



How to Improve Your SAT/ACT Scores

A Cal-SOAP Presentation

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What is the
SAT/ACT?

A test you have to
take to be
accepted to a
university as a
freshman.

Suggested Goal Score for UCs

University	Goal ACT Score (1-36)	Goal SAT Score (400-1600)
UCB (University of California, Berkeley)	32	1240-1450
UCD (University of California, Davis)	29	1160-1380
UCI (University of California, Irvine)	29	1170-1370
UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles)	31	1220-1450
UCM (University of California, Merced)	23	1010-1220
UCR (University of California, Riverside)	26	1100-1290
UCSD (University of California, San Diego)	31	1210-1420
UCSB (University of California, Santa Barbara)	30	1190-1400
UCSC (University of California, Santa Cruz)	29	1180-1360

Goal Scores (25th-75th percentile)

University	Average ACT (1-36)	Goal SAT (400-1600)
UCSD (University of California, San Diego)	31	1210-1420
SDSU (San Diego State University)	25	1090-1300
USD (University of San Diego)	28	1180-1390
University of Arizona	26	1040-1290
Oregon State University	24	1060-1290
University of Florida	27	1250-1430
Harvard University	33	1480-1600
Morehouse/Spelman Colleges	22	970-1190
UNLV (University of Nevada, Las Vegas)	21	950-1170
USC (University of Southern California)	30	1370-1530
UCLA-University of California, Los Angeles	31	1220-1450
University of Washington	28	1190-1440

Which should I take?

The SAT or the ACT?

How SAT and ACT are similar

- Both are accepted at every university in the USA
- Cost approximately the same
- Start and end around the same time on a Saturday
- Both have four sections, plus an optional essay
- Both cover reading, grammar and math
- Both cover geometry, trigonometry and all levels of algebra; both cover statistics and probability

Benefits of the SAT

- Familiar because you've taken the PSAT
- More time per question than on the ACT
- Fewer questions than the ACT (154 questions vs. 215 questions)
- Only four answer choices on math (ACT has five)
- "Cheat sheet" of formulas at the beginning of each math section
- No Science (good if you dislike science)
- Better if you prefer writing an analytical essay

Benefits of the ACT

- No “Command of Evidence” questions on the Reading section. Four reading passage instead of five.
- More straightforward questions, especially on math.
- Only one section of math (SAT has two math sections)
- No math grid-ins; all multiple-choice
- Can use your calculator the entire time on math
- Has a Science section (good if you like science)
- Better if you prefer writing a persuasive essay

Top Tips

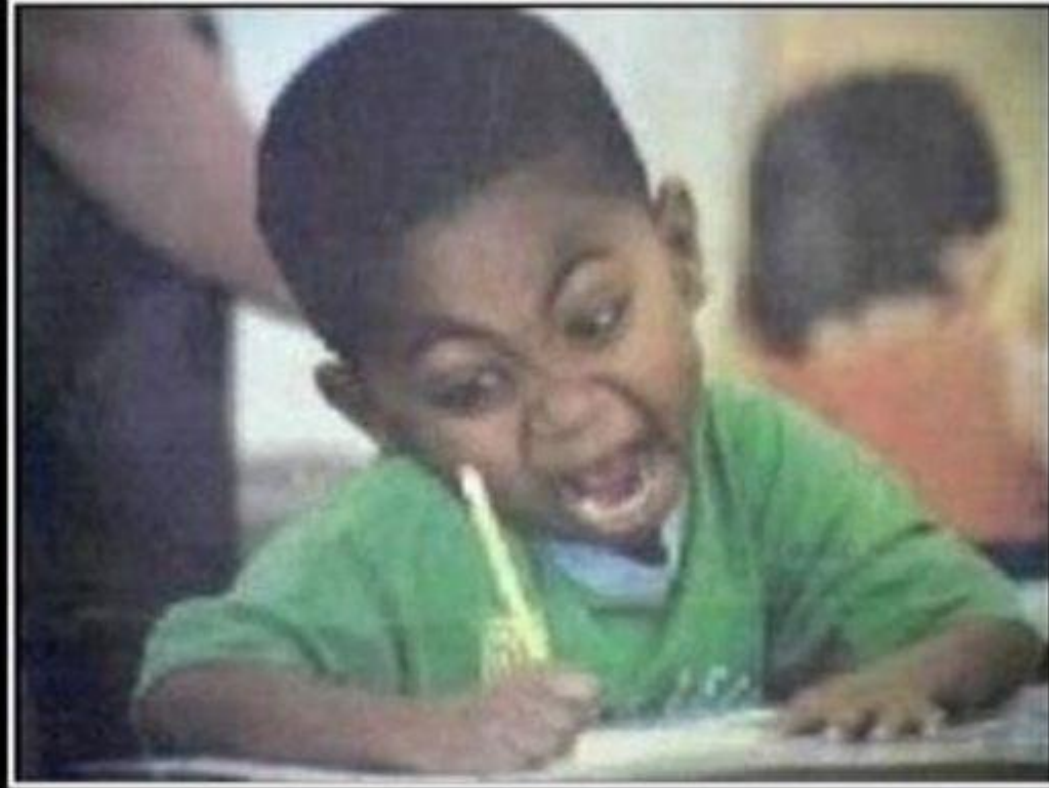
1. BUILD YOUR MENTAL **STAMINA** (4 HOURS)
2. **READ** CONSTANTLY (BEFORE THE TEST.)
3. **UNDERLINE** WHAT EVERY QUESTION IS ASKING.
4. ANSWER IN *YOUR* **PREFERRED** ORDER.
5. BEFORE TIME IS CALLED, **BUBBLE AN ANSWER TO EVERY QUESTION**, *EVEN* IF GUESSING, *EVEN* THE MATH GRID-INS.

