

Introduction to ACT/SAT (SAT version)

The **BIG** Idea

- Why should I take a college entrance exam (ACT or SAT), and how can I prepare?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up: College Entrance Exams (5 minutes)
- II. Why and Why Now? (5 minutes)
- III. Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT (5 minutes)
- IV. SAT FAQs (20 minutes)
- V. Wrap Up: Plan of Attack (10 minutes)

MATERIALS

STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 5, College Entrance Exams
- Student Handbook page 6, Why and Why Now?
- Student Handbook page 7, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT
- Student Handbook page 8, SAT FAQs
- Student Handbook pages 9-10, Plan of Attack

- Handout with local SAT test dates, locations, and education codes. (See **PREPARATION**.)

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Learn that colleges require entrance exams, and the reasons that they do.
- List good reasons to take the ACT or SAT in 11th grade.
- Become familiar with the basic content of the SAT and ACT.
- Gather the practical information they need to register for the SAT.

OVERVIEW

By 11th grade, most students know that high school will not last forever, and that one option after they graduate is to go to college. They may not know, however, that planning ahead is necessary, and that many colleges require applicants to take either the ACT or SAT college entrance exam. This four-lesson unit will help students get ready to take the SAT as well as tests they may encounter after high school.

The first lesson introduces students to both the SAT and ACT, explains why colleges require an entrance exam, cites reasons to take one of the two tests this year, provides basic information about the content, and articulates what students need to know before signing up for the SAT.

PREPARATION

- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook page 6, Why and Why Now?**
 - **Student Handbook page 7, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**
 - **Student Handbook page 8, SAT FAQs**
- For **Activity II, Why and Why Now?**, make a T-chart on chart paper. On the left column write “Why do colleges require entrance exams?” and on the right column write “Why should I take a college entrance exam in 11th grade?” This chart will be used to record students predictions before looking at **Student Handbook page 6, Why and Why Now?**
- For **Activity IV, SAT FAQs**, research upcoming SAT test dates, locations and location codes (available on the SAT website, www.collegeboard.com), as well as registration deadlines. Please note that the registration deadlines are about one month in advance of the test. Be sure to select test dates for which your class will have enough time to register for when you go online together in two weeks (Lesson #3).
 - Create a handout with this information, and make enough copies for each student. Include the website name and URL.
 - List local test prep courses on this handout.
 - Check for current information on the cost of the test. Students will need to enter these amounts on **Student Handbook pages 8 and 10.**

- ❑ For **Activity IV, SAT FAQs**, talk to the school counselor:
 - Find out about local test prep options. IHaveAPlanlowa.gov has free SAT test prep modules in it.
 - Obtain SAT Preparation Booklets to give out to students or download and print these from the web: http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/sat/sat-preparation-booklet.pdf.
 - Make sure the guidance office has enough SAT Registration packets for your students who may end up filling out the paper forms. These can be ordered in quantity from the SAT website, or downloaded from: http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/sat/sat-registration-booklet.pdf (Make sure you've linked to the booklet for the current year.)
 - Discuss where to direct students who have questions about the test, or want to request fee waivers.
 - Discuss enlisting the counselor and/or host teacher's help for Lesson 3 (in two weeks), when students register for the SAT in class.
 - Discuss how to handle special education classes.
- ❑ **Obtain permission from your school administrator to register students for the SAT in class. This will involve two options:**
 - Online registration (much preferred), for which students are encouraged to bring in credit card information; or
 - Filling out and mailing the registration packet, for which students are encouraged to bring in a check or money order, made out to "The College Board".
 - Discuss the possibility of offering a Saturday practice test at your school.
 - Discuss procedures for obtaining parental permissions for bringing in social security numbers, as well as credit card information. **(NOTE: To avoid identity theft or unauthorized purchases, students should NOT share credit card information with anyone. If students or family members are concerned about these issues, they may complete the online registration in class, and fill in the credit card information at home.)**
- ❑ Decide how to handle students reluctant to register for the SAT. Even if they aren't planning to attend college, it's recommended that they create an SAT online account and follow instructions so they're familiar with the process if they change their minds later.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It's critical that students know by fall of junior year that they will be required to take the SAT or ACT entrance exam in order to apply to college. Students who aren't sure of their plans should also be strongly encouraged to take the test. And though most students will be familiar with the notion of a "standardized test," many (especially if their parents didn't attend college) won't know that taking the SAT or ACT is different – you don't just show up and wing it. Students need to learn that they must prepare for this test well in advance, logistically as well as academically. They'll have registration deadlines to meet, fee waivers to apply for (if eligible), decisions to make about which tests and test options to choose. Plus, they need to recognize it's a huge advantage to be familiar with the test, and to be armed with the appropriate test-taking strategies.

