



The SAT, ACT, and PSAT - Everything You Need to Know

Tom Ehlers
Founder
Method Learning



Method Learning



Tom Ehlers

President and Founder



Tom graduated from Princeton University and completed Princeton's Teacher Preparation Program. Early on, he developed a passion for learning which led to the inception of Method Test Prep. Running this small business allowed Tom to really focus on each student's needs and spend countless hours tutoring with the belief that all students have the ability to succeed. In addition, he has worked as an educational consultant with school districts across the country and advises them on ways to improve the districts' college admission test scores.

Tom is a father to twins Jonathan and Julia and enjoys traveling with his children and wife, Ally. In his down time, he reads, watches sports, and stays active. His motto in life, "Keep your face to the sunshine and you will never see the shadows."

What's Our Goal?



A HIGHER SCORE CAN...



Academic Merit Aid

Help you earn a larger academic merit aid package



Admissions Chances

Help with admissions chances



Particular Program

Help get admissions to a particular program at a college



Place Out of Classes

Help you place out of certain classes



How SAT/ACT Scores Impact Merit Scholarships and College Admissions in 2026

Typical scholarship thresholds



SAT Score	Typical Merit Award
1100	Minimal merit
1200	\$5,000 - \$15,000
1300	\$15,000 - \$30,000
1400+	\$25,000 - \$40,000

So a student moving from a 1090 to a 1240 could unlock **\$60,000 - \$100,000 in additional merit aid** over 4 years.

A Few of the Colleges that Require the SAT/ACT



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Is “Test Optional” Really Optional?



What We Learned at School A

- 46,000 applicants
- 4,000 admitted
- **75% Submitted Test Scores**
- **200 No Scores, No Special Hooks**



What This Means for Your Student

- Only a small group admitted without scores
- Many had factors we can't control
- Testing is still very important

How to Research the Data

- Check the **Common Data Set**:
 - **Section C7**: Importance of Test Scores
 - **Section C9**: % of Students Submitting Scores

Are You in That Small Group?

- Can you compete without a score?
- Do your activities & achievements truly stand out?

Our Approach with Families

- Plan for both paths
- Assess realistic testing potential
- Build a balanced college list

If you only remember
ONE THING from this
presentation...



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Predictability warrants preparation

The exams are *standardized*: they must
test the same set of skills in the same
way on every administration



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If a student gets just 1 more question correct on the SAT, how many points does his or her score often go up?



1 Question



National Averages

SAT

1030

(out of 1600)

ACT

19

(out of 36)

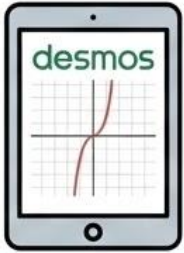
Should a student take
both the SAT and ACT?

If you get a question wrong
on the SAT or ACT, you lose
how many points?

Changes to the ACT



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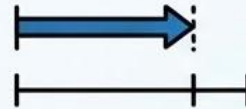
Now has the Desmos calculator on the digital version



Science section optional and more “science-y”



More time per question



Shorter than previous ACT (2 hrs and 5 min. w/o science. 2 hrs and 45 min. w science)

What are the
differences between
the SAT and ACT?

Differences between exams

SAT



50% Math



Digital only



Adaptive



Shorter reading passages



More emphasis on vocab



Fewer math topics but more in depth

ACT (w science)



25% Math



Digital or paper/pencil



Science reasoning section



Longer reading passages



Less emphasis on vocab



Greater variety of math topics

How much time should I
put in each week to
prepare for the tests?



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What would I do if I had a 12th grader?
(or if I was in 12th grade)



Oh my goodness, I do!

Help him or her prepare for the next test that makes sense, schedule-wise:

- Oct or Dec ACT
- Oct or Nov SAT



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What would I do if I had an 11th grader?
(or if I was in 11th grade)





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11th Grade Timeline

Fall PSAT



PSAT

Initial
assessment



SAT
(Fall or Winter?)

