

ALL ABOUT THE SAT & ACT

**WHY THEY MATTER, WHAT
COLLEGES WANT, & HOW TO
SUCCEED**



marigold prep



Who is Marigold Prep?

- Virtual support for test prep, every major academic subject, and executive functioning
- Decades of tutoring & test prep experience
- Provided online instruction "before it was cool"



**HI! I'M CASSIE
BROWN
FOUNDER OF
MARIGOLD PREP**

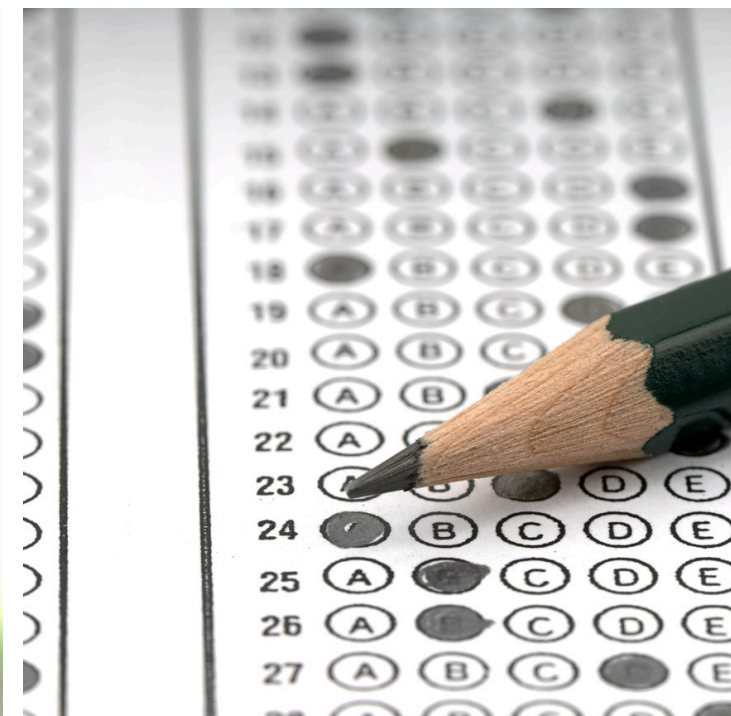
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Tonight we'll cover

- **Overview** of the SAT & ACT
- SAT **vs** ACT
- What **colleges** want
- How to **succeed**
- Live Q&A



What are the SAT & ACT, anyway?

- They are **not** necessarily testing student intelligence.
- They **are** testing a student's ability to take a multi-hour test on a Saturday morning.
- They assess **content knowledge of reading, language, and math**.
- These are also tests of critical thinking and problem-solving.
- The SAT and ACT remain the primary college entrance exams for US universities.
- Colleges **do not have a preference between the SAT & ACT**, nor do they need to see both tests.
- The SAT offers an official test 8 per year, while the ACT is offered 7 times per year.

What about the PSAT?

- **The PSAT is essentially a practice run at the SAT**, especially for freshmen and sophomores.
- For juniors, it's an **opportunity to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship**, depending on score.
- The PSAT is **not a college admissions test**, like the SAT and ACT.
- The PSAT is **extremely similar to the SAT**, but is scored out of 1520 because it is slightly less difficult.
- Still, a PSAT score is universally considered an **accurate indicator of an SAT score**.
- The PSAT is offered in **mid-October every year**, typically through a student's school.
- **Notre Dame students took the PSAT on October 22nd and will have their scores back on November 6th.**

SAT Overview

SAT FORMAT

1. Reading/ Writing Module 1 (Non-Adaptive)

32 minutes, 27 questions

2. Reading/ Writing Module 2 (Adaptive)

32 minutes, 27 questions

3. Math Module 1 (Non-Adaptive)

35 minutes, 22 questions

4. Math Module 2 (Adaptive)

35 minutes, 22 questions

Total Digital SAT Duration

134 minutes

98 questions

SAT Sub-Categories or “Content Domains”

READING & WRITING

Information & Ideas

Locating, interpreting, and integrating information and ideas from texts and graphs

Craft & Structure

Understanding words in context, synthesizing rhetorical texts, connecting ideas

Expression of Ideas

Revising texts to improve effectiveness

Standard Conventions of English

Editing text for grammar, usage, and punctuation

MATH

Algebra

Solving linear equations, functions, and inequalities

Advance Math

Solving equivalent expressions, nonlinear equations, and nonlinear functions

Problem Solving and Data Analysis

Applying quantitative reasoning to ratios, rates, and proportional relationships

Geometry & Trigonometry

Solving problems focused on perimeter, area, volume, and angles

How the SAT Adapts

Module 1

Students are given questions of mixed difficulty, with the **more difficult questions being weighted more heavily**, or worth more points.

Less Difficult

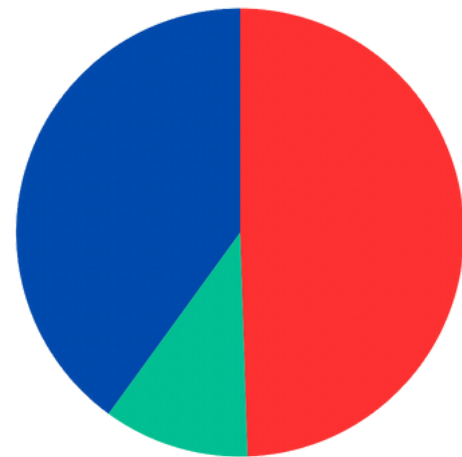
Moderately Difficult

Most Difficult



Less Difficult Module 2

Students who do not answer as many difficult (or heavily weighted) questions correctly will be routed to a less difficult second module. Correct answers in this module are generally worth fewer points.

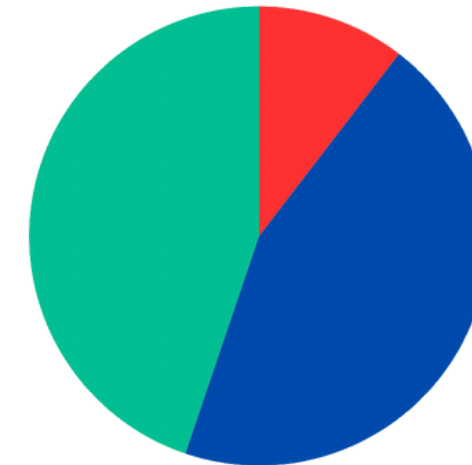


Student
routed based
on
performance



More Difficult Module 2

Students who answer more difficult (or more heavily weighted) questions correctly will be routed to a more difficult second module. Correct answers in this module are generally worth more points.



What this means for your score

Students routed to the **more difficult module** have access to questions that are **worth more points**. This means that they can **get fewer questions correct, but still get a higher score** than a student routed to the less difficult module.

On the flip-side, students who are routed to the **less difficult module** are essentially **locked out of higher potential scores**. This gives an added **importance to performing well at the beginning** of the test.

ACT Overview



What does the ACT **test**?

