STANDARDISED TESTING WITHIN COLLEGE ADMISSIONS

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UES
EXPERT ADMISSIONS

Member of   INTERNATIONAL ACAC   NACAC
National Association for
College Admission Counseling

ABOUT UES

- Founded 2013; now work with ~50% of all UK students who go to US (800 in each year)

- We help students with all aspects of US applications, including SAT/ACT prep and college counselling

- Run courses and in-school advising at 40 schools

- Over 200 schools within our wider network

OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION

- Context and background on testing
- SAT vs ACT
- SAT– overview of digital roll-out
- Advising students on testing
- Case studies

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS IN TESTING?

- Since the pandemic – vast majority of colleges became test optional or test blind

- Testing policies led to huge spike in admissions, particularly at HSCs. Most colleges do not want go back to pre-COVID application numbers!

- Outlier colleges: Georgetown, MIT, Purdue, Florida state system, Tennessee and Georgia flagship colleges

- Testing still subject of debate and controversy (c.f. recent NYT article)

- SAT/ACT have become something of a political football/shibboleth in admissions

- Testing has declined in importance but is stubbornly resistant to elimination

- Some colleges have longitudinal studies on performance of non-test submitters in terms of GPA and graduation rates

- What matters to colleges: diversity, student performance at colleges, graduation rates

RECENT STUDIES ON TESTING AND GPA

Opportunity Insights' recent study (as reported in NYT) recently found that:

- Students with higher SAT/ACT scores are more likely to have higher college GPAs than their peers with lower scores

- High school GPA does a poor job of predicting academic success in college

- Students from different socioeconomic backgrounds who have comparable SAT/ACT scores receive similar grades in college

- Conclusion: "standardized test scores may have more value for admissions processes than previously understood in the literature, especially for highly selective colleges"

American Educational Research Association's recent study recently found that: "Contextualizing high school grades and test scores may allow institutions to identify students from diverse backgrounds with strong academic achievement who will graduate,"

FACTORS IN THE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Factor	Considerable Importance	Moderate Importance	Limited Importance	No Importance
High school grades in college prep courses	77	15	5	3
High school grades in all courses	74	19	5	2
Rigor of high school curriculum	64	23	10	3
SAT/ACT Test Score	5	35	39	31

Source: Factors in the College Admissions Decision, NACAC report, first-time freshmen, Fall 2023

HOW HAS THIS CHANGED?

Factor	2023	2020-22	2018	2017	2016
High school grades in college prep courses	77	-	73	71	77
High school grades in all courses	74	-	75	81	77
Rigor of high school curriculum	64	-	62	51	52
SAT/ACT Test Score	5	-	35	39	31

Source: Colleges attributing "considerable importance" to various factors in the College Admissions Decision, NACAC report, first-time freshmen, Fall 2023

# WHY HAVE STANDARDISED TESTING AT ALL?

- Standardised testing gives colleges the tools to compare students across all curricula

- Tests are designed to prove college readiness

- SAT/ACT provide evidence in absence of graded exams

- Good scores are evidence of student persistence

- Some studies support correlation between testing and college GPA & graduation rates