Flexible timing
options

April or June ACT



ACT

College admission
test



SAT
(Spring of
Junior Year)

Final junior year
attempt

The ACT My Answer Key Service

- October
- December
- April
- June

SAT 2026 -2027 Test Dates



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SAT Test Date*	Registration Deadline	Deadline for Changes, Regular Cancellation, and Late Registration**
Aug. 22, 2026	Aug. 7, 2026	Aug. 11, 2026
Sept. 12, 2026	Aug. 28, 2026 Register	Sept. 1, 2026
Oct. 3, 2026	Sept. 18, 2026 Register	Sept. 22, 2026
Nov. 7, 2026	Oct. 23, 2026 Register	Oct. 27, 2026
Dec. 5, 2026	Nov. 20, 2026 Register	Nov. 24, 2026
March 6, 2027	Feb. 19, 2027	Feb. 23, 2027
May 1, 2027	Apr. 16, 2027	April 20, 2027
June 5, 2027	May 21, 2027	May 25, 2027

ACT 2026 -2027 Test Dates



Test Date	Registration Deadline (Late fee applies after this date)	Late Deadline	Photo Upload & Standby Deadline	Paper Initial Score Release
September 19, 2026	August 14	September 1	September 14	October 6
October 17, 2026	September 11	September 29	October 12	October 27
December 12, 2026	November 6	November 29	December 7	December 22
February 27, 2027	January 22	February 9	February 22	March 16
April 10, 2027	March 5	March 23	April 5	April 20
June 12, 2027	May 7	May 25	June 7	June 23
July 10, 2027	June 4	June 22	July 5	July 20



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What would I do if I had a 10th grader?
(or if I was in 10th grade)





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Put all of my academic energy into my classes



Take the most challenging classes I can and focus on my GPA

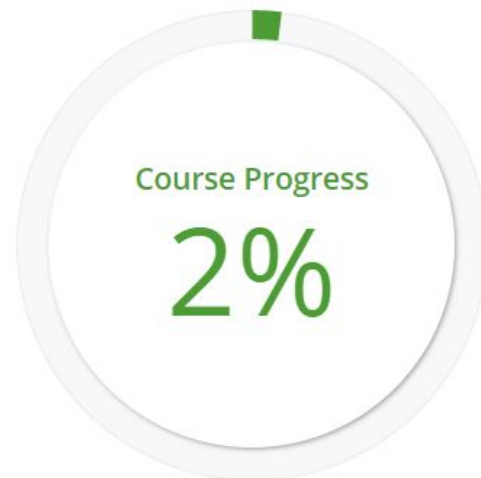


So what is the next step?
How can I improve my
score most efficiently?



SAT

The SAT course provides students with a comprehensive overview of the most effective strategies and most relevant content for raising their SAT scores. It also offers robust features for teachers looking to improve their students' SAT skills and performance in math, reading, and English.

[Continue →](#)

Units

1/17

[View Units](#)

Lessons

1/51

[View Lessons](#)

Quizzes

0/59

[View Quizzes](#)

Test Sections

0/11

[View Tests](#)



Functions

Report Issue

Answered: 0 of 1

Play Audio

Segment 1 of 3

Next Segment

Understanding Functions

Think of a function like you think of software: it takes an input (something you type in) and gives you an output (a result) according to a program. Typical notation gives the function a name like f , an input, and an output.

$$f(\underbrace{x}_{\text{input}}) = \underbrace{2x^2 + 5x}_{\text{output}}$$

Once the function is defined (just like f is defined above), anything that shows up in the "input" variable (here, that's x) gets plugged in whenever the variable shows up in the output. *No matter what the input is—a number or another variable—it gets plugged in.* Here are a few examples using the function above. Inputs are shown in blue.

$$f(4) = 2(4)^2 + 5(4)$$

$$f(4) = 52$$

$$f(a) = 2(a)^2 + 5(a)$$

$$f(a) = 2a^2 + 5a$$

$$f(p + q) = 2(p + q)^2 + 5(p + q)$$

$$f(p + q) = 2(p + q)(p + q) + 5p + 5q$$

$$f(p + q) = 2p^2 + 4pq + 2q^2 + 5p + 5q$$

Now, give the basic function question below a try.



Catch All Geometry

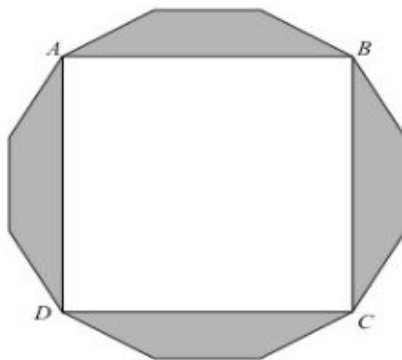
Report Issue

Questions 1 of 8

00:01:14

View Results

QUESTION 1 OF 8



In the figure above, square ABCD is inscribed in a regular dodecagon (12 sides). Each side of the dodecagon has length 10. What is the area of the square?