ENGLISH

**Tests Knowledge of
Written English**

Grammar, usage, &
mechanics

Understanding a
passage's purpose

Word choice,
consistency, tone

MATH

**Tests Math Skills
Through 10/11th Grade**

Algebra 1, Geometry,
Algebra 2

Fundamental
Trigonometry & Statistics

Producing & interpreting
models

READING

**Tests Ability to Read &
Reason Logically**

Determine main ideas &
details

Make connections &
comparisons

Analyze claims &
arguments

SCIENCE

**Tests *Problem Solving
Skills* for Sciences**

Analyze & manipulate
data

Identify controls &
variables

Compare conflicting
viewpoints & hypotheses

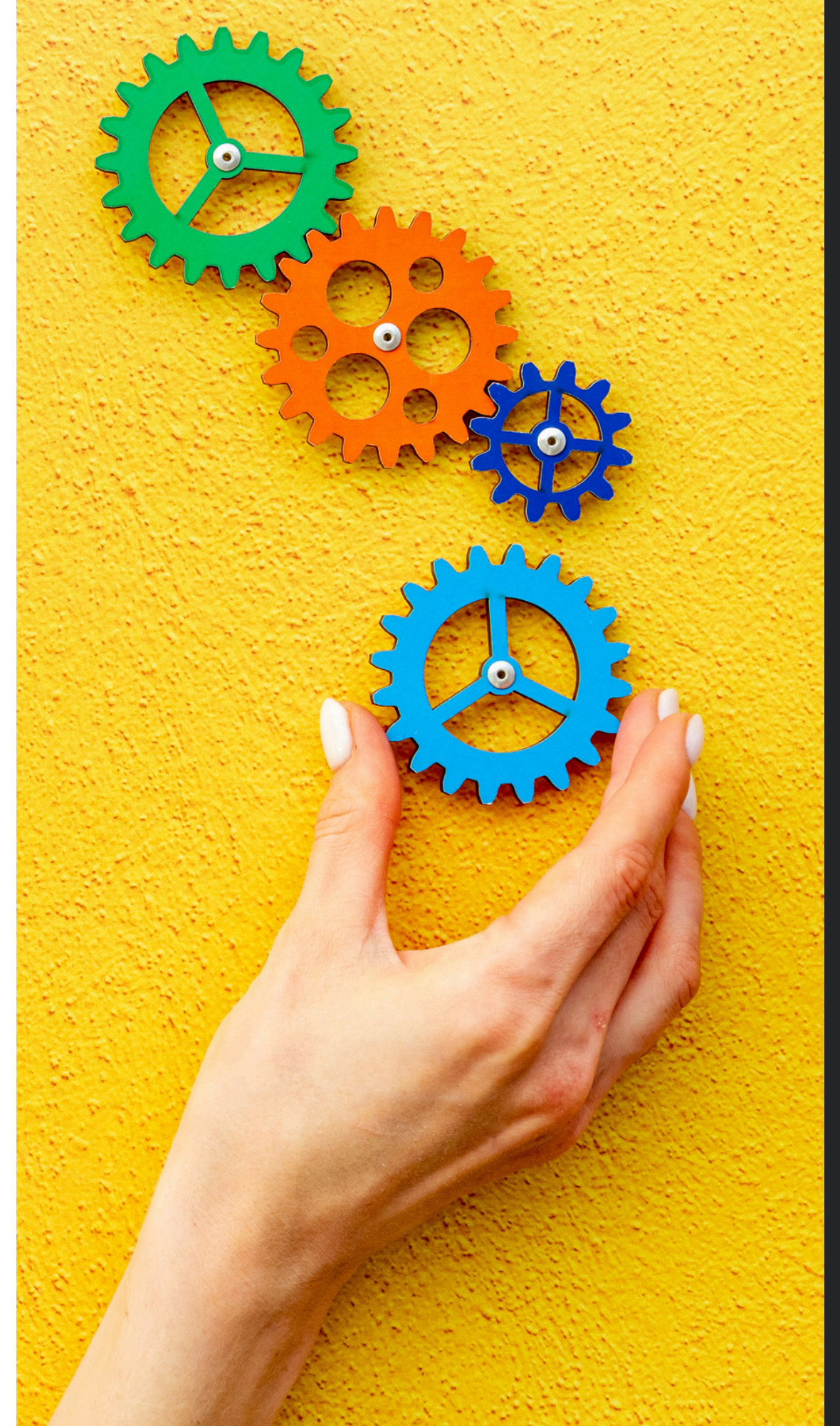
What's **Staying the Same?**

- The **composite score will remain on a scale of 1 to 36** possible points and be the average of its mandatory sections.
- It will remain a linear, **non-adaptive test**, even when students take it digitally.
- The **core competencies and content** tested in each section will remain largely the same.
- The **scores on the current ACT and Enhanced ACT will be comparable**, meaning if a student scores a 25 on the current ACT, they are expected to score a 25 on the Enhanced ACT.



What's **Changed?**

- The overall test and most of its sections will be **shorter**.
- Students will have **more time** per question.
- The **science section will be optional**, and the Composite score will be the average of the English, Reading, and Math sections.
 - The mandatory test portions (English, Math, Reading) will be collectively called the **"Core ACT."**
- Students will have the **option to test digitally** or with pencil and paper.



FORMAT & TIMING

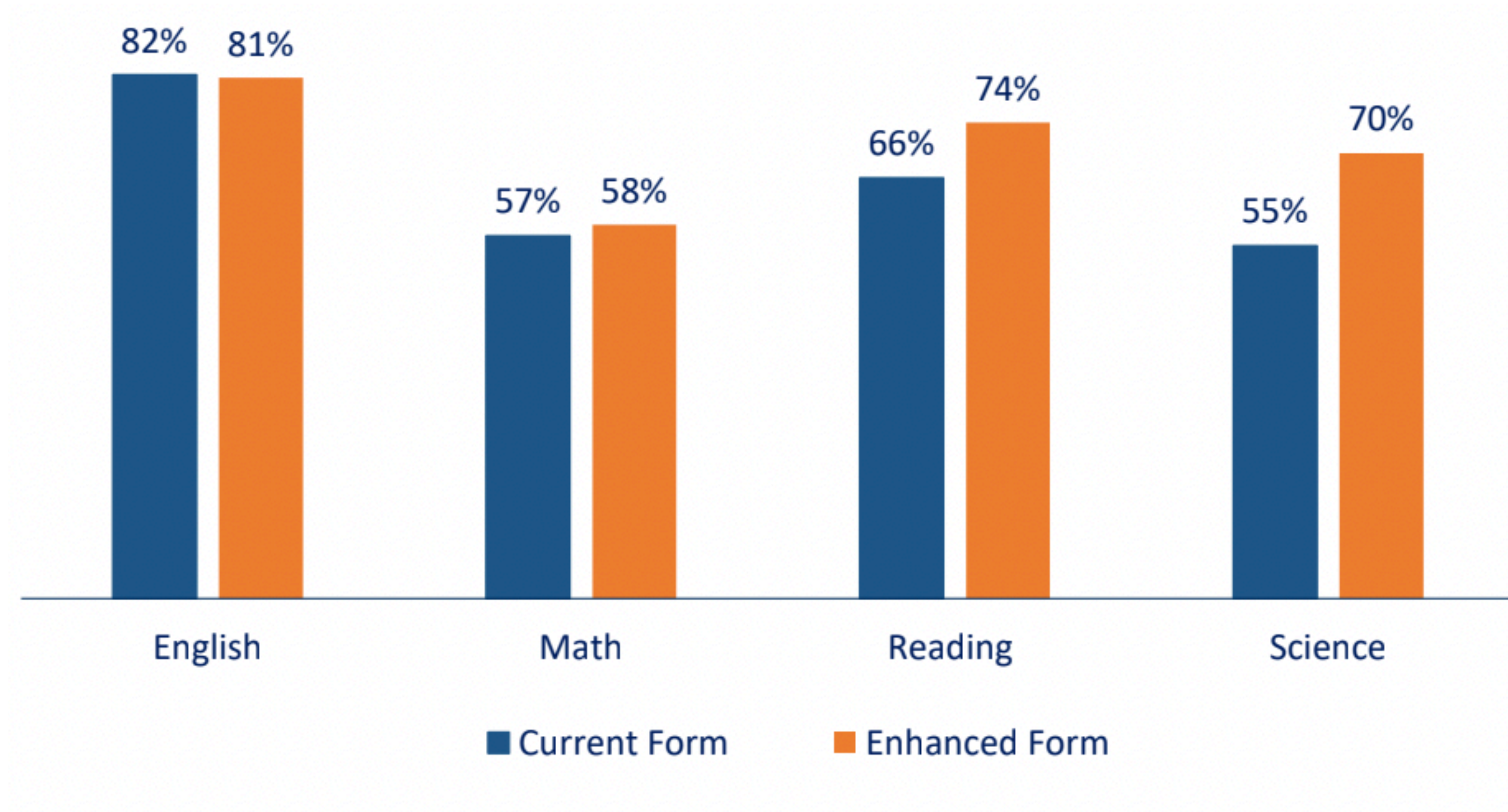
Current ACT	Enhanced ACT
1. English 45 minutes, 75 questions	1. English 35 minutes, 50 questions
2. Math 60 minutes, 60 questions	2. Math 50 minutes, 45 questions
3. Reading 35 minutes, 40 questions	3. Reading 40 minutes, 36 questions
4. Science (Mandatory) 35 minutes, 40 questions	4. Science (Optional) 40 minutes, 40 questions
Total Duration 175 minutes, 215 questions	Total Digital Duration 125 minutes, 131 questions (Core ACT) 165 minutes, 171 questions (with science)

Time Per Question

Section	Current Time Per Question	New Time Per Question	Increase in Time Per Question
English	36 seconds	42 seconds	6 seconds or 17%
Math	1 minute	1 minute 7 seconds	7 seconds or 11%
Reading	53 seconds	1 minute 7 seconds	14 seconds or 27%
Science	53 seconds	1 minute	7.5 seconds or 15%

Students have long reported that **rapid pacing and limited time** per question have been some of the **most challenging parts** of the ACT.