THE ENTRANCE TESTS
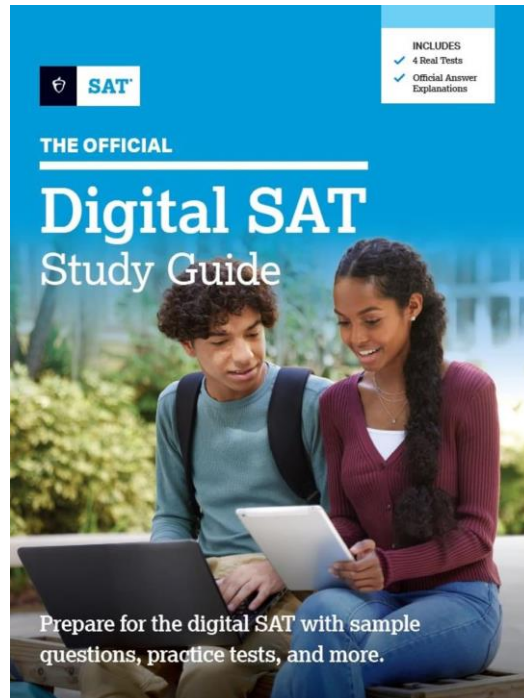
Digital internationally (since 2023)
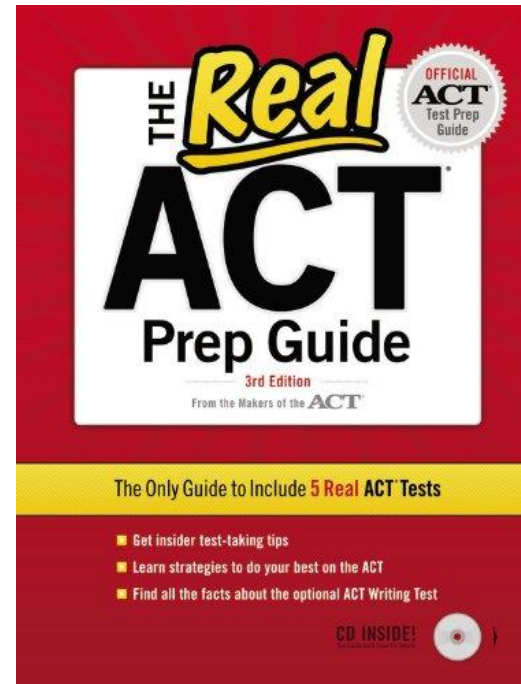
Digital internationally (since 2018)

SAT VS ACT

ACT			Digital SAT		
Section	Questions	Time	Section	Questions	Time
English	75	45 minutes	Reading & Writing 1	27	32 minutes
Reading	40	35 minutes	Reading & Writing 2	27	32 minutes
Math	60	60 minutes	Math 1	22	35 minutes
Science	40	35 minutes	Math 2	22	35 minutes
Total	215	3 hours	**Total**	98	2 hours 15

SAT VS ACT

Feature	ACT	Digital SAT
Time per question	49 seconds	82 seconds
Format	• Linear	• Adaptive by section
Math	• Broader syllabus • Easier to learn	• Narrower syllabus • Focus on ability
Reading	• Focus on speed • Not much inference • Predictable sources	• Focus on depth • More inference • Short passages
Data Analysis	• Science section	• Embedded within Math and English sections
Writing section	• Optional	• None

ADAPTIVE SECTIONS ON THE DIGITAL SAT

- Adaptive by Module

- Approx. 2/3^{rds} correct on first module gains access to the more difficult module.

- If second module is easier --> ceiling is about 650

- If second module is difficult --> floor is about 550

  - Fine tuning at the top with 1-3 very difficult math questions
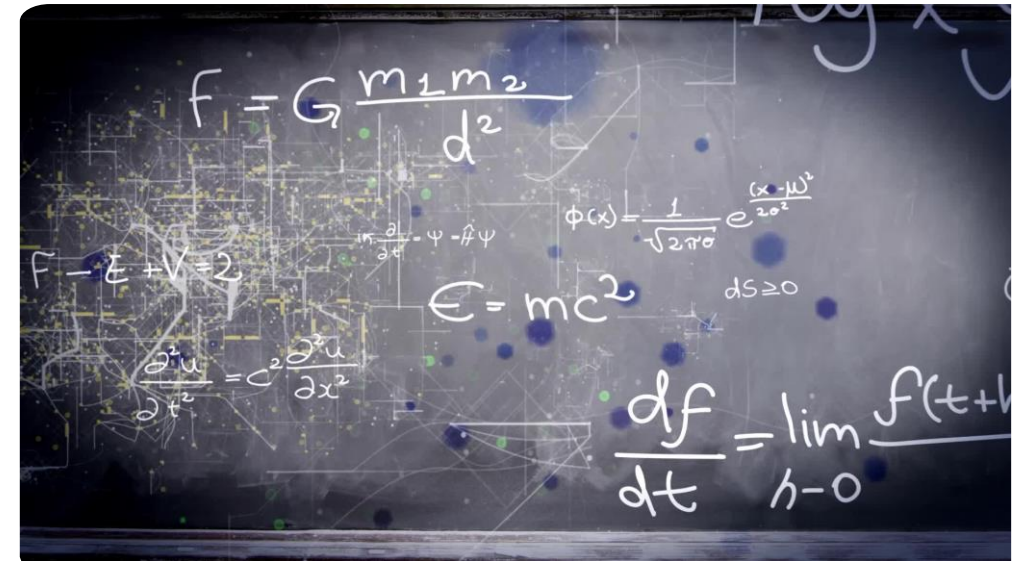
DIGITAL SAT ROLL-OUT: OVERVIEW

