

The ACT at a glance

		Content	Item types	Score
English	45 minutes Measures understanding of the conventions of standard written English.	Punctuation Grammar and usage Sentence structure Rhetorical skills (strategy, organization, and style)	75 questions Multiple choice	Composite score: 1–36 Subscores: • Usage/mechanics: 1–18 • Rhetorical skills: 1–18
Mathematics	60 minutes Assesses math skills in six areas.	Pre-algebra Elementary algebra Intermediate algebra Coordinate geometry Plane geometry Trigonometry	60 questions Multiple choice Students can use a calculator.	Composite score: 1–36 Subscores: • Pre-algebra/elementary algebra: 1–18 • Intermediate algebra/coordinate geometry: 1–18 • Plane geometry / trigonometry: 1–18
Reading	35 minutes Asks student to derive meaning from several texts.	Reading selections from four areas: social studies, the natural sciences, prose fiction, and the humanities	40 questions Multiple choice	Composite score: 1–36 Subscores: • Social studies/sciences: 1–18 • Arts/literature/reading skills: 1–18
Science	35 minutes Tests the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences.	Biology Chemistry Physics Earth/space sciences (geology, astronomy, and meteorology)	40 questions Multiple choice Students <i>are not permitted</i> to use a calculator.	Composite score: 1–36 No subscores for science section.
Optional Writing Test (Feb. 2005)	30 minutes	Writing proficiency	Essay	Scaled score: 1–36 (reflecting performance on Writing and English combined) Subscore: 2–12 reflecting performance on Writing Test only

What to Know About Applying Early

If you find a college that you're sure is right for you, consider applying early. Early Decision and Early Action plans allow you to apply early (usually in November) and get an admissions decision early (usually by December 15).

Early Decision plans are binding

You agree to attend the college if it accepts you and offers an adequate financial aid package. You can apply to only one college for Early Decision. You may also apply to other colleges through the regular admissions process, but if you're accepted by your first-choice college early, you must withdraw all other applications.

Early Action plans are nonbinding

While the college will tell you whether or not you're accepted by early January, you have the right to wait until May 1 before responding. This gives you time to compare colleges, including their financial aid offers, before making a decision. You can also apply Early Action to more than one college.

Get advice from your school counselor before applying Early Decision. While it may seem appealing to get the process over with early, it might be too soon to know that you've made the right college choice.

Single-choice Early Action is another option offered by a few colleges

This plan works the same way as other Early Action plans, but candidates may not apply early (either Early Action or Early Decision) to any other school. You can still apply for regular admission to other schools and are not required to give your final answer of acceptance until the regular decision deadline.

If you need financial aid, Early Decision might not be a good idea

You shouldn't apply under an Early Decision plan if you think you'll be better off weighing financial aid packages from several colleges later in the spring. While you can turn down an early acceptance if the college is unable to meet your need for financial aid, "need" in this context is determined by formulas, not by your family.

Not every college offers an early plan

More than 400 colleges offer an Early Decision plan, an Early Action plan, or both; but that is less than 20 percent of all colleges.

Handout 7E