanics and rhetorical skills
Mathematics	60	60	21.0	22	pre-algebra, elementary algebra, intermediate algebra, coordinate geometry, geometry, and elementary trigonometry
Reading	40	35	21.4	21	reading comprehension
Science	40	35	20.9	24	interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving
Optional Writing Test	1 essay prompt	30	7.7		writing skills

Composite			21.1		
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Test availability

The ACT is offered four to six times a year, depending on the state, in the United States, in September, October, December, February, April and June and is always on a Saturday except for those with credible religious obligations.

Candidates may choose either the ACT assessment (\$32), or the ACT assessment plus writing (\$47). Students with verifiable disabilities, including physical and learning disabilities, are eligible to take the test with accommodations. The standard time increase for students requiring additional time due to learning disabilities is 50%. Originally the score sheet was labeled that additional time was granted due to a learning disability, however this was dropped because it was deemed illegal under the American with Disabilities Act.

Scores are sent to the student, his high school, and up to six colleges.

ACT Time vs. SAT Time

Time is a major factor to consider in testing.

The ACT is generally regarded as being composed of somewhat easier questions (versus the SAT), but the time allotted to complete each section increases the overall difficulty (equalizing it to the SAT). The ACT allots:

- 45 minutes for a 75-question English section
- 60 minutes for a 60-question Math section
- 35 minutes for a 40-question Reading Comprehension section
- 35 minutes for a 40-question Science section

Comparatively, the SAT is structured such that the test taker is allowed at least one minute per question, on generally shorter sections (25 questions or less).

We generally recommend that 11th graders take their first college entrance exam in May or, if more preparation is necessary, June followed by a second exam at the beginning of their senior year. This year's Test Dates are:

ACT- April 10th (registration deadline March 5th); June 12th (registration deadline May 7th)

SAT- May 1st (registration deadline- March 25th); June 5th (registration deadline April 29th)

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me during school hours.

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The New York Times

ACT vs. SAT

By Michelle Slattala

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So I was ready when my daughter, a junior, cornered me in the kitchen the other day.

“Mom, can I ask you a question?” she asked.

“Sure, anything,” I lied.

She had heard from her teachers that some students score higher on the ACT and others on the SAT, and so she was wondering how I had decided which test to take, and did I think she should follow the same strategy.

I considered possible answers. The last time I was exposed to the horror of standardized testing was in 1979, when I vaguely remember rolling out of bed early one Saturday to frantically root around for two No. 2 pencils to take to a test center, where I nodded off during a particularly boring passage in the reading section.

“Wouldn’t you rather hear about my underage drinking?” I asked.

A generation ago, taking a standardized test was a no-brainer: it was mainly a matter of geography. In the Midwest, students took the ACT. If you lived on the coasts — or were applying to a highly selective college or university there — you took the SAT.

Now, with some Ivy League schools rejecting nine of 10 qualified candidates, applicants are looking for any edge to improve their chances. Many, particularly those in traditional SAT territory, are taking both tests and submitting the higher score or both scores. In the last five years, the number of ACT takers on the East Coast has risen 66 percent, and on the West Coast 46 percent, according to ACT Inc.

But not everybody has the time or money to prepare for both tests. And the truth is, most probably don’t need to. While the tests have distinct personalities — the ACT is curriculum-based, while the SAT is aimed more at general reasoning and problem-solving skills — spokesmen for both say their formats favor only one type of student: the one with a good grasp of material taught in rigorous high school courses.

Similarly, colleges swear they don’t prefer one over the other. “Since it’s a choice you can make, it has the feeling of being a significant choice, fraught with implication, but I don’t think it does matter,” says Marlyn McGrath-Lewis, director of admissions at Harvard College. “Either is fine with us, and we don’t have a feeling that either favors students with any particular profile.”

Still, some college counselors believe otherwise. In the absence of quantitative studies, they suggest asking yourself a few questions.

1. Which format feels right?

You can take predictive tests (the PSAT and PLAN) sophomore year and extrapolate scores you’re likely to get on the SAT and ACT. The practice tests cover much the same material as their respective cousins, which they imitate in style and content.

Experts recommend that if your school gives both, take both. If not, test prep companies offer free full-length practice tests for the ACT and SAT online (at Princetonreview.com, Petersons .com and Ivybound.net).

