

Luu Tutoring F.A.Q.

Which is the better test for my child: SAT or ACT?

There is a significant amount of overlap between the two tests—especially in the Math, **Grammar, and Reading sections**. Some minor **differences**:

1. The ACT has a **Science section**, which is actually more of a reading test, one that measures how quickly and precisely students can interpret scientific data, as presented in charts and graphs. (Although the SAT does not have a *separate* science section, scientific passages also appear in the SAT's Reading Section)
2. The math concepts tested on both tests are also very similar. The SAT tests a smaller range of concepts, but it tests these concepts in much greater depth. The ACT tests a wider range of math concepts but does not go into as much depth.
3. The SAT Math has one section (20 questions out of 58) during which students may *not* use their calculators; the ACT allows calculator usage on all 60 of its math questions. However, the SAT's multiple-choice questions will have only 4 choices, as opposed to the 5 choices on the ACT math.

For students who want classroom tutoring, or tutoring in groups of 2 through 6 students

I have structured my classes so that students will be prepared for both tests. The differences between the two tests, as detailed above, actually aren't that significant.

For students who want private (1-on-1) or pairs tutoring:

Most students will have taken the 10th-grade PSAT, so we can use that as a diagnostic measure. I will also give your child a diagnostic ACT exam. If your child shows a clear preference for one test, it's better to focus on that test. On the other hand, your child might show no clear preference, and it might take 6 or 7 sessions to decide which test better suits him/her. With private or pairs tutoring, there is more flexibility to explore and decide which test is better.

Some students decide to take both tests—at least for their first exam, in the winter or spring of junior year—to leave their options open. Later—over the summer, say—some of these students focus on only one of the tests. Others end up sending *both* SAT and ACT scores to colleges, to present the most comprehensive profile.

For students planning to apply for extended-time accommodations:

Please read footnote at the bottom of the page.¹

When should my child begin tutoring?

The summer before junior year is the ideal time to start tutoring. **Students who start sophomore year or the summer before junior year are more likely to finish tutoring by junior year.** If your child's PSAT scores are high, we can start in the fall of junior year.

However, if your child has skipped a year in math; needs to brush up on the fundamentals of math, reading, or grammar; will be a recruited athlete; is aiming for the National Merit Scholarship competition; and/or wants to apply for highly selective internships or enrichment programs for the summer after junior year—it might be beneficial to start in the 2nd semester of sophomore year.

¹The SAT vs. ACT decision could hinge on which test will grant your child extended-time. Ideally, both tests will grant him/her extended-time. But if only one test does so—historically, the SAT is more lenient in terms of approving extended-time—then your child is most likely better off focusing on the test for which he/she has been approved for extended-time. Please know that the two exams are separate, rival corporations; so if your child already has been granted extended-time by one test, you still have to apply for accommodations with the other test.

When Should My Child Begin Tutoring: Special Cases

1. **Accelerated math students** (those who have skipped a year of math—and/or will take Calculus junior year) might also want as early as possible. Why? The math section on both the ACT and SAT will cover concepts through Pre-Calculus *only*—nothing related to Calculus. Therefore, students in accelerated math should start in January or February and aim to take the June ACT or May SAT test date, because these dates synchronize perfectly with the same Pre-Calculus curriculum and final exam dates given at school. If accelerated math students start tutoring in November of junior year or later, they might have to spend too much of class time reviewing concepts from the Pre-Calculus from the 10th grade.
2. **Students who need to brush up on the fundamentals of math, reading, and/or grammar.**
3. **Recruited athletes** should start tutoring sophomore year—since the vast majority of colleges will require that athletes have all of their testing done by June of junior year.
4. **Students who want to compete for the National Merit Scholarship and whose scores are within striking distance of what’s required to advance in the competition.** Students who have a combined score of approximately 1200 on the 10th grade-PSAT² might also want to start as early as possible. The reason is that the qualifying test for National Merit is the PSAT that students take in October of junior year.
5. **Students who want to apply for highly selective internships or enrichment programs the summer after junior year.** The deadlines for such internships and enrichment programs are usually January to March of junior-year, and one of the most important criteria for admissions is the student’s PSAT score from junior-year or any SAT/ACT scores taken earlier than usual—the tests in November, December, or January.

I want private tutoring for my child. Should I choose the 1-hour option, the 1 hr-15 minute option?