To point students in the right direction, you should motivate them to become pro-active about taking the SAT. Give out test dates and locations, recommend helpful websites such as IHaveAPlanlowa.gov that post practice tests, and inform students about community test-prep resources.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

For **Activity II, Why and Why Now?** you could structure this as a discussion, and then just point students to **Student Handbook page 6, Why and Why Now?** for reference.

Another option for **Activity II** is to ham it up a bit, by turning this into a role-playing exercise. You would assume the role of a college admissions officer (donning a bowtie, letter sweater, or college cap) and let students ask you questions about "Why and Why Now?" Then, point them to **Student Handbook page 6, Why and Why Now?** as a summary of your answers.

For **Activity III, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**, you may choose to turn this activity into a competition. Allow students to scan **Student Handbook page 7, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**, for one minute, then ask students questions that are addressed in the handbook page. You may wish to give prizes to students to correctly answer a question.

For **Activity IV, SAT FAQs**, you might suggest your students take notes and circle information

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. WARM UP: College Entrance Exams (5 minutes)

1. Direct students, as they come in, to **Student Handbook page 5, College Entrance Exams**. Give them 3 minutes to complete their responses.
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Today we start a new unit about something very important—test preparation. Specifically, the next three lessons will focus on preparing you for a college entrance exam – a *big* test you have to take if you want to get into college. Some colleges don't require it, but many do. So even if you're not sure you want to go to college, or where you're applying, it's to your advantage to take this test. (For those of you who are thinking about going to work after you graduate from high school, the fourth lesson in this unit focuses on standardized tests used in the workplace.)

There are two college entrance exams you can take: the SAT or the ACT. How many of you have heard of these tests? [Students respond.]

How many of you felt nervous when I mentioned them? [Students respond, probably most will nod, say "me!"]

I don't blame you. Most of us don't like taking tests, and we get especially nervous when we know a test will have a big impact on our future. But, just like anything scary that you haven't experienced before, the more you know, the less you fear. And when it comes to taking the SAT or ACT, the more you know, the better you'll do. So let's go over your answers on **Student Handbook page 5, College Entrance Exams** and see what you know and how you feel.

[Go over **Student Handbook page 5, College Entrance Exams**, encouraging students to share what they know.]

If the class has a large number of students who don't know anything about these tests, limit the discussion of question #6, "How do you feel about taking the SAT or ACT?", so students won't be scared off; but if most kids have friends or siblings who have taken the tests, let them express their anxiety.

II. Why and Why Now? (5 minutes)

1. Display chart paper with T-chart (See **Preparation**). Call on a volunteer to read the first question (Why do colleges require entrance exams?) aloud and then call on volunteers to share their predictions. Record their answers on the chart paper. Repeat this procedure with the second question. Why should I take a college entrance exam in the 11th grade?
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Most 11th graders across the country are feeling the same way you are about taking college entrance tests. But colleges have very good reasons for requiring these tests. And it makes good sense to take them this year. Let's see why.

[Refer students to **Student Handbook page 6, Why and Why Now?** Put the transparency of this document on the overhead projector. Call on students to read each point aloud. Spend more time covering the “Why Now?” section, allowing for questions and discussion.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: You can see why it's important for us to spend some class time preparing for the college entrance exam. You should also talk to your parents about taking the test, and it might be a good idea to include this list of **Why and Why Now?** as part of your discussion.

III. Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs. SAT (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** As you know, there are two different standardized tests, both nationally administered, that you can take: the ACT and the SAT. Traditionally, students in the coast states like California and New York have taken the SAT, students in the middle of the country have taken the ACT. Colleges accept scores from either test and do not usually have a preference. But the tests are different. In general, the ACT questions are more direct and test you on the subjects you've learned in high school. The SAT is considered more abstract, focusing on problem solving, reasoning ability and critical thinking skills. Here's a brief look at how the two compare, so you will know your options.

Put the transparency you made of **Student Handbook page 7, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT** onto the overhead projector. Give students one minute to scan the page and then read it aloud. (See **Implementation Options** for Suggestions.)

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: For future reference, you have the same information in **Student Handbook page 7, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**. And if you want to compare the two exams in further detail, you can find commentaries on how the tests compare online, by typing “SAT vs ACT” into your browser.

IV. SAT FAQs (20 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Since many of you will take the SAT, for the rest of today's lesson, and for the next two lessons, we're going to focus on preparing you for that test.

[Ask students to turn to **Student Handbook page 8, SAT FAQs**, while you display this document on the overhead projector.]

2. **Registration Dates**

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Today we're going to make sure you have all the information you need to be ready to register, which we'll do together in class, two weeks from now. Of course you can register at home with a family member too, but you'll leave today knowing what to expect.

We'll start with the first thing you need to do in order to register, which is to select a date to take the test. I checked the SAT website, and created this handout listing upcoming test dates.

[Hand out the information sheet you prepared with up-to-date information about when and where the SAT will be offered, and the registration deadline for each date. Read the dates out loud. Point out the difference between the registration deadline and the actual test date.]

3. **Reporting scores to colleges**

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Next on your list is to look up when each college or scholarship agency you're interested in applying to needs to have your SAT scores, so you can be sure to pick a test date that gives you time to meet their deadlines. But what if you don't know what schools you want to apply to? Or if you don't know which scholarships might be right for you? Are any of you thinking this now? [Students respond.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: This is perfectly fine; most 11th graders don't know these answers yet. So think about it a bit, and investigate some possibilities. If you decide to take this test during your senior year, you may want to think about when your scores would be delivered. Visit some college websites, see when they want scores. Do the same with scholarship agencies. Your SAT scores are typically mailed about a month after the exam, so get out a calendar and make sure the test you sign up for gives you *plenty* of time to meet any possible deadlines.

Another question you might have is: what if my scores are bad, and I don't want colleges to see my first try? Don't worry. You can choose to send your scores only to the schools you want. If you take the test more than once, you can request that only your best score is sent, depending on the requirements of the college where you're applying. You can sign up to send your scores to specific schools for free when you register, or you can send them later, for a fee.

Saturday testing

One thing you should know is that the only acceptable reason NOT to take a test on a Saturday is for religious reasons. If that's the case for you, see the school counselor to investigate your options – you can apply to take the test on Sunday by submitting a letter from your clergy person. If you work on Saturdays, you'll have to get permission to have this time off. You'll need about four to five hours on the test day, from the time you arrive to sign in, until you leave. Most bosses will understand how important it is for you to take the test. If you need help convincing him/her, ask your parents, or school counselor, for help.

Disabilities

If you have a diagnosed disability and qualify for extended time accommodations in school, you may be eligible for the same on the SAT. Check for the requirements and application process with your school counselor, or look in the SAT registration booklet. This information is also available on the SAT website: www.collegeboard.com.

Subject Tests?

Some colleges require you to take special subject tests, like U.S. History, Biology, or a foreign language. You must register for each subject test you take, and subject tests may not be taken on the same day as the SAT Reasoning Test. Check with colleges you're interested in attending to see if subject tests are required. You'll find this information in the "undergraduate admission requirements" section of college websites.

Next on your handout, you'll see the costs for the SAT. It costs \$45 to register for the SAT Reasoning Test. (Subject tests require additional fees.) Fee waivers are available if you're eligible; see your school counselor for the details. But don't wait for the last minute! You'll need to have this information to register in two weeks. [NOTE: This a fee for the year 2009. Future prices may be subject to change.]