A $200\sqrt{3} + 300$

B 700

Incorrect

An ice-cream truck driver's monthly profit can be modeled by the equation $p = 2k + m + 3n$, where p is the monthly profit in dollars, k is the number of ice-cream cones sold, m is the number of ice-cream sandwiches sold, and n is the number of ice pops sold. What is the ice-cream truck driver's monthly profit if he sells 200 ice-cream cones, 100 ice-cream sandwiches and 50 ice pops?

A) 350

B) 450

C) 650

D) 800

$$p = 2(200) + 100 + 3(50)$$

$$400 + 100 + 150$$

$$650$$





Test #2

☒ Super Score ☐ First Attempt[Submit](#)

Score

Reading and Writing

Math

Reading and Writing

The Reading and Writing section of the digital SAT focuses on key elements of comprehension, rhetoric, and language use that the best available evidence identifies as necessary for college readiness and success.

[Start Reading and Writing](#)

Math



Missed and Mastered Vocabulary Words

A vocabulary word is considered "mastered" when you have correctly defined it more than one time in the vocabulary quiz.

Filter:

All Time

This Year

Words Missed	Total: 7
scrupulous	1
vitriolic	1
perspicacious	1
resolve	1
voracious	1
vapid	1
monotony	1

Words Mastered	Total: 0
----------------	----------

Questions?



Call: 1-877-871-PREP

Email: tom@methodlearning.com

Features of the Digital Test

Section 2: Math

Directions ▾

0:00

Hide



Calculator



Reference



More

Calculator

Expand

Grid showing x and y axes with labels -10, -5, 0, 5, 10 on the x-axis and -5, 0, 5 on the y-axis.

Buttons: +, -, ×, ÷, =, and other standard calculator functions.

1

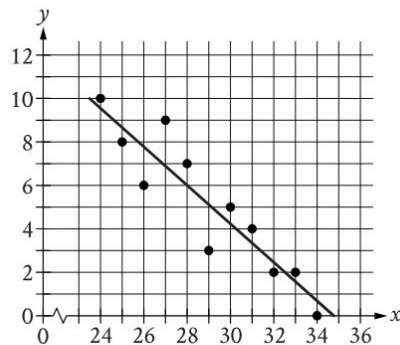
2

powered by desmos

1 Mark for Review



The scatterplot shows the relationship between two variables, x and y . A line of best fit for the data is also shown.



At $x = 32$, which of the following is closest to the y -value predicted by the line of best fit?