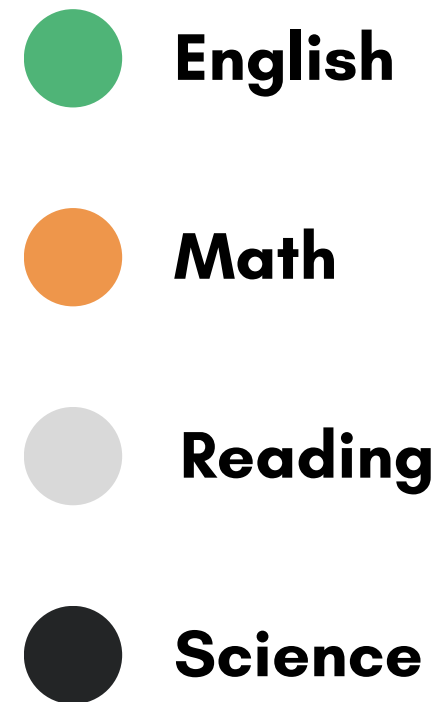
Examinees who reported having enough time per question



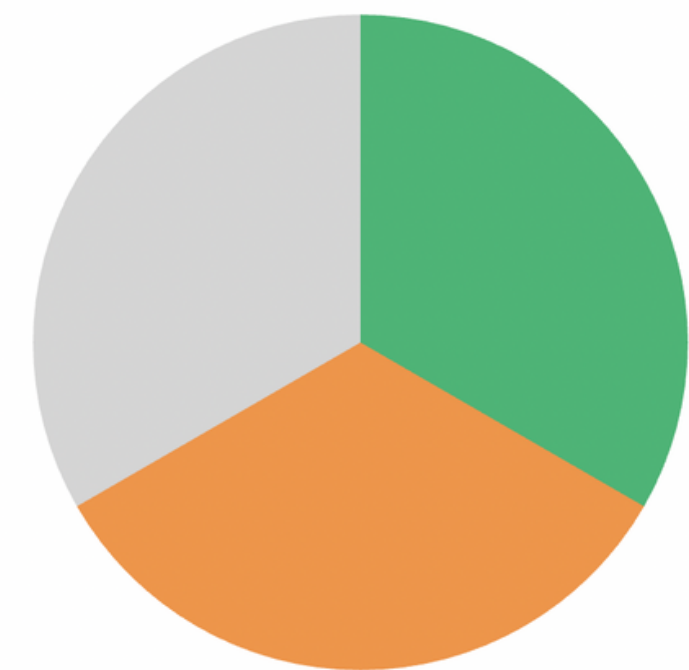
Changes to Scoring

The ACT will continue to be scored **out of 36 possible points**. A student's current composite score is an **average of the English, Math, Reading, and Science sections**. On the Enhanced ACT, a student's composite score will be an average of the **Core ACT**, only. If a student opts to take the **science section, it will reflect as a standalone score**. It will still be submitted with the Composites from the same sitting.

Current ACT



Enhanced ACT



SAT vs ACT



STANDARDIZED TEST FORMATS

ACT	SAT
1. English 35 minutes, 50 questions	1. Reading & Writing Module 1 32 minutes, 27 questions
2. Math 50 minutes, 45 questions	2. Reading & Writing Module 2 32 minutes, 27 questions
3. Reading 40 minutes, 36 questions	3. Math Module 1 (Calculator) 35 minutes, 22 questions
4. Science (Optional) 40 minutes, 40 questions	4. Math Module 2 (Calculator) 35 minutes, 22 questions
Total New ACT Duration 125 minutes, 131 questions (Core ACT) 165 minutes, 171 (with science)	Total Digital SAT Duration 134 minutes 98 questions

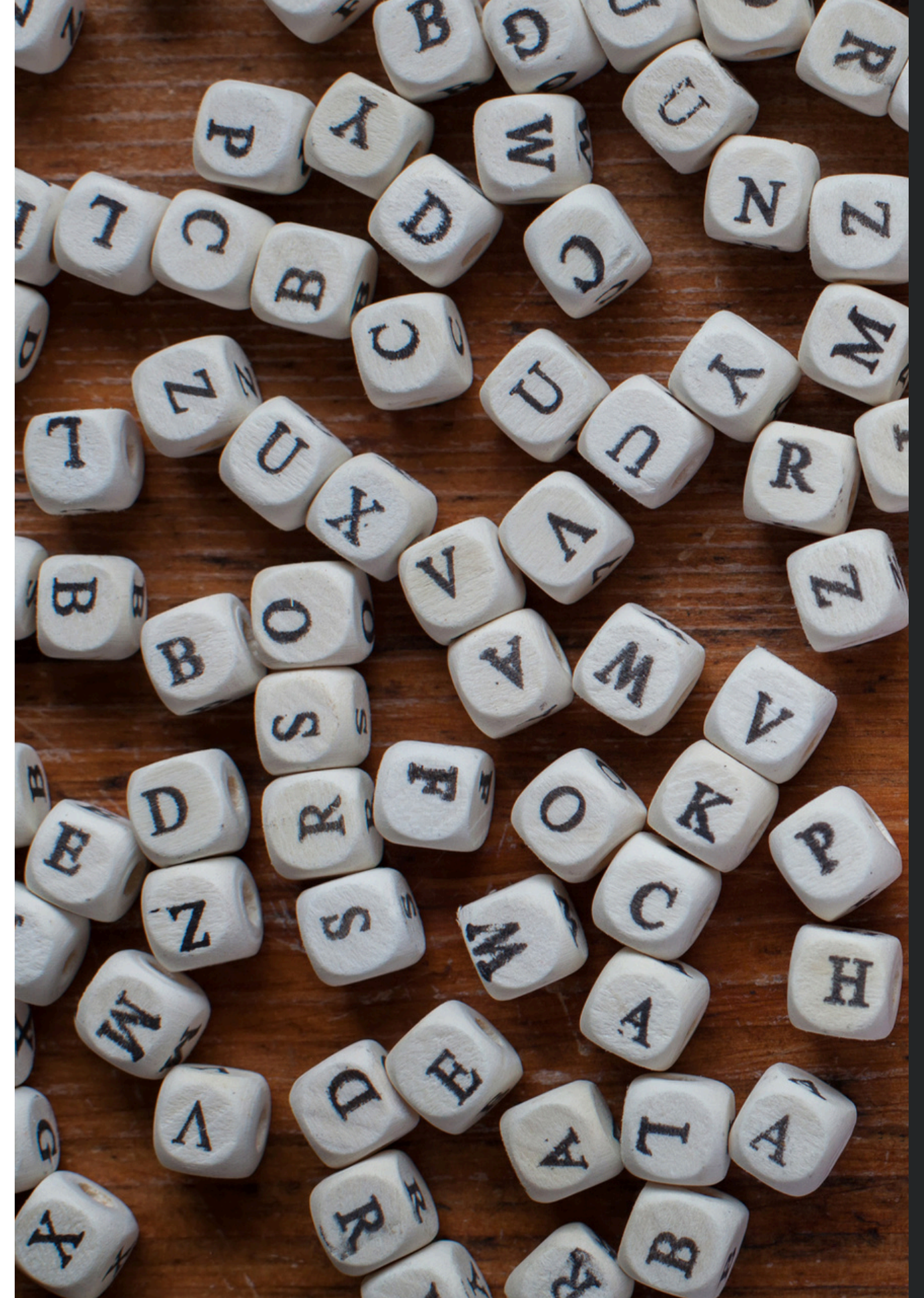
Differences in **Timing**

- The **SAT** is **2 hours and 14 minutes**.
- The **ACT without Science** is **2 hours and 5 minutes**.
 - The **ACT with Science** is **2 hours and 45 minutes**.
- On average, students have **more time per question** on the SAT than on the ACT.
- While the ACT moves more quickly than the SAT, its questions tend to be more **straightforward and take less time to answer**.
- Timing accommodations are **available for qualifying students** on both exams.