SAT/ACT Raw Score

- Correct Answer = + 1 raw point
- Wrong Answer = 0 raw points
- No Answer = Guaranteed zero.
- Every question is worth the same. You don't get extra points for harder questions.
- **Strategy**: Before time is called for each section, go back and bubble any questions you initially left blank. DO NOT LEAVE ANY QUESTION UNANSWERED.

Keep track of time

- You are not allowed to go back to a previous section once time is called, or go forward to a future section.
- Sooooo before time is called for the end of each section, students should be like....



Last five minutes
Of each section

Up Next...

- Strategies for Reading Comprehension
- Strategies for Grammar
- Strategies for Math
- Strategies for Science
- Strategies for the Essays
- Test Day Tips
- Fun Study Tips

READING

SAT/ACT Reading Strategies

- Read your favorite **type** of passage first. Do you prefer prose fiction/literature? Social Science? Humanities? Science?
- Double passage: Mark double passage **LAST** and read it after reading all the other passages. Read first Passage, Answer questions about first passage. *Then*, Read the second passage and answer the remaining questions.
- Underline what each question is asking (1-6 words.)
- Mark vocabulary questions with a “**V.**” Answer them **first**.
- Circle **difficult** questions and save them to answer last. SAT only: Mark “Command of Evidence” questions **CE**. Save to answer **last**.
- Number each paragraph (1, 2, 3...) Read/take notes.

For the Reading Section: *Should I read the passage first or the questions first?*

- Faster Readers: read the passage first
- Slower Readers: **skim** the questions, underline what they are asking, and now you know what to focus on while reading the passage

GRAMMAR

SAT “Writing & Language” and ACT “English” Strategies

- Do not read the passage first. Start on questions right away.
- Skim questions. Circle 2-4 **difficult** questions per passage.
- The most difficult questions:
 - *Ask where a sentence or paragraph should be logically placed, or if it should be added or deleted. ***OR***
 - *Ask about the entire passage*
 - *If you have to guess on any questions due to time, guess on these*
- Answer **easier** questions first.
- Sometimes there is NO mistake so you choose “NO CHANGE.”
- Plug in your shortest answer first
- Shorter/less/fewer is often better. Fewer words, less punctuation.
- If a question says “NOT” or “LEAST ACCEPTABLE” circle it. Three answers are correct grammar. You choose the **wrong** grammar.

MATH

Math Strategies

- Immediately circle ones you want to skip and go back to them later. Answer **easy** questions first.
- Write it out. Show your work.
- Eliminate wrong and unlikely answers.
- Estimate.
- Draw a picture or visual
- Use simple numbers for variables (1, -1, 0, $\frac{1}{2}$)

Multiple choice approach

1. Read the question.
2. Underline what the question is asking.
3. Look at the answer choices for hints.

SAT Math Only

- Be comfortable both **with** and **without** a calculator.
- Always answer the math grid-ins, even if it's guess.