- SAT has been digital internationally since March 2023

- Will be digital in the US from March 2024

- Innovations and Bluebook app have proven effective and user-friendly

- Student feedback on test experience almost all positive

- Now a large bank of testing material to help students prepare

- Accommodation process is much more straightforward than that of ACT

- UES now recommends SAT to vast majority of students

ACCOMMODATIONS ON THE DIGITAL SAT

- Without accommodations: on own laptop, 2 hours, at a test centre (usually a school)

- Extra time available:
  - 50% (3 hours total)
  - All done on same day, at the same test centre

- Other accommodations options available:
  - Can choose to do it on paper or on computer (specify in advance when applying)
  - Braille, large print, answer sheet with no bubbles.

- Test centres for accommodations:
 - Lots available in UK. Very unlikely to be student's own school.

SAT OR ACT? HELPING STUDENTS DECIDE

- Many students will prefer the Digital SAT
- SAT Accommodations much easier to arrange than ACT
- Students good at STEM who are fast processers may find ACT straightforward
- But: ACT-recommended students will likely feel equally comfortable with the Digital SAT
- Encourage students to take our free Diagnostic Test: ueseducation.com/diagnostic

TEST OPTIONAL

- Students don't have to submit SAT/ACT scores to apply

- Students can choose to submit or withhold scores, if they have them

- Submitted scores will be assessed with the rest of students' applications

- Non-submitting students will not be at a disadvantage

- Rest of the application comes under greater scrutiny
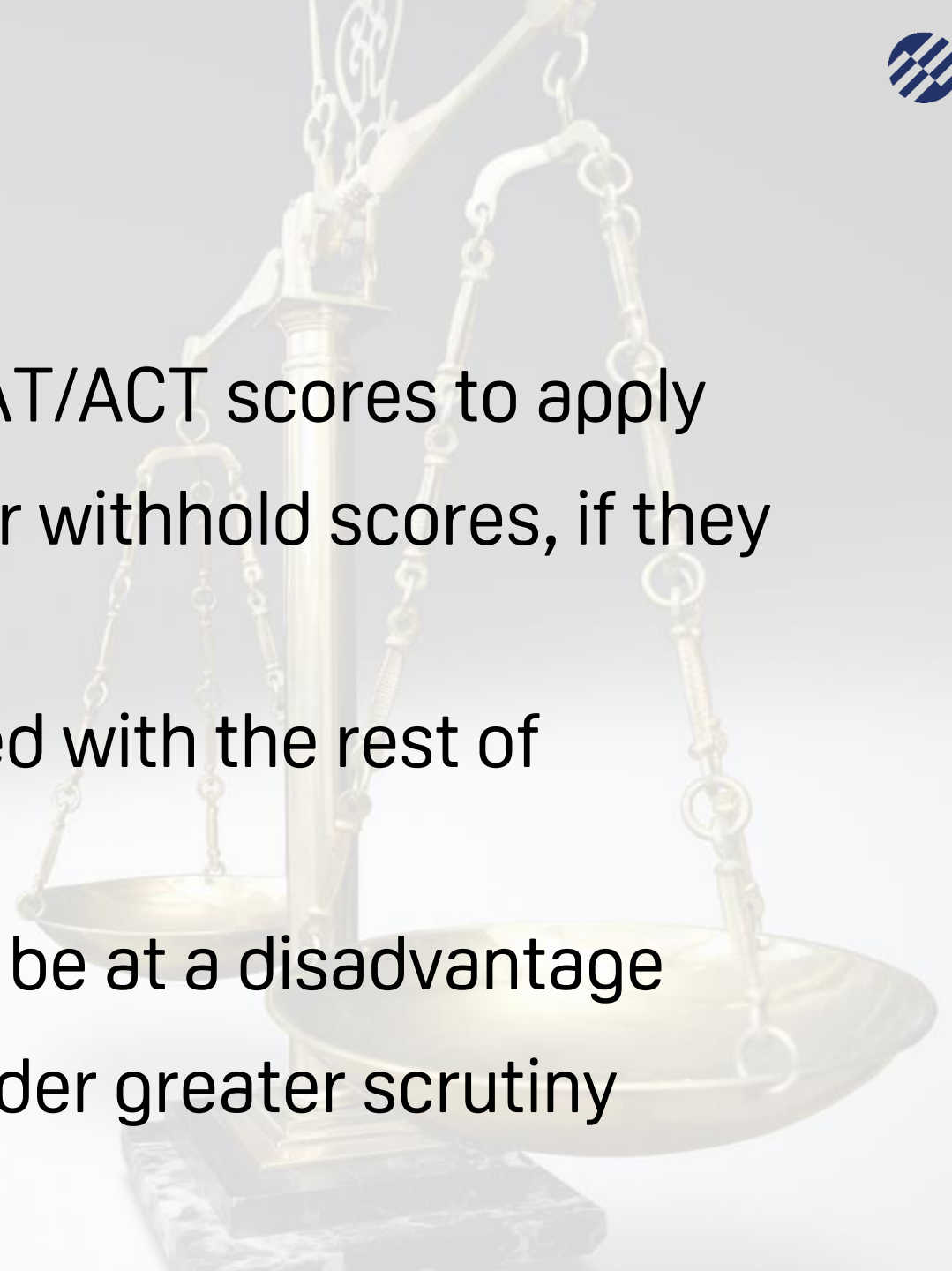
TEST BLIND