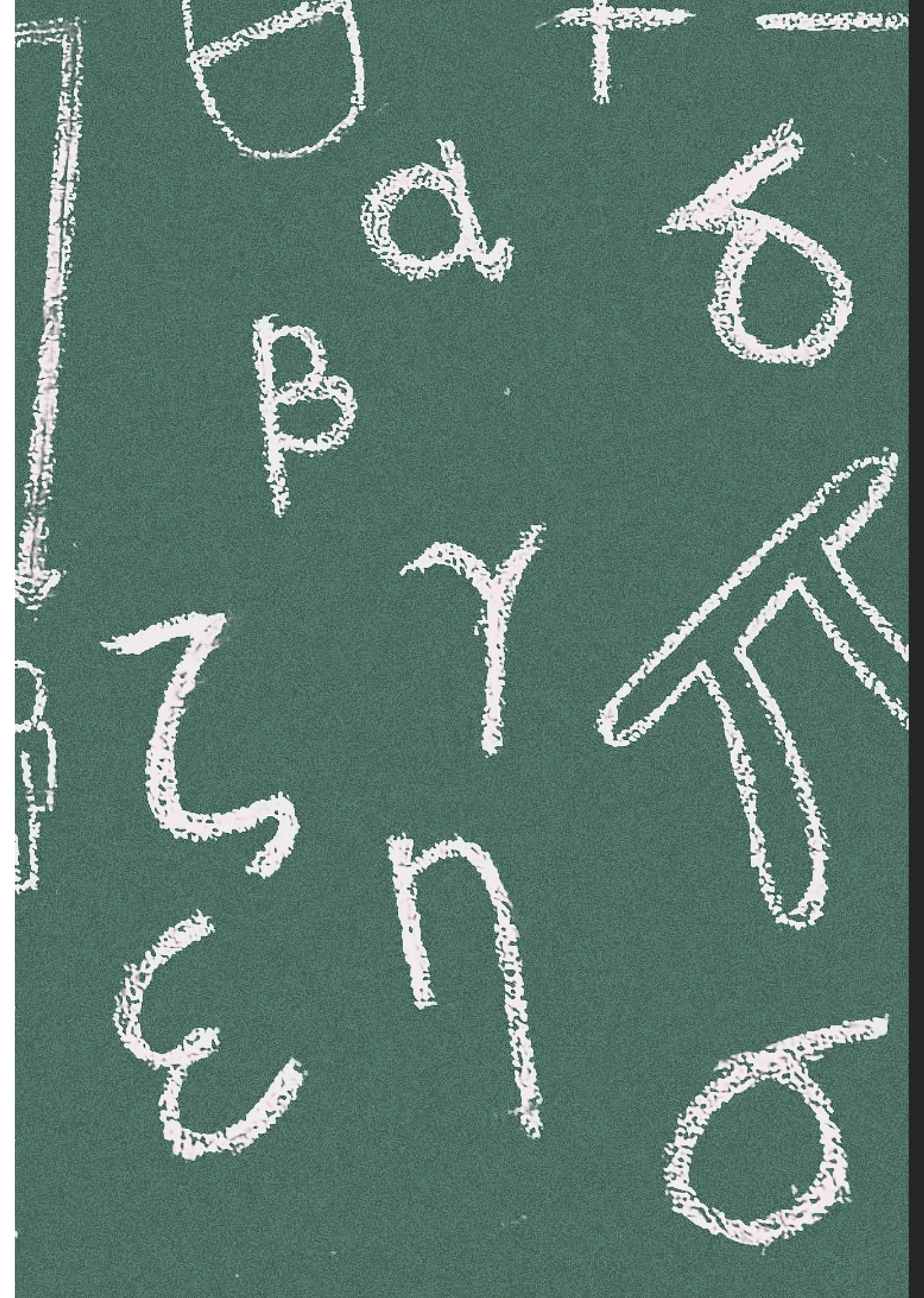
Differences in Reading & Writing

- The SAT has **one section** covering both Reading and Writing (English). The ACT has **separate sections for Reading and English (writing)**.
- The SAT's Reading & Writing section will contain reading comprehension questions structured around **shorter passages with one question each**. The ACT's Reading section contains **longer passages with 10 questions each**.
- The SAT's Reading & Writing section also includes passages dealing with **non-conventional writing**, like poetry or notes for a hypothetical essay.
- The questions on both tests address **the same concepts and skills**: grammar, identifying main ideas, discussing the intent of the author, etc.



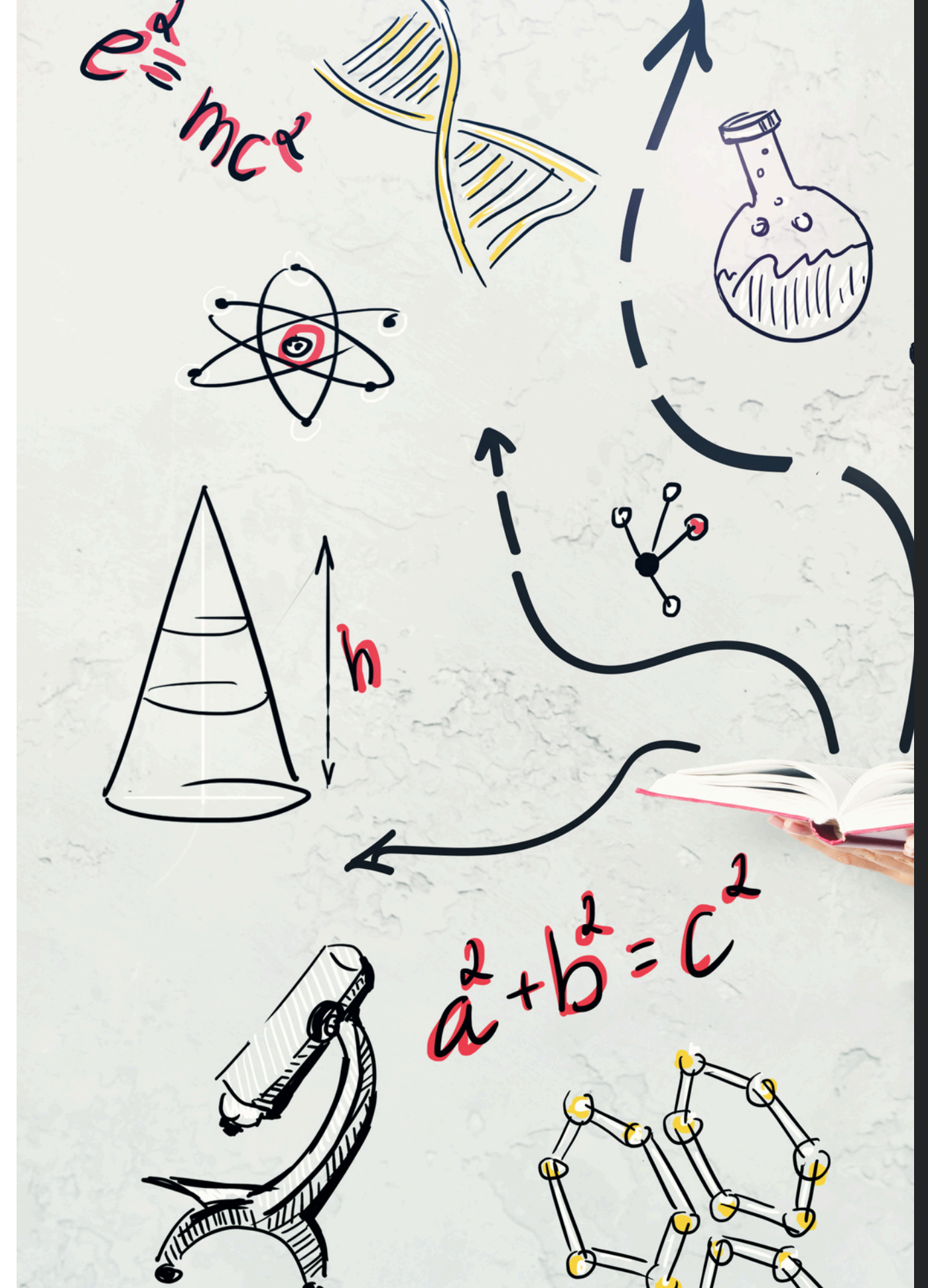
Differences in Math

- Both the SAT and ACT test concepts taught in **Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2.**
- The **ACT tests a broader set of skills**, and tends to have more questions that assess higher level math knowledge.
- The **SAT uses more word problems** and often gives the student unnecessary information.
- **Calculators are allowed on all math problems on both tests.** For the SAT and digital ACT, students have access to an on-screen graphing calculator (Desmos) built directly into the testing software.



A word about ACT Science...

- The ACT has an optional Science section, while the SAT does not have a Science section at all. Instead, science-type questions are woven into both sections of the SAT.
- Taking the Science section on the ACT is **optional**. Many colleges have yet to announce their policies for science, and we expect it to be largely optional.
- On the **old ACT**, Science tested a student's **problem-solving skills required for the scientific process**.
- On the **new ACT**, students may encounter **more questions that require scientific background knowledge**.
- But at its core, the ACT Science is still a test of **logic, pattern recognition, and data interpretation**.



Differences in Scoring

	New ACT	SAT
Total Score	36 possible points	1600 possible points
How It's Calculated	Average of English, Math, and Reading sections, each scored out of 36	Total of Reading/Writing and Math sections, each scored out of 800
Math Weighting	33% of total score	50% of total score

How do I know which test is best for **my student?**

Sign up for a free, virtually proctored practice test on November 8th or 9th!

Every family can review their score(s) with an expert who will help determine which test is better for your student.

If students have already taken a PSAT at school, consider starting with a practice ACT.