I recommend the 1 hour-15 minute option. Students with high starting scores (above 600 per section on the PSAT and above a 27 on the P-ACT) can get by with 1-hour sessions. Students who are starting tutoring late and/or whose starting scores are 500 or below do the 1 hour-15 minute option. In general, the longer the session, the greater the likelihood of maximizing a student’s score.

I’m unsure of the best option: private, pairs, or classroom?

Private (one-on-one) tutoring offers the most individualized teaching and the most comprehensive curriculum. If the student’s starting scores are below 500 per section on the SAT or below 21 on the PACT, I strongly recommend that students do private tutoring.

If you’re concerned about costs, may I suggest that you try one of these options:

A) Start with classroom, group, or pairs tutoring, but switch to private tutoring later. (The summer before senior year or the fall of senior year.)

B) Start with private tutoring—the shorter, 1-hour option. But keep open the possibility that we might have to switch to longer sessions a couple months before the first test. Please keep in mind, though, that students who start with shorter sessions or with classroom or pairs tutoring often end up taking longer to finish, and so it might be better to do private sessions anyway, to increase the chances that students will be done as soon as possible.

Also, please keep in mind that the cost of tutoring is an investment in your child’s future, one that equals only a fraction of a year’s tuition at private schools, and only a small fraction of just one year’s college tuition. This investment can make a tremendous difference in college admissions, which affects graduate school admissions, and future job opportunities. Furthermore, often the investment pays for itself. Every year many of my students receive scholarships and grant aid from colleges—often totaling more than

² The PSAT score is given as a “Selection Index” on your child’s PSAT score report, which was given to the students this past December.

\$70,000 for all four years. Perhaps most important: although I help with standardized tests, I always re-teach the fundamentals of math, grammar, and reading skills. In the past, students have told me that my classes have also helped them improve in their regular school courses: physics, English, History, and even college mathematics.

What happens after the first SAT/ACT test?

The vast majority of students take these tests 2 or 3 times.

Students who start sophomore year are more likely to finish tutoring by junior year.

Students who start *junior year* might need to continue with tutoring in the fall of senior year or over the summer. Some students feel comfortable enough with the tests to take them senior year without my guidance. (Or they need only 4 or 5 sessions again in the fall of senior year).

My child's school already has an in-house tutoring agency. How are you different from the teachers at the big agencies?

In general, the franchise agencies hire young teachers, often recent college graduates without significant classroom experience, and ask them to teach from the standardized, “cookie-cutter” script. This model has some advantages and disadvantages. Some of the teaching from the chain agencies can be excellent, but sometimes the teaching can be inconsistent. I believe that the college-admissions tests are too important to be scripted and “farmed out” to recent college graduates. I have almost 20 years’ experience teaching in the classroom: I’ve taught upper-school Pre-Calculus and Geometry; fifth-form American Literature; sixth-form Expository Writing; and sixth-form Fiction & Poetry—all at a competitive private school in New York City. I’ve also taught English Composition at Boston University and at a local college near Chicago. And of course for many years now I’ve taught standardized tests through Luu Tutoring.

Furthermore, in the vast majority of classes at the franchises, the teacher will teach in this manner: he assigns a practice section and then, in class, he explains one question that many students got wrong.

Then he proceeds to another question that needs to be explained, without going in depth.

I, however, have a different strategy. If a handful of the students get a problem wrong—let’s say a problem on probability or verb tenses—I will do more than just explain the problem. I will slow down and do a focused lesson to review the concept. Then I will sign a dozen questions for homework, ranging from easy questions to the hardest possible questions on that concept.

If my child starts out with tutoring in a class or group tutoring, can my child switch to private tutoring or a smaller group later?

Yes. For pairs and classroom tutoring, I ask that parents pay for the sessions in advance, toward a targeted test date. Each class will have a targeted test date (and test type): for example, “the March SAT or the April ACT class.” After the targeted test date, the student can continue to the next targeted test date. Or switch to other, more individualized tutoring options.

How can you help students with college-application essays?

I can guide students through the entire process of writing the essay: from initial brainstorming to final draft. Many students, however, just use me as the final editor of essays they’ve worked on previously; one of my strengths is trimming down essays dramatically so that they fit the required length required by colleges. In my twenties I co-edited a book called “*Watermark: Vietnamese-American Poetry & Prose*” (Asian-American Writers Workshop: 1998)

To view sample college essays that I’ve edited, please visit www.luututoring.com and click on the “Admissions Essays” tab.