

HURWITZ CONSULTING • DR. NATHAN HURWITZ

# SAT/ACT Strategy Guide

*A clear, low-stress plan for smarter test prep — not last-minute panic*

The most successful test-takers are not the ones who cram — they're the ones who prepare early, practice strategically, and understand what the test is actually measuring. This guide explains the difference between the SAT and ACT, how to choose the right test, and how early planning leads to better results with less stress.

## SAT vs. ACT — WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

### SAT

- Focuses on careful reading and close analysis
- Strong emphasis on grammar and writing conventions
- Algebra and problem-solving — methodical approach
- Slightly slower pace — more time per question
- Better for students who prefer to think problems through carefully

### ACT

- Emphasizes speed and efficiency
- Frequent topic switching across sections
- Straightforward math and reading questions
- Science section — data interpretation and reasoning
- Better for students who work quickly and trust their instincts

### THE RULE

*Choosing the right test is not about intelligence. It's about how well you process information under timed conditions. Take a diagnostic of both before deciding.*

## STEP 1 | START WITH A DIAGNOSTIC

Before any prep begins, take a full-length diagnostic SAT and/or ACT under realistic timed conditions.

### A diagnostic test helps you:

- Identify natural strengths and weaknesses

- Reveal timing patterns — are you rushing, or running out of time?
- Clarify which test is the better fit
- Set realistic, individualized goals

### IMPORTANT

*A diagnostic is not a prediction. It's a starting point. Most students score significantly higher after structured preparation.*

## STEP 2 | CREATE A PREP PLAN THAT FITS YOUR LIFE

Effective test prep is paced, purposeful, and pressure-free. Here's what that looks like:

<b>Diagnostic testing</b>	Take full-length tests to establish a baseline and choose the right exam
<b>Targeted skill-building</b>	Focus prep time on the specific areas where your score can improve most
<b>Timed practice</b>	Regular practice under real test conditions — not just reviewing content
<b>Score review</b>	Analyze every mistake. Understanding why you got something wrong matters more than the score itself
<b>Official test date</b>	Schedule your first official exam with enough time to retest if needed

## WHEN TO TEST

<b>Diagnostic</b>	Late 10th grade or early 11th grade — just for information
<b>First official test</b>	Spring of 11th grade (most common)
<b>Second attempt (if needed)</b>	Fall of 11th grade or summer before 12th grade
<b>Final attempt deadline</b>	Most students complete testing by fall of 12th grade

## TEST-OPTIONAL — WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS

Many colleges are now test-optional — meaning you can choose whether to submit scores. Here's the honest guidance:

- Submit scores if they strengthen your application — generally at or above that school's median reported scores
- Do not submit scores if they are significantly below a school's median — they may actually hurt your application
- Test-optional does not mean test-irrelevant — strong scores still open doors at most schools
- When in doubt, use the school's Common Data Set to see their 25th–75th percentile score range

## HOW TO SUPPORT WITHOUT ADDING PRESSURE

For parents: the most helpful thing you can do is help maintain a calm, consistent schedule — not hover over prep sessions.

- Help set up a realistic practice schedule — consistency beats intensity
- Treat the diagnostic as information, not a verdict
- Focus on progress, not a single score target
- Trust that steady, structured prep produces results over time

### THE BOTTOM LINE

*Test prep works best when it's paced, purposeful, and low-pressure. Students who start early, practice consistently, and choose the right test for their style almost always see meaningful improvement — without the anxiety that comes from last-minute cramming.*

## Ready to take the next step?

Schedule a free 30-minute consultation — no obligation.

[nathan@hurwitzadmissions.com](mailto:nathan@hurwitzadmissions.com)

(203) 613-9262 • [hurwitzadmissions.com](http://hurwitzadmissions.com)