What Colleges Want



Testing Policy Fluency

Test Policy	What does it mean?	Should I submit SAT/ACT scores?
Test Blind	Test scores do not hold weight in admissions decisions, even if submitted.	You do not need to submit scores, but consult with your college counselor to make sure you won't need/want a test for certain program or financial aid considerations.
Test Optional	Schools will consider test scores if a student submits them, but will not penalize a student if they do not submit them.	Yes, if your score is above the average score for incoming freshman at the college. No, if your score is below the average, and be aware the other parts of your application might hold more weight.
Test Optional with Caveats	Scores are not required for a school in general , but are required for certain programs and scholarships.	Yes, if your score is above the average score for incoming freshman at the college and/or required for a certain program/scholarship.
Test Optional Based on GPA	Scores are required if students have below a certain GPA.	Yes, if your score is above average for incoming freshman at the college and/or you have below the minimum required GPA.
Test-Flexible	Sometimes used interchangeably with "test-optional", test-flexible also means schools require tests, but will take AP or IB exams instead of an SAT/ACT.	Yes , and you should aim for a competitive score. In the absence of a competitive SAT/ACT score, submit another test score that "shows off" your testing proficiency.
Required	There's no getting out of it.	Yes , and you should aim for a highly competitive score.

How Optional is **Test-Optional**?

Boston College has always said: *Internal research has shown that test scores, when used alongside other factors such as grades, curriculum rigor, writing, co-curricular involvement, and recommendations, **add measurable value in predicting academic success.** For this reason, students who complete the SAT or ACT are encouraged to submit their scores.*

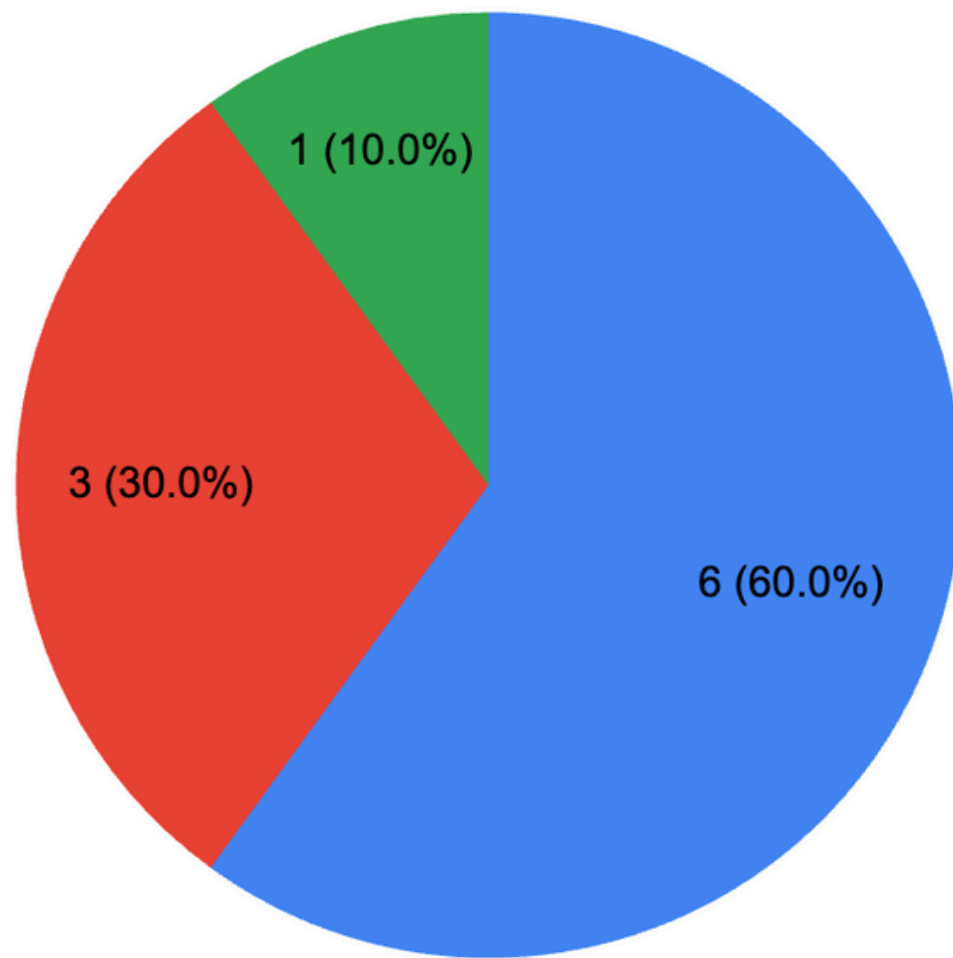
They recently added: *During the 2024-25 application cycle, **approximately 75% of admitted students submitted SAT and/or ACT test scores.***

Last year, Oberlin said: *Test-optional truly means test-optional: the **absence of scores will not count against a student's** application in any way.*

Now they say: *If you have taken the SAT or the ACT, we encourage you to submit your scores to **Oberlin.** While our holistic application review will weigh your four-year academic journey — including grades, strength of curriculum, and teacher recommendations — more heavily than the results of standardized tests, your standardized test score will provide an **additional data point that can help increase our confidence in your ability to succeed at Oberlin.***