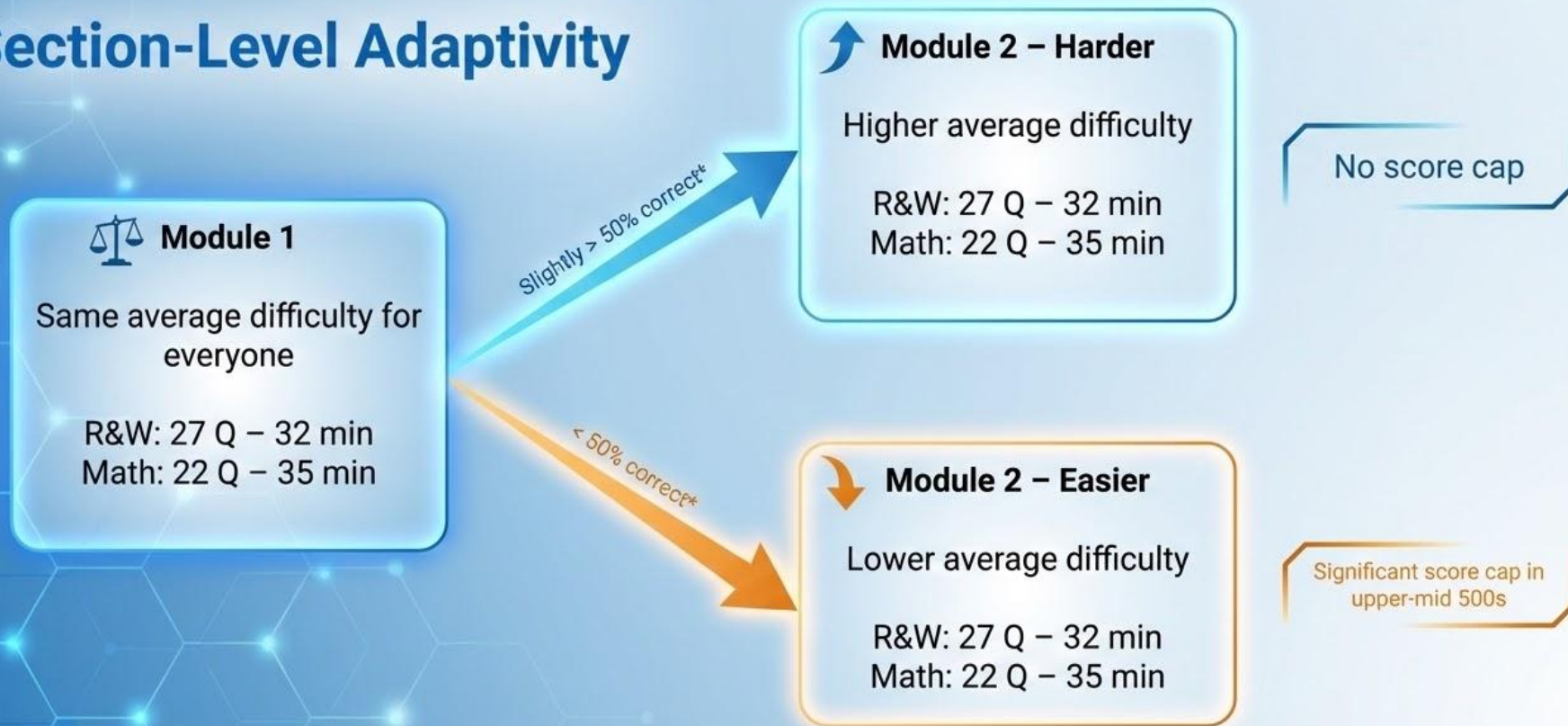
(A) 0.4

(B) 1.5

(C) 2.4



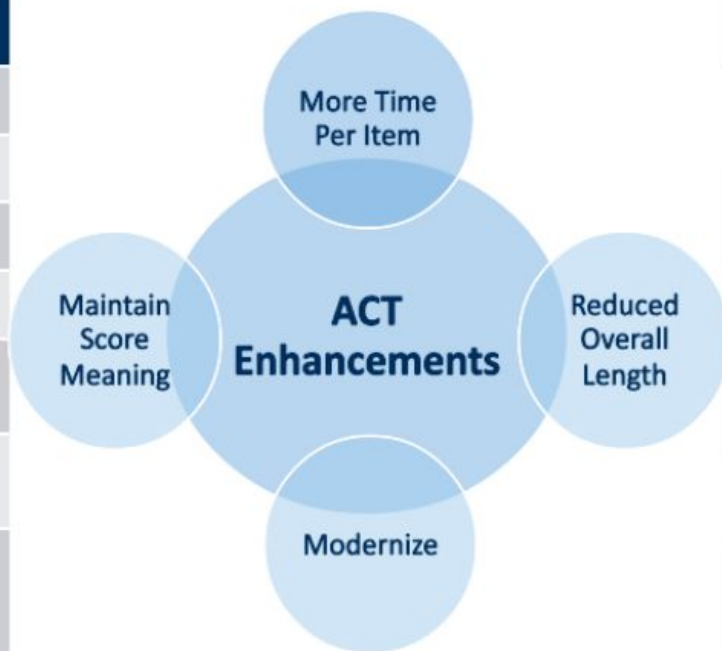
Section-Level Adaptivity



ACT Current State to Future State

Current State		
English	75 items	45 min
Reading	40 items	35 min
Math	60 items	60 min
Science	40 items	35 min
5 th Test [^] (Field Test)	12-28 items	20 min
Writing	1 item	40 mins
	National	195 min
	+ Writing	235 min
	S/D	175 min
	+ writing	215 min