Preparation

So, where can you go to get some good, solid preparation for the SAT? Several online options are listed on **Student Handbook page 8, SAT FAQs** including IHaveAPlanIowa.gov. Local test prep options are listed on the handout with local test dates. Definitely visit the SAT website. Download the SAT Preparation Booklet from the College Board website, or ask your school counselor for a copy.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The more you look at the SAT prep materials, the more you'll know what to expect. You'll be able to identify subjects you learned but need to re-view again. And you'll be able to the target areas you need to work on the most.

V. WRAP UP: Plan of Attack (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Congratulations! You are now well on your way to taking the SAT. Next week, we'll go over some sample questions from an SAT exam. And the following week, we'll go online to actually register for the test. So, you have a number of things to take care of between now and then, which are listed on **Student Handbook pages 9-10, Plan of Attack**. [Tell students to turn to that page.]
 - Visit the website to get familiar with the SAT information (www.collegeboard.com).
 - Select a test date and location.
 - Investigate colleges of interest to see if they require Subject Tests.
 - Get fee waiver information from the guidance counselor; if you're eligible for free or reduced lunch, you may be excused from paying the registration fee. (Note: If you're eligible for a fee waiver for the SAT, you may also be eligible to have the college admission fee waived at some colleges.)
 - Get credit card information from your parent or guardian, and plan to register online. If this is not an option, get a check or money order and plan to fill out the paper form in class.
 - And last but not least – relax! By the time the test date arrives, you will be prepared and ready to give it your all.

Now, who has questions? I'll answer as best I can, and if there's something I don't know, we'll generate a list for the school counselor, and I'll report back to you on them next week.

[Field questions, and ask a student to write down unanswered questions. Bring this list of questions to your school counselor and report back to students during the next lesson.]

College Entrance Exams

Directions: Answer of the questions below.

1. What is the purpose of the SAT or ACT?

2. What have you heard about these tests?

3. Did you take the PSAT? If so, how did you feel before you took it? After?

4. Do you have friends or siblings who have taken the SAT or ACT? If so, which test?

5. How do you feel about taking the SAT or ACT? Check off all that apply:

- Nervous
- Excited
- Clueless
- Worried
- Ready for the challenge
- Unsure what to expect
- Competitive
- Afraid
- Eager to prove yourself
- Like hiding

Why and Why Now?

Why do colleges require entrance exams?

- The tests show your mastery of the material colleges expect you to learn in high school.
- The tests help colleges compare students from different kinds of high schools.
- The tests show how well you analyze, reason, problem solve and communicate.
- The tests show your readiness for the demands of a specific college.

Why should you take a college entrance exam in 11th grade?

- If you're in a college prep program in high school, much of the material you've been studying will correspond to the content and be fresh in your mind.
- Your test scores can help you decide what areas you need to strengthen.
- Your test scores can help you decide on coursework to take senior year, or during the summer.
- Some colleges are more difficult to get into than others. Knowing your score will help you find a college that's a good match.
- When considering where to apply, you'll be able to compare your test scores with those of typical students at the colleges you're considering. This will help you see if the school is a good choice for you.

For example in 2008, the University of Charleston in West Virginia expected a minimum score of 900 (out of 1600 possible points) total for the math and reading sections of the SAT. At Emory University in Georgia, math + reading combined scores for the middle 50% of freshman ranged from 1330 to 1470 (also out of a possible 1600 points).

- Colleges that get your test scores this year will be able to contact you about their academic programs, scholarships, special programs and/or visiting days. (You get to decide where to send your scores.)
- Some colleges and scholarships have application deadlines for which you might need scores soon, or in the early fall.
- You'll be able to take the test again next year if you feel you can do better.

Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT

	ACT	SAT
Subjects Tested	Math, Science, English, Reading Writing is optional (though required by some colleges)	Math, Writing (includes an Essay), Critical Reading (Note: no science)
Scores	Each subject scored: 1-36 Composite score created (out of 36) Separate score for Writing: 1-12	Each section scored: 200-800 Composite score created (out of 2400)
Length of Test	2 hours, 25 minutes Including Writing: 3 hours, 25 minutes	3 hours, 45 minutes
Questions	215, all multiple choice	Essay, plus 140 questions, some multiple choice, some math requires showing work
Math Content	Algebra, Geometry, 4 questions Trigonometry	Algebra II, Basic Geometry
Penalty for wrong answers	None	$\frac{1}{4}$ point off for each wrong answer, except for math grid-ins
Score History	You decide which to send (easier to hide bad scores)	You decide which to send. If you don't choose, your entire score history is reported automatically; colleges generally consider the best score.

SAT FAQs

1. Registering – Selecting a Test Date

- Find out when the test is being offered, and where. This information can be found on the SAT website (www.collegeboard.com).
- Look up when each college or scholarship agency you're interested in applying to needs to have your SAT scores. Scores are typically mailed about a month after the exam.
- If you need to take the test on a day other than a Saturday because of religious reasons, you'll have to apply by mail to take the test on Sunday. A letter from your clergy person is required.
- If you have a diagnosed disability and documentation of extended time accommodations in school, you may be eligible to test on national test dates with extended time. Information is available on the website (www.collegeboard.com) or in the registration booklet located in your guidance office.

2. Registering: Selecting a Test Option

- We'll be registering for the SAT Reasoning Test in two weeks. Check with colleges of interest to see if they require Subject Tests as well. (Note: it's not possible to take the Reasoning Test and Subject Tests on the same day.)

3. Costs

- \$_____ to register for the SAT Reasoning Test, with additional fees for subject tests. You get four free score reports at the time you register and take the test. Additional score reports are \$_____ each.
- Fee waivers are available for certain students who are eligible for free or reduced lunches. See your school counselor and get a fee waiver number before actual registration (which will occur in class, two weeks from today).

4. Test Prep Options

- Visit the SAT website: (www.collegeboard.com).
- Visit other websites: www.IHaveAPlanIowa.gov, www.ineedapencil.com, www.kaplan.com, www.vocabulary.com, www.freevocabulary.com.
- Ask your school counselor for a copy of the SAT Preparation Booklet, a free booklet published by SAT. You can also download this free from the SAT website.
- Check your public or school library for information and practice tests.
- Once you know what to expect, review those content areas you have studied but need to re-view again.
- Identify areas you have not mastered, and seek materials and prep classes that will help you get ready.

Plan of Attack

Things to do to get ready to sign up for the SAT on _____ (date).

- Visit the SAT website (www.collegeboard.com).
- Select an SAT test date and location.
- Find out if colleges of interest require SAT Subject Tests.
- If you are eligible for a free or reduced lunch, talk to your guidance counselor about fee waivers, and get a fee waiver number.
- Think about what colleges should receive your test scores. The SAT will send your scores to four schools free if you list them on your registration; but you may prefer to decide later, once you see your scores. (Note: fees apply).
- Discuss with your parent or guardian whether or not you want to use your social security number when registering for the SAT. (Social security numbers are used to distinguish between students who have similar names.)

Social Security #: _____

- ❑ Get credit card information from a parent, in order to register for the SAT in class. (**NOTE: You can also sign up online in class and fill in credit card information later at home, on your own computer.**)

WARNING: To avoid identity theft or unauthorized purchases, please do NOT share this information with anyone.

If you're concerned about these issues, you may complete everything but the credit card information in class, and log on to add this information at home.

Type of credit card: _____

Credit card #: _____

Name of cardholder: _____

Expiration date: _____

Security Code
(last three digits- located on the back of card where cardholder's signature is) _____

If you are going to use a credit card to register for the SAT, please have your parent or guardian complete the information below.

_____ (name of student) has my permission to use my credit card to register online for the SAT during his/her Roads to Success class. I understand that the following costs will be charged to my card:

\$_____ SAT registration fee

(Signature of parent/guardian)

(Printed name of parent/guardian)

(Date)

If you are bringing in a check or money order, make it out to "The College Board".