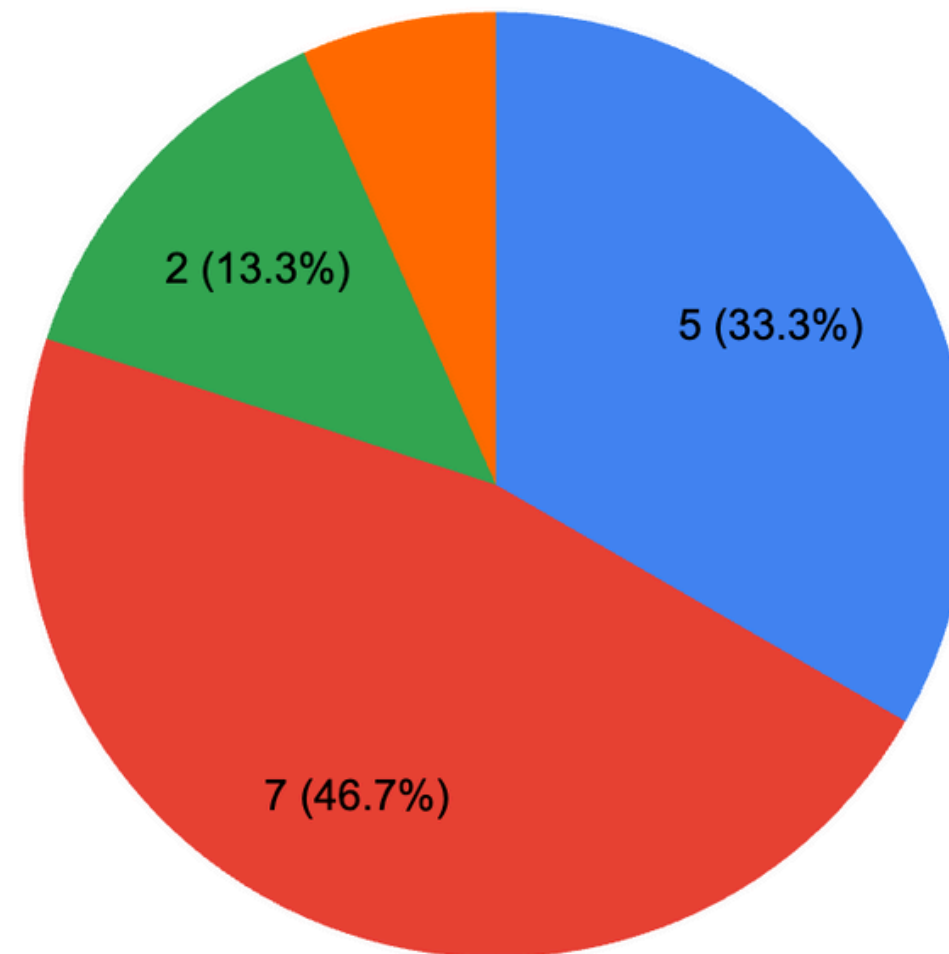
Student Score Submissions

Top 10 - Average 82%



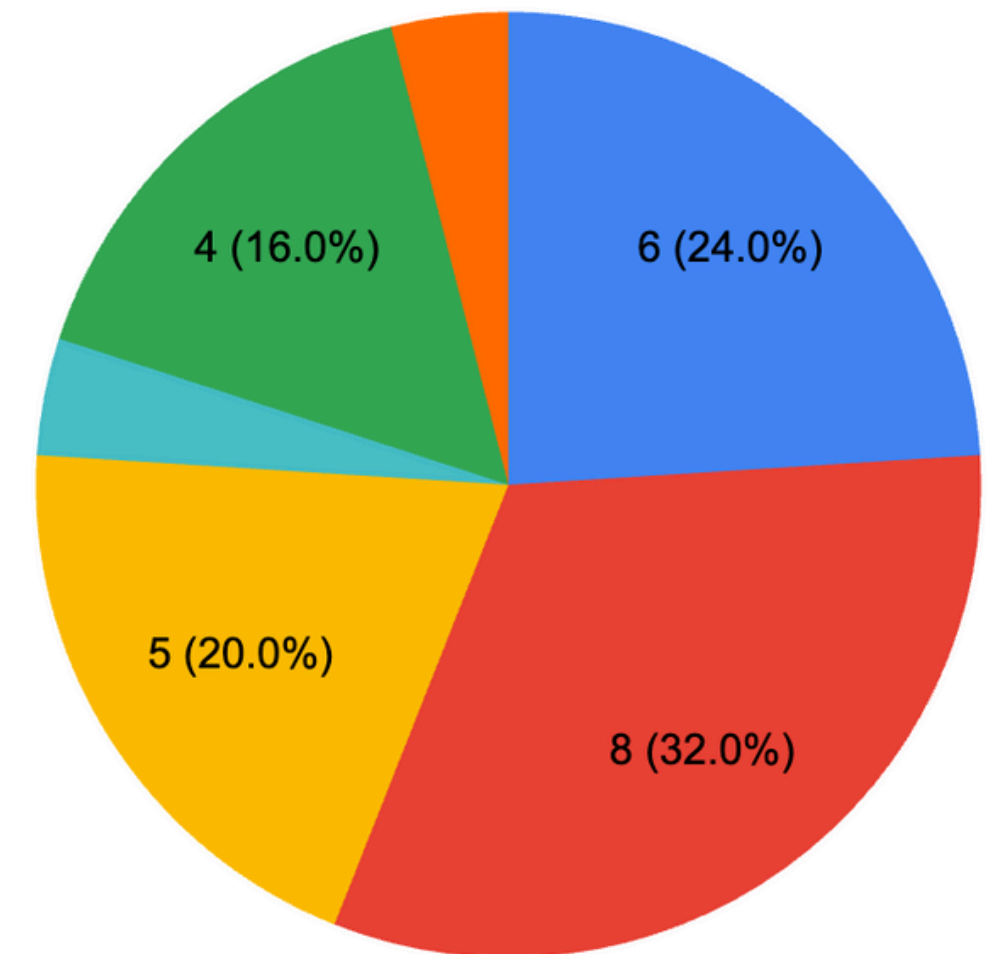
• >=75% or Required • 50-74% • Test Blind

Top 11-25 - Average 72%



• >=75% or Required • 50-74% • Test Blind
• Data Not Reported

Top 26-50 - Average 63%



• >=75% or Required • 50-74% • 25-49%
• <25% • Test Blind • Data Not Reported

Submitting to Test Optional Schools

- Each year, every college publishes the **percentage of enrolled Freshmen who submitted scores and their averages.**
- Students should aim to submit scores **at or above the school's average.**
- Students should also consider **how much of their competition** will submit scores.
- A student is **never required to submit a score to a test-optional college**, even if they've tested.

SCHOOL	STUDENTS W/ TEST SCORES	SAT AVERAGES	ACT AVERAGES
Ohio State	85%	1260 to 1420	26 to 32
Harvard	83%	1490 to 1580	34 to 36
Vanderbilt	61%	1490 to 1570	34 to 35
Carnegie Mellon	71%	1500 to 1570	34 to 35
USC	50%	1460 to 1540	32 to 35
NYU	37%	1470 to 1550	33 to 35

Keep in Mind: Admissions readers spend *5-15 minutes on each application*. The more concrete data you can give them to quickly see what you are capable of, the better!

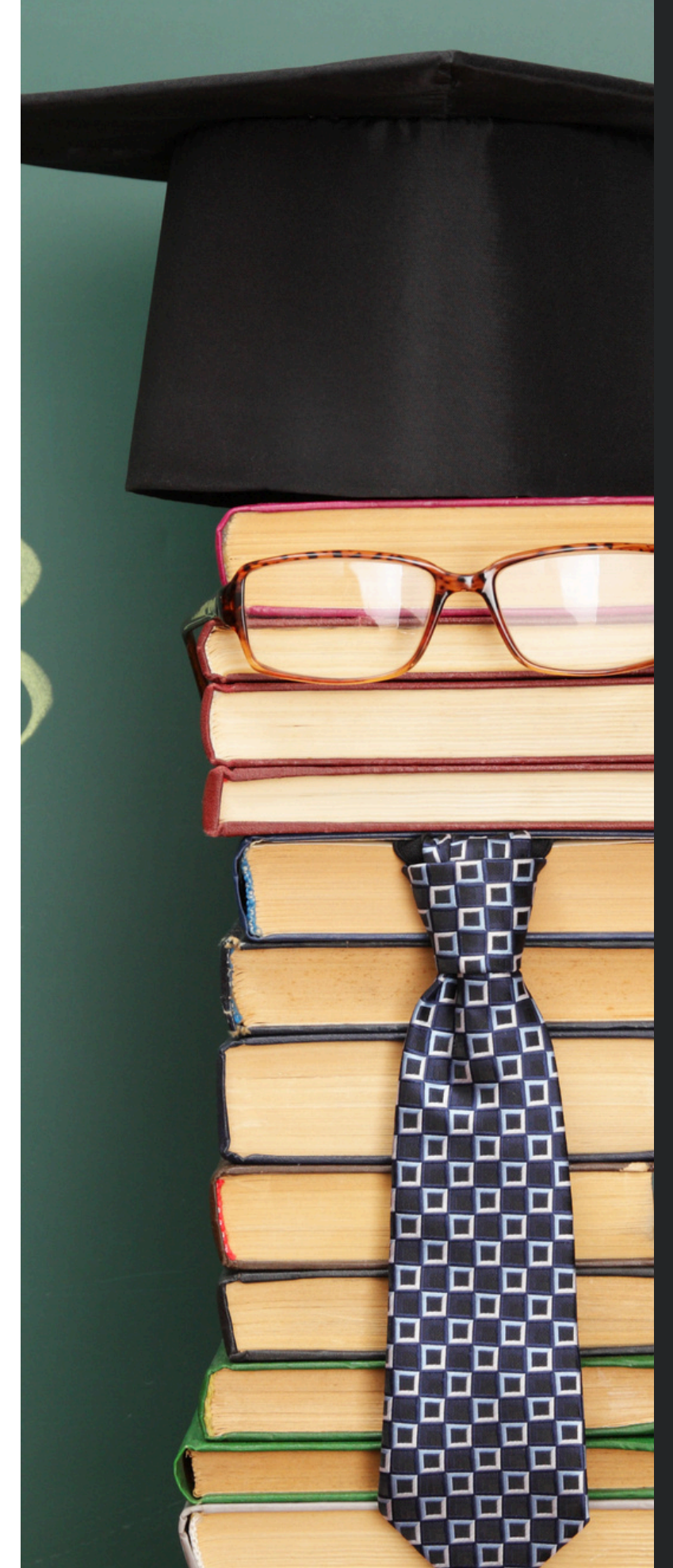
Score Choice

- The SAT & ACT both allow students to **register with “score choice,”** which means they can **select the scores they send to colleges** instead of sending all scores automatically.
- Most US Colleges only consider a student’s **highest score and do not care how many times they test.**
- Certain highly selective colleges, such as Georgetown and some Ivys, will still **require scores from all tests**, but the highest score is considered a reflection of a student’s potential.



Superscoring

- About **75% of colleges “Superscore,”** meaning they combine a student’s best section scores from multiple test dates.
- An **SAT Superscore** totals a student’s best Reading & Writing section with a student’s best Math section. It does not take individual modules into account.
- A **legacy ACT Superscore** averages a student’s best English, Math, Reading, and Science scores.
- An **Enhanced ACT Superscore** averages a student’s best English, Math, and Reading scores.
- Students must take a full-length test to earn scores eligible for a Superscore. **Single-section testing is not an option** with the SAT or ACT.



Where do I find up to date **college data**?

- Make **common data sets** your BFFs
- College **admissions policy** page
- **Contact us**
- Talk to your **college counselor**



How to Succeed



Testing Timeline

When should my student **take the SAT/ACT?**

Sophomore

- **Take the PSAT** in October
- Consider taking their first SAT/ACT if they have **completed Alg 2**

First
Semester
Junior

- **Take the PSAT** (NMSQT) in October
- Take their first SAT/ACT if they've **completed Alg 2**

Second
Semester
Junior

- Take their first SAT/ACT if they're currently in Alg 2
- **In our opinion**, every student should have tested **at least once (if not 2-3 times)** by the end of their Junior year

First
Semester
Senior

- If they are unable to wrap up testing within Junior year, **take their last test by fall of Senior year**
- **EA/ED deadlines are in November**; regular admissions deadlines are in December and January

Preparation Timeline

When should my student **start preparing** for the SAT/ACT?