[^] State/District students do not receive 5th test



Proposed Future State		
English	50 items (10 FT)	35 min
Reading	36 items (9 FT)	40 min
Math	45 items (4 FT)	50 min
Science	40 items (6 FT)	40 mins
Writing	1 item	40 min
	National & S/D	125 min
	+Science	165 min
	+writing	205 min

- Total count includes Field Test (FT) items
- Current studies may result in adjustment to total minutes

Key Enhancements

Estimated Time Per Item

Subject	Current (seconds/item)	Enhanced (seconds/item)	Est. Increase in seconds/item
English	36	42	6 (17%)
Math	60	67	7 (11%)
Reading	53	67	14 (27%)
Science	53	60	7 (13%)

Important Note: The enhanced ACT blueprint remains a linear assessment and is not a computer adaptive test. A student's max score potential is not routed into "tracks" based on their performance on initial section questions.

New Composite Score: Starting Fall 2025

ACT { **English**
Math
Reading } → **COMPOSITE**

ACT + **Science** → **STEM SCORE**
+ **Writing** → **ELA SCORE**

Starting in fall 2025, the ACT Composite will be English, math, and reading. Students can still take all five subjects previously offered on the ACT test, but they will have more flexibility to choose their own test experience tailored to their education needs.

Students who choose to take the science section will receive a STEM score, and students who choose to take the writing section will receive an ELA score.

Section 1: Reading and Writing

Directions ▾

0:00

Hide

Annotate More

In recommending Bao Phi's collection *Sông I Sing*, a librarian noted that pieces by the spoken-word poet don't lose their ____ nature when printed: the language has the same pleasant musical quality on the page as it does when performed by Phi.

1



Mark for Review



Which choice completes the text with the most logical and precise word or phrase?

Ⓐ

scholarly

Undo

Ⓑ

melodic

⊕

Ⓒ

jarring

Undo

Ⓓ

personal

⊕

New Annotation: "the language has the same pleasant musical quality"

CLOSE ✕

Highlight Color:

Underline style:

Save

Cancel

Section 1: Reading and Writing

0:00

100% 

Directions ▼

Hide


Annotate
More

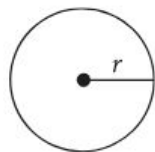
Check Your Work

On test day, you won't be able to move on to the next module until time expires.

For these practice questions, you can click **Next** when you're ready to move on.

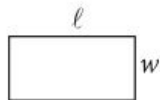
Section 1: Reading and Writing Questions

☐ Unanswered ☒ For Review

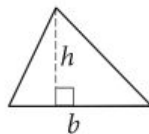


$$A = \pi r^2$$

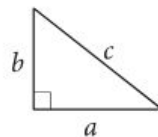
$$C = 2\pi r$$



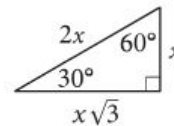
$$A = \ell w$$



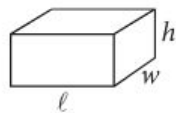
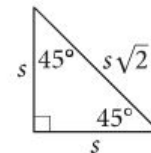
$$A = \frac{1}{2}bh$$



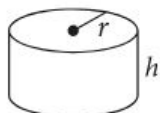
$$c^2 = a^2 + b^2$$



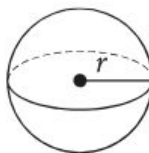
Special Right Triangles



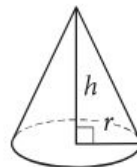
$$V = \ell wh$$



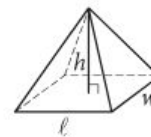
$$V = \pi r^2 h$$



$$V = \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3$$



$$V = \frac{1}{3}\pi r^2 h$$



$$V = \frac{1}{3}\ell wh$$

The number of degrees of arc in a circle is 360.

The number of radians of arc in a circle is 2π .

The sum of the measures in degrees of the angles of a triangle is 180.