- Scores will not be considered as part of the admissions process

- Colleges that have gone down this route: University of California, Caltech, Cornell (Business, Agriculture, Architecture Schools), Reed College

- Greater reliance on transcript for admissions decisions

ADVISING STUDENTS WHETHER TO SUBMIT SCORES

- Colleges publish **"mid-range"** for incoming freshman class: 25th and 75th percentile

- Students should ideally be at or above the **mid-point of the mid-range** or higher

- NB: Mid-ranges generally **increase** when colleges go test-optional

- Between 25th percentile and mid-point: seek advice

- Below the 25th percentile: probably better not to submit

- Some colleges are **"test flexible"** – ask advice before submission

- Nuances to this process in context of transcript, intended major, ED/EA, international/domestic, socio-economic status

INCREASES IN SAT AND ACT RANGES

College	SAT Mid-range Class of 2023	SAT Mid-range Class of 2027
MIT	1510-1570	1520-1570
Yale	1470-1560	1470-1560
Penn	1450-1560	1500-1570
Emory	1390-1510	1450-1530
Brown	1440-1550	1500-1560
Carnegie Mellon	1460-1560	1500-1560
UVA	1340-1500	1400-1540

*Based on Common Data Set for each colleges for 2019-20 and 2022-23

CASE STUDIES

Example Student 1:
- Political Science major
- Five 9s, five 8s, one 7 GCSE
- A*A*A predictions for A Level
- 1500 on the test
- Applying to:

Brown ED   UVA EA
UChicago EA   UT Austin
Yale   William & Mary
Georgetown   Notre Dame

Example Student 2:
- Business major
- five 8s, five 7s at GCSE
- A*AA predictions for A Level
- 1480 on the test
- Applying to:

Cornell ED   UMich EA
NYU EDII   Georgetown
UGeorgia   Emory
USC   Boston College

Discuss in groups of 2-3: where should each student submit?

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Test optional admissions has made advising more nuanced

- Each student needs a personalised testing plan depending where/when they are applying

- Students should enter Y12 assuming they need a test, then pivot to test optional if required

- Advice needs to factor in early/regular, type of major, transcript, college list

- Important to stay in touch with trends and changes to institutional policies

ABOUT UES – OTHER EVENTS

- **Teacher Training Day** in March and September

- **Mock Admissions** in March

- **Annual Conference** in June

- **SAT/ACT Diagnostic Test:** ueseducation.com/diagnostic

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