Rising
Junior
Summer

START PREP IF:

- They have **completed Algebra 2**
- They have a **rigorous junior year**
- They want **200+ points/5+ points** of improvement
- They have **learning differences**, test **anxiety**, or known **gaps in academic fundamentals**

First
Semester
Junior

START PREP IF:

- They meet the aforementioned criteria, but **cannot logistically fit in prep** over the summer
- Still, if possible, try to do *SOMETHING* over summer when they have **increased mental capacity**

Second
Semester
Junior

START PREP IF:

- They are **currently in Algebra 2**
- The demands of summer and/or junior year did not allow them to start prep earlier.

Rising
Senior
Summer

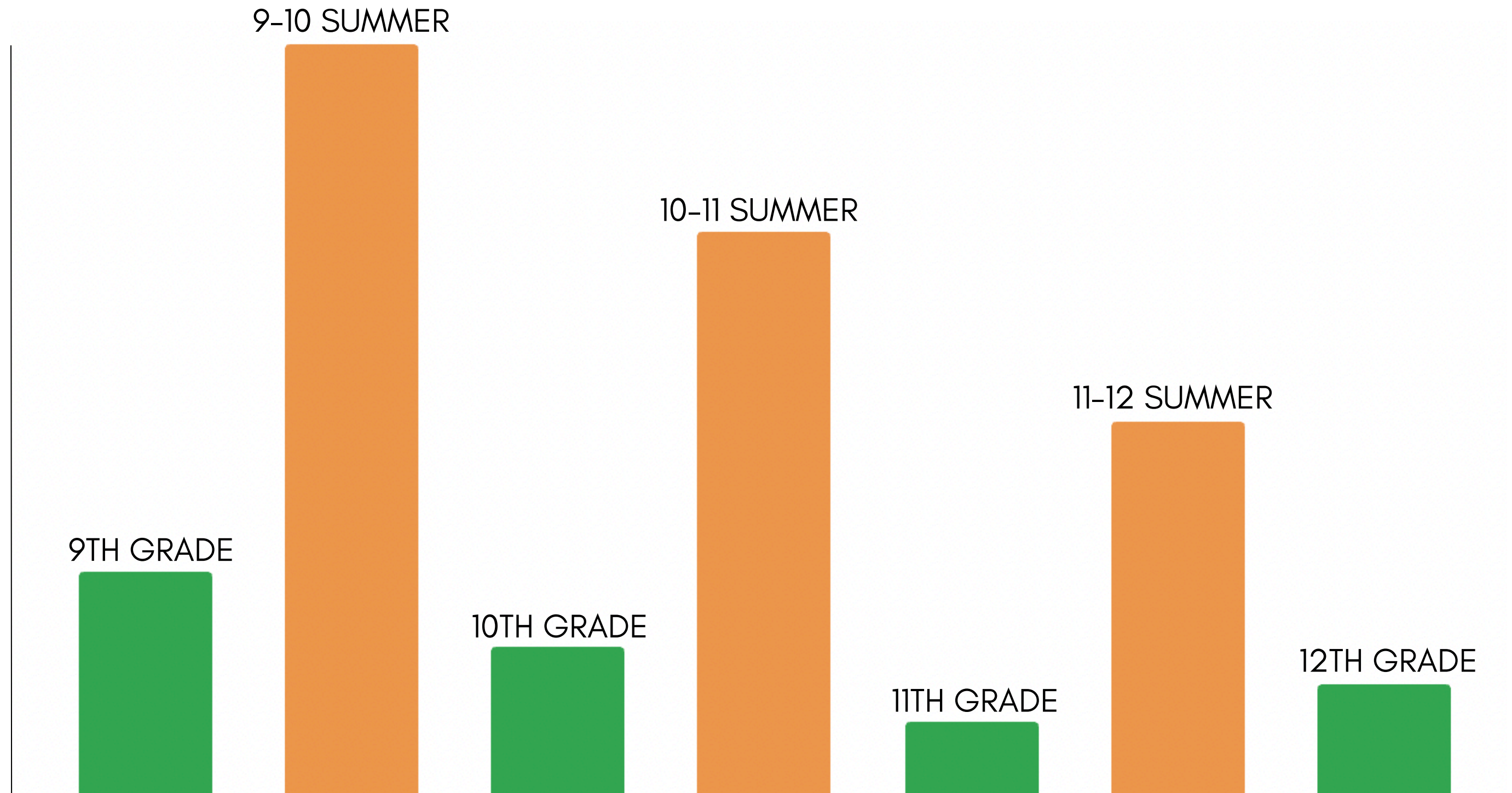
START PREP IF:

- **In our opinion**, students should **start prep prior to Senior year**, but we understand that life happens.
- Regardless of where your student is, summer is a great time to **brush up on skills** for a final test