How to Fill in the SAT Grids

\$1.75

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2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4
5	5	5	
6	6	6	6
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8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9

$2 \frac{1}{3}$

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1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2
3	3		3
4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6
	7	7	7
8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9

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2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3
4			
5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9

20%

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3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9

Grid-In Rules

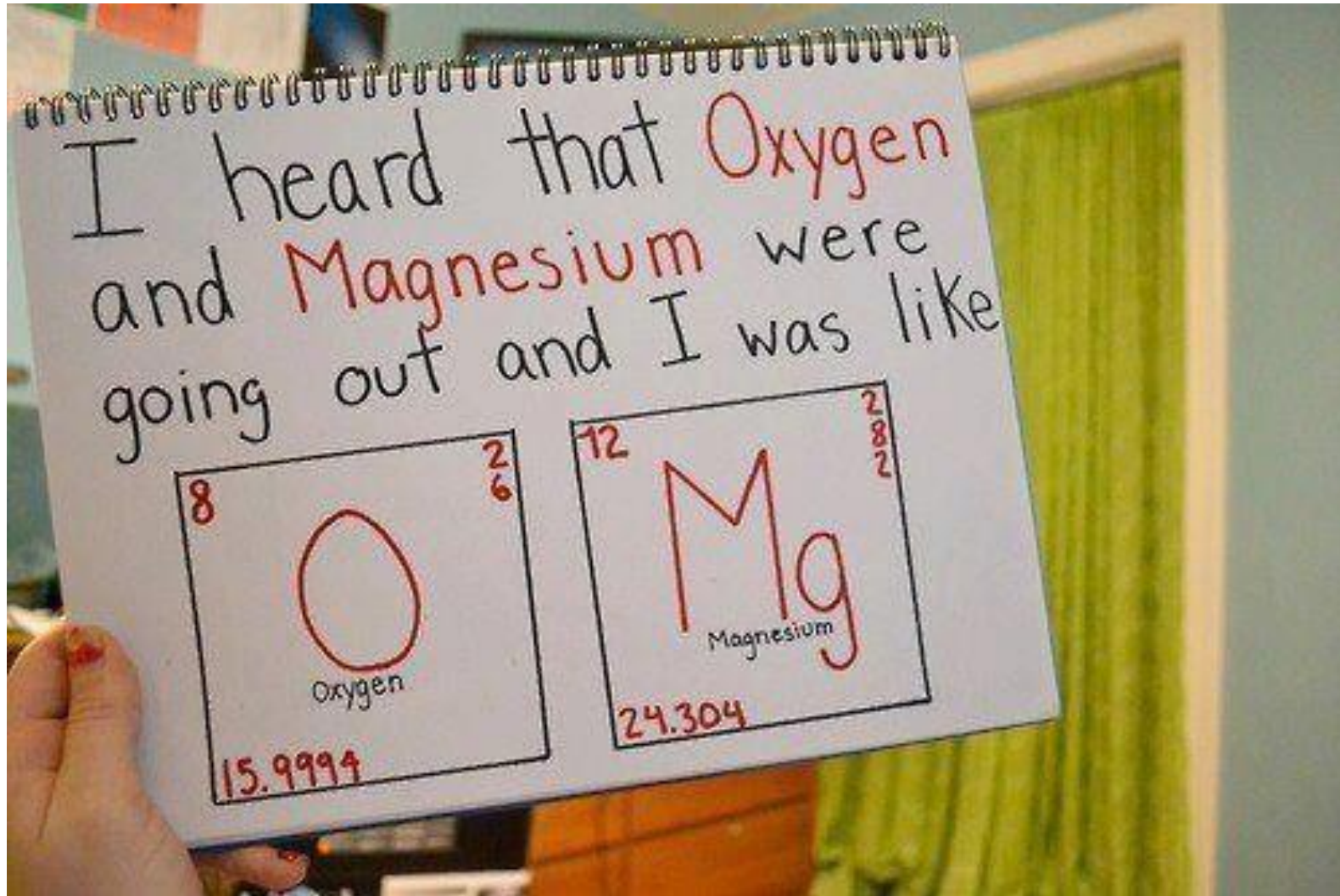
- Grid-in answers must be between 0-9999
- Grid-in answers cannot be negative
- Grid-in answers must be integers, decimals or improper fractions. You cannot grid a mixed fraction ($5 \frac{1}{2}$)
- Always bubble. The machine doesn't score anything you write in the squares at the top of the columns.
- Short numbers can be written in any of the columns. You don't have to start at the far left or far right.