Key Enhancements

Change	Description
More time per item	• Average of ~10 sec per item (varies among subjects).
Testing time reduced	• Composite score received after 125 minutes, rather than 195 or 175 minutes. • For students taking all four current core subjects, ~30 minutes shorter for national testing. • For students taking all four current core subjects, ~10 minutes shorter for state/district testing.
Fewer items per section	• ~44 items shorter in total (across English, math and reading). • Minimized impact to reporting categories.
Eliminate the 5 th Test for National test takers	• Aligns testing experience for state/district and national testers – creating a more inclusive research sample when testing new items (prior EFTs were only in National). • Test new items in real-world circumstances, not in isolated section. • More field test items each year. • Over time, will enable faster score reporting.
Learners can choose to take with or without science section (as writing is today)	• English, math, and reading sections taken by all students will generate a Composite score. • When a student chooses to take science, it will appear as a section score and be used to calculate the STEM score (science + math) but will not be used to calculate the Composite (same as writing today). • States/districts can choose to offer science and/or writing.

Key Enhancements

(Final determination of changes will be made after summer linking and dual mode studies.)

Sections	Changes to Items, Passages, and Other Specifications
English	• Adding stems. • Reducing the length of some English passages. • Adding an argumentative essay and items. • Rebalancing reporting categories.
Math	• Reducing the number of foils in math from five to four. • Reducing the number of items aligned to Integrating Essential Skills reporting category. • Reducing the number of items aligned to advanced topics (higher grade level items). • Reducing the number of items with context (require longer time to read). • Rebalancing reporting categories.
Reading	• Reducing the length of some reading passages. • Rebalancing reporting categories.
Science	• Ensuring at least one passage per form addresses an engineering and design topic. • Increasing the number of items requiring scientific background knowledge (DCI). • Rebalancing reporting categories.
Writing	• No change.

The SAT remains a very literal test:

- If an answer choice is not supported in the passage, eliminate the choice.
- If there is one word wrong in an answer choice, eliminate the choice.

Students who take the Digital SAT multiple times will have a large advantage:

- Less questions means each question is worth more. Just getting two more questions correct, could mean a 40-50 point increase

An Example: “Red Flag” Words



Where's the error?

The congressional panel issued their findings after conducting an investigation that lasted for over a year.

The congressional panel issued their findings

The congressional panel issued its findings

SAT vs. ACT: on which
test do you have more
time per question?

How many sections are on the SAT? the ACT? (putting aside the optional essay section)

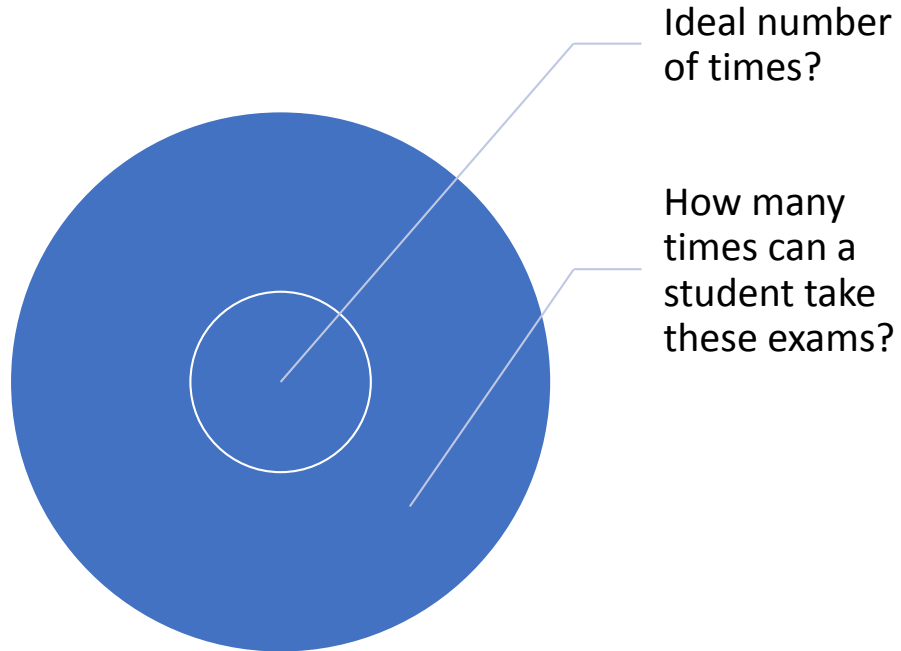
Poll: True/False: The ACT
Science Section test
students on science
knowledge?

Strong test scores give
strong grades more
credibility



The less information an applicant gives, the more the college will scrutinize the information the applicant does give

Polls: How many times?



Can you mix and match
your best scores?