Student Capacity In High School

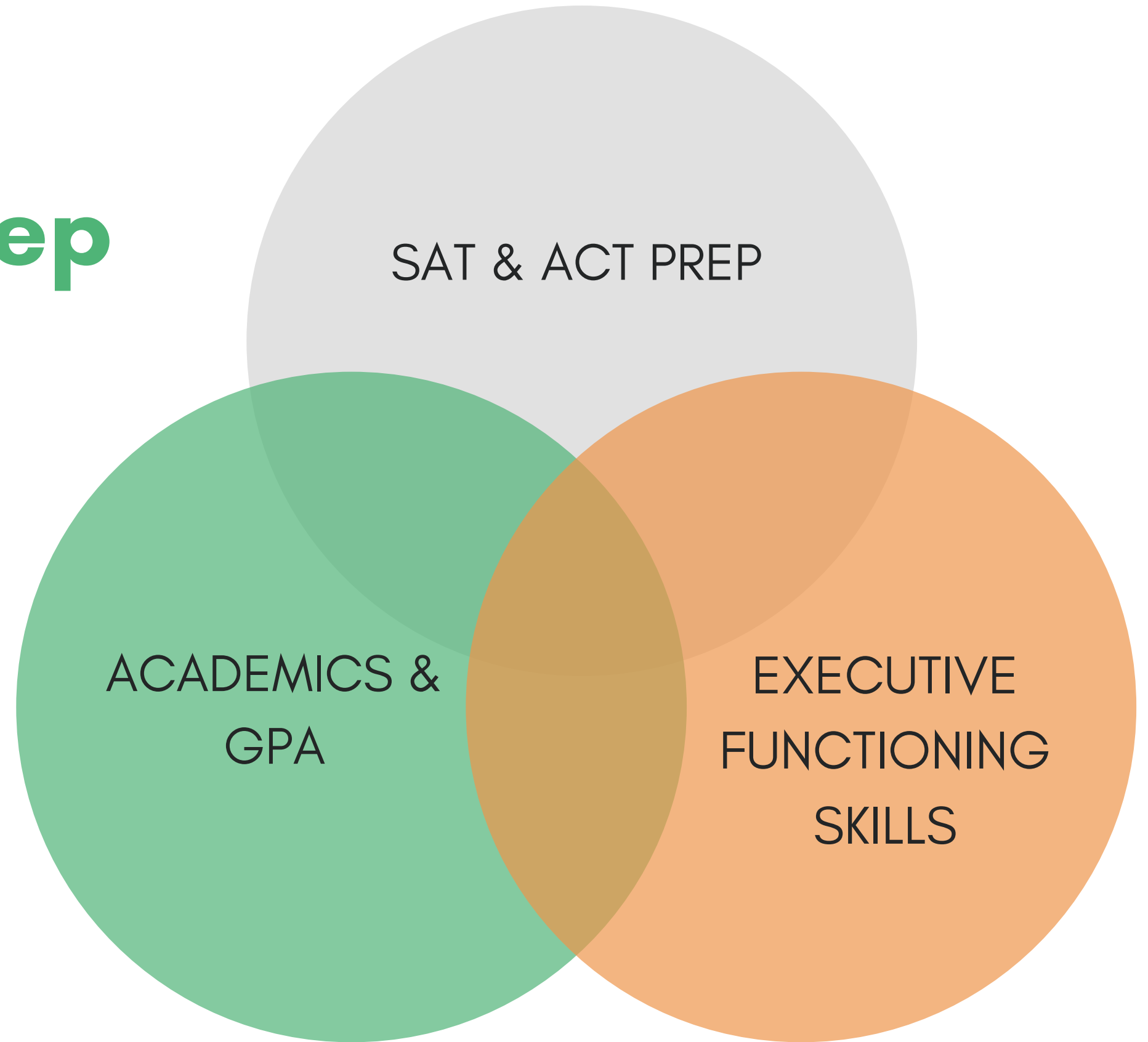
Time Available

- School Year
- Summer



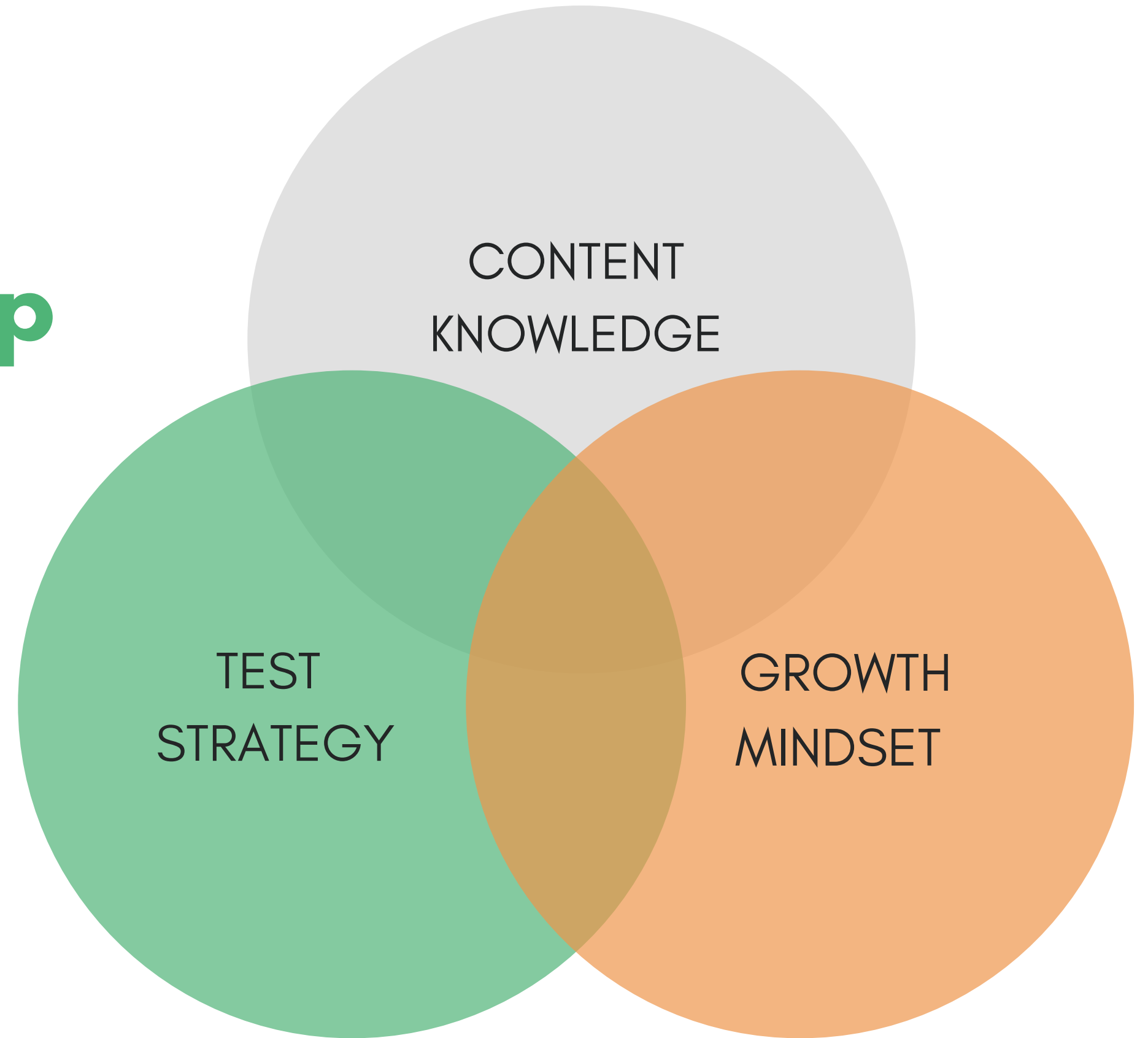
Benefits of early prep

A successful test prep program will reinforce critical **academic concepts** and teach students strong **executive functioning skills**. Test prep should benefit students in **measurable** ways beyond the SAT/ACT.



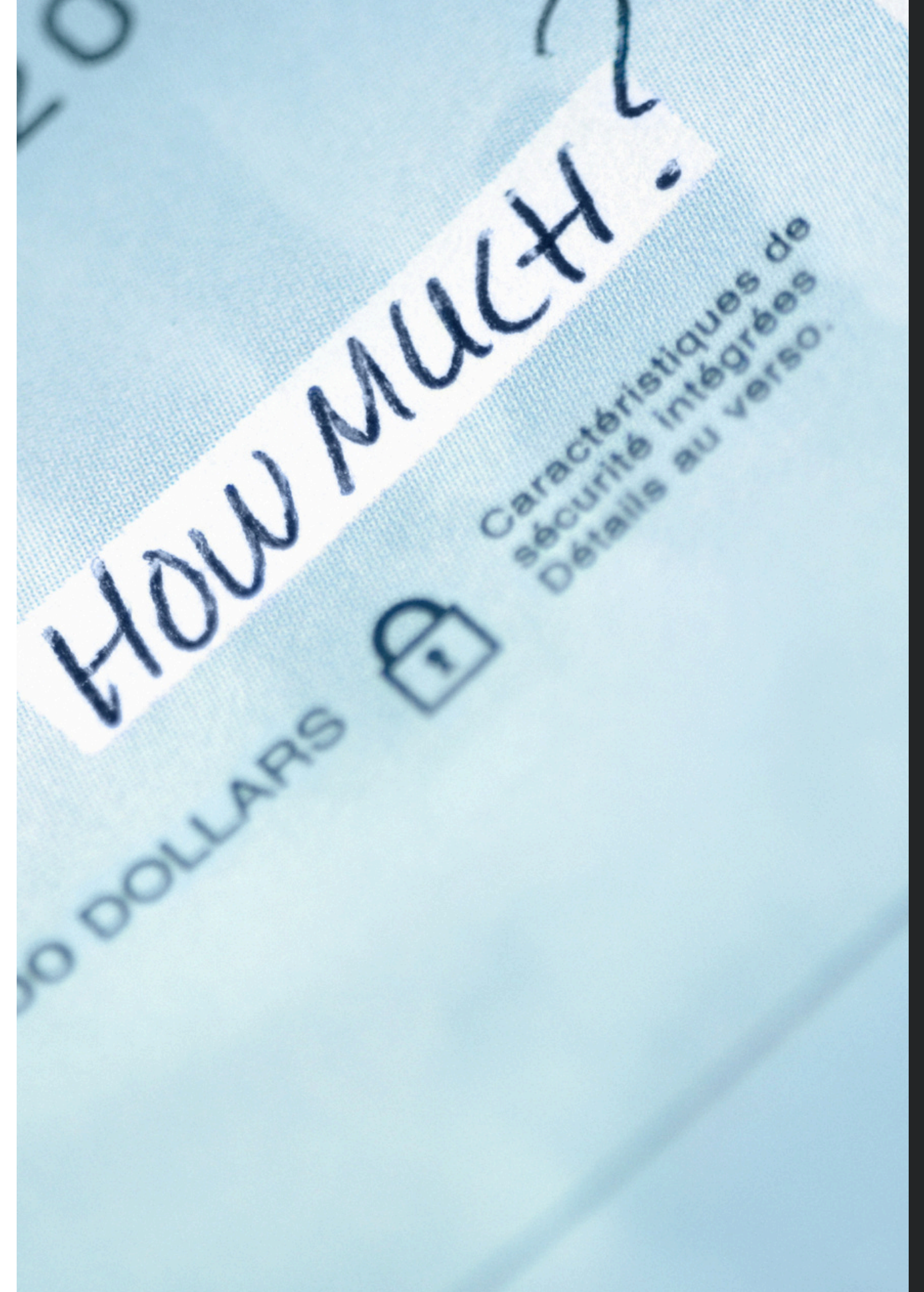
A well rounded prep program:

Most students must focus on a personalized combination of three things to adequately prepare for an exam.



How much should my student prepare?

- This is **entirely based on the student**, their starting score, their goal score, and their learning style.
- **On average**, Marigold Prep students improve by 100/2-3 points with every 10-12 hours of tutoring.
- **Not all point increases are created equally.** For example, going from a 1000 to a 1200 is usually “easier” than going from a 1200 to 1400.
- Find a program that will **customize an approach** based on your **family’s needs, schedule, and budget.**
- **Avoid programs** that offer point increase guarantees or pitch “one size fits all” packages.
- Like anything in life, time and effort yield results. **Dramatic point increases (300/8+) are possible** but do not happen overnight.





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Additional questions?

Use [the link](#) in the chat to schedule a free consultation.

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