ACT Math Only

- If plugging in all five answer choices, plug in middle answer (**C** or **H**) first. Answers will go in order from least to greatest.

SCIENCE

Types of Science on the ACT: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Earth/Space Science



Science: ACT Only

- Science is organized by passage. Respond to preferred/easier passages first. 5-6 minutes/passage.
- Do **not** read the passage first. Go immediately to the questions. If you skim the passage, take 2 minutes maximum.
- Clump together questions about the same figure/table/study. Work on those together.
- Underline numbers, values, important info.
- Stuck? Look at the answer choices for hints.
- Think VISUAL. Know how to read a graphic.
- Know how to extend beyond the Figure/Table.

ESSAYS

SAT Essay: 50 Minutes

- Essay type: analytical. Read a text and analyze the author's techniques.
- Avoid first person (I think, I feel, In my opinion)
- Read and annotate the passage.
- Choose **2-3** techniques the author uses to further his/her argument. (Examples: *logos, pathos, ethos, diction, imagery, statistics, syntax, language, irony, etc.*)
- Write a two-sentence Introduction Paragraph.
- **2-3** Body paragraphs. Should be a mix of details (paraphrase and quote text) and analysis (explain why/how the technique is effective.)
- Write a two-sentence Conclusion Paragraph.

ACT Essay: 40 minutes

- Presents conversations around contemporary issues
- Offers three diverse perspectives that encourage critical engagement with the issue
- Asks students to develop an argument that puts their own perspective in dialogue with others

ACT Essay Tips

- Essay type: persuasive
- Write about a page and a half.
- Make it clear which Perspective you most strongly agree with (Perspective 1, Perspective 2, Perspective 3)
- You can use first person (I, me). You can use your life and your observations as examples.
- Describe real-life and historical situations.
- Write about the other perspectives, but ultimately refute them.

SAT Resources

- Create a Khan Academy account www.khanacademy.org
- Create a College Board account www.collegeboard.org
- Link the two accounts so that your PSAT Results give you a personalized preparation pathway on Khan Academy.
- Log on to Khan Academy and practice SAT questions regularly before the test.

ACT Resources

- Search for Kaplan's www.onlinepreplive.com
- There is a free version and a paid (more intensive) version
- Live and pre-recorded webinars and lessons
- Study and Practice on a regular basis before the ACT

Test Day Tips

- Bring a snack and water
- Bring multiple pre-sharpened pencils and a separate eraser
- Don't forget your calculator, admission ticket and photo ID!
- Wear layered clothing in case you're hot or cold
- Do not try to sleep during breaks. Stand, stretch, use the bathroom, eat, drink, chew mints or gum.
- Sit up straight and breathe slowly and deeply
- Show that test who's boss!

Technology for English

- Use www.wordhippo.com to find words you can't remember, but can describe.
- Use www.snappywords.com for visual dictionary/thesaurus.
- After writing a paper, copy and paste it in to [Google Translate](#). Listen to it to see if you hear any mistakes.
- www.ttsreader.com instantly reads out loud any text. Natural sounding voices. Drag and droop PDFs or txt files to play. Multiple languages.

Technology for Math: all available on Google App and Apple App Stores

- Go to www.photomath.net or download the Photomath app to your cell phone. It lets you take photos of math problems and teaches you the correct steps to solve them.
- App and website: [WolframAlpha](#). For math, statistics, data analysis. \$2.99
- App and website: [Mathway](#). Math problem solver for basic algebra through calculus.

Fun Study Tips

- You're more likely to remember something you wrote in **blue ink** than in black ink.
- Writing something out is the equivalent of reading it **7 times**. It also helps you retain better than typing. This is why creating your own notes and flash cards is so important!!
- Eating **chocolate** while studying will help the brain retain information more easily.
- Pretend you will have to **teach** the material. You will understand and remember it better.

Candles, oils, spices, waxes

- Dab a little **peppermint** essential oil on your temples before studying and again before tests. Peppermint boosts concentration.
- **Cinnamon** can sharpen your mind.
- Pine can alleviate stress.
- **Citrus** can help you feel more energized.
- **Apples** help with headaches.
- **Roses** can improve memory.

Listen to music while studying, but avoid music with lyrics.

- Use **playlists** to prevent distractions and tempo changes
- Pick the genre that suits your mood and task
- Search keywords like “**music for**”
“**studying**” “**productivity**”
“**concentration**” “**focus**”
- YouTube: **Study Music Alpha Waves** by Yellow Brick Cinema.



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