“Take each test in as realistic conditions as possible, with no distractions, timing yourself,” says Scott Johns, a Peterson’s product manager. “Your score is a benchmark, but also think about how you felt about taking each test. Did you understand the format? Did one experience cause more stress than the other?”

2. How long can you sit without fidgeting?

If you have a short attention span and difficulty maintaining focus, the ACT may be for you, says Marybeth Kravets, a college counselor in suburban Chicago and the “K” in the K & W college guides for students with special needs. The ACT lasts two hours, 55 minutes (plus 30 minutes with the optional writing test). The SAT lasts three hours, 45 minutes.

Similarly, counselors say that students with learning disabilities that make it difficult to process information may do better on the ACT. “That’s because the ACT questions are more knowledge-based and straightforward,” says Scott White, director of guidance at Montclair High School in New Jersey. “The SAT is more nuanced, puzzle-like, trickier.”

Both cover English and math, but there are notable variations in content. For instance, in measuring verbal skills, the SAT focuses on vocabulary whereas the ACT concentrates on grammar, punctuation and syntax. And if you want to avoid science and trigonometry, stick with the SAT, which has neither.

3. Overachiever or underachiever?

College counselors say they see two groups of students, with distinctly different approaches to learning, who may score markedly higher on one test or the other.

“The bright underachievers who are bored and get through school using one quarter of their brains will do better on the SAT, because you just need good reasoning skills for that,” says Mr. White. “And the overachievers, I don’t want to call them grinds, but they’re the ones who get the highest grades in the toughest classes because they work really hard, will do better on the ACT.”

Mr. White’s theory was echoed by several counselors who responded to a comment he posted in August on the Web site of the National Association for College Admissions Counseling. Cigus Vanni, a school counselor at Cherry Hill High School West in New Jersey, was one who agreed. In a phone interview, he elaborated on the “grinds”: “There’s a cluster in the middle — the kids who would be average to above-average types of kids, the subgroup who don’t have the intellectual flash of the really tippy-top kids but who work really hard in school, and these are the kids who do better on the ACT. They are compliant with school, willing to go the extra mile, ask the extra question, do their homework. And for them, the ACT is much more like just another school-based test than the SAT is.”

In his experience, he says, differences in scores are not consequential for students at either end of the test-taking spectrum. “The great test takers are great test takers, no matter what instrument they’re playing. And the kids at the other end, who consistently get 350s on the SATs or 11s on the ACTs, they’re not going to do better no matter which test they take.”

4. Girl or boy?

The observation has been made that boys surpass girls on standardized tests. But the ACT gender gap has narrowed. Boys from the class of 2007 scored 21.2 on average, with girls just behind at 21 (the equivalent of 1500 on the SAT, according to the Princeton Review formula).

But boys as a group do better on the SAT, according to data published by both testing companies: 1037 for the class of 2007, compared with 1001 for girls.

That doesn’t mean that every boy should take the SAT and every girl the ACT. But, says John Katzman, chief executive of the Princeton Review, “Girls tend to fit pretty well into the group of high achievers, who get good grades and do well in school, who also do well on the ACT.”

He adds: “I sometimes give the advice that if you were to flip a coin, just go with the SAT if you’re a boy and the ACT if you’re a girl, in part for that reason.”

The test makers’ statistics also indicate that members of minority groups score better across the board on the SAT than on the ACT. But that can be explained, Mr. Katzman says: Top students in all ethnic groups tend to take the SAT, while some Midwestern states require all juniors to take the ACT, thus lowering the mean.

5. Which do you think you’ll do better on?

You’ll probably live up to those expectations — especially if you are a girl or a member of a minority group. The reason is a phenomenon called “stereotype threat,” identified more than a decade ago by Claude M. Steele and Joshua Aronson after they discovered that individual test scores changed with the test taker’s sense of confidence.

“Women and minorities feel stereotypes in our society — that they don’t have the same innate academic abilities as men and Caucasians,” says Professor Steele, director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. “So if they are taking a test that they have been told is difficult and then they experience frustration in the middle of it, that makes the stereotype relevant to them and they perform dramatically worse.” But, he says, if you believe you will do well on a particular test, your performance is less likely to be impaired by difficult problems.

I told my own daughter, a good test taker who possesses what appears to me to be a magically endless supply of freshly sharpened pencils, that I would recommend either test for her, so long as she follows my final bit of parental advice.

“The real trick,” I said, “is to stay awake.”