



Edison Prep

What Can a Sophomore Parent Do This Year to Ensure a Smooth SAT/ACT Preparation Process?

By Silvia and Brian Eufinger

Originally published Dec. 12, 2016 on the Edison Prep blog
Updated Sept. 23, 2020



About Edison Prep

Brian and Silvia Eufinger, the founders of Edison Prep, have tutored over 15,000 students for a combined 50,000+ hours for the SAT, PSAT, ACT, GMAT, SSAT, and SAT Subject Tests. The average SAT/ACT tutor in metro Atlanta has tutored for fewer than 200 hours.

They are frequently invited to speak about test prep, college admissions, and scholarships at PTSA meetings at Atlanta-area high schools as well as at Edison Prep's free parent meetings. They have spoken at national education conferences and are sought-after guests on national podcasts on higher education and cutting the cost of college.

Learn more at edisonprep.com



Around mid-November each year, Edison Prep begins hearing from some of the earliest sophomore parents as to when they should start the SAT/ACT preparation process for their students. While no student should begin tutoring during sophomore year, **there are still important, meaningful steps that should be taken during a student's sophomore year** to minimize stress and avoid pitfalls during what is a very time-crunched junior year for most students.



Three Ground Rules for Designing a Smart Junior Year SAT/ACT Testing Plan

1

Well-designed testing plans should give students **a very high probability of being done by the June test of junior year at the latest.** Senior year test dates are entirely valid, but are ideally avoided because the majority of senior-year exam dates are not valid for some Early Decision, Early Action, and scholarship deadlines. Just as importantly, waiting until senior year increases household stress.

2

Students should plan to take a “one-two punch” of back-to-back test dates so that they take (and finish!) the test while they have momentum. It’s not unreasonable for most students with typical starting scores and typical score increase goals to knock the test out by taking it twice, if meaningful timed tests/practice homework occurs leading up to those two test dates. Large gaps between official tests leads to atrophy; those hours spent knocking off the rust could have been spent pushing the score higher instead!

3

Students who are in lower-level math classes (e.g. are taking Algebra II during junior year) should wait until second semester junior year to take the test. Most students taking precalculus or above as their junior year math class will have 90% of the relevant SAT/ACT math information that they’ll ever receive/need by Oct. 1st, if not before.

Specific Steps to Take During Sophomore Year



Between January and April of sophomore year, have your student take a full-length mock SAT and mock ACT on two separate days. Do not waste your student's time on the increasingly-popular, abbreviated "combo SAT/ACT comparison tests" that are often offered at schools or other firms and claim to quickly diagnose which test is a better fit. These "combo tests" are half-length, are full of inauthentic questions made up by the tutoring companies themselves, and due to a terribly small sample size of questions, are unreliable, volatile and about as accurate as simply flipping a coin. When the SAT/ACT is often worth the same as two semesters of a student's GPA during the college admissions process, it is worth taking just 6 hours to make sure you are pursuing your student's naturally stronger test. We certainly do not enjoy grading twice as many bubbles for prospective students, but it's the right thing to do to avoid wasting students' time and parents' money. More info on signing up for free SAT/ACT mock tests is on the last page.



If a student is exceptionally busy and can't do two different mock test dates, we can always compare his/her Sophomore PSAT scores to a real, full-length mock ACT. For about 80% of students, there's an obvious winner when the Sophomore PSAT and mock ACT scores are compared.



A student can then **compare the exam dates for his/her stronger test (SAT/ACT) against his/her extracurricular time commitments/conflicts during junior year** in an effort to select the most conducive test dates. Because of exam-date conflicts or an overloaded portion of the year (e.g. a sport plus 4 AP classes), many students find that they don't have 6 or 7 possible testing plans to choose from, but just 1 or 2.



Having these mock test scores in hand during late sophomore year allows you to make intelligent plans for your student's junior year. We typically release our tutoring calendar for the entire next academic year by May 1st and, like all tutoring companies, **we simply fill our calendar for group classes and 1-on-1 on a first-come, first-served basis.**



The Most Common Pitfall We See

(This is an overly-specific scenario but one that, even as just a two-person company, we physically encounter 40+ times per year.)

A student intended to take mock tests during second semester sophomore year, but then conflicts quickly piled up (Sadie, Prom, AP exams, state swim meet, etc.). Then, the student is too close to final exams, they're out of town when school gets out for Memorial Day Weekend, and they're out of town as a summer camp counselor and can't take a mock until late July. By late July (or even late June), not just our company, but most in-demand tutors will have started summer tutoring and possibly filled up for the August and September months. If second semester testing was always the goal, this is not a big deal; take a mock SAT and ACT anytime in September or early October. No worries! If taking the first test or two of the school year is desired, however, early mock tests (ideally by Memorial Day) are key.

Common Roadblocks to Taking the SAT/ACT on Various Test Dates:

As you will see below, virtually every SAT/ACT test date has logistical difficulties for a meaningful portion of students, and the list below doesn't even include personal events (e.g. weddings, religious holidays, college visits, etc.)

Aug. SAT and Sept. ACT: Difficult for students who are gone all summer (e.g. camp counselor), or who have mandatory football camps.

Oct. SAT and Oct. ACT: Often conflicts with cross country meets, homecoming, and some schools' Fall Breaks when people frequently go on college visits.

March SAT: Always conflicts with spring break for most private schools (common exceptions: St. Pius, Wesleyan, Weber).

February ACT: Often conflicts with the state swim meet.

December ACT: Takes place the second Saturday in December, so it's somewhat close to finals (not a big deal in reality, since students are ideally preparing for months leading up to the test versus cramming).

November SAT: Often conflicts with state cross country meet and a few homecoming dances.

April ACT: Often takes place at the end of spring break for public schools and the remaining private schools. Also conflicts with a fair number of proms.

May SAT: Always takes place the Saturday in between the two weeks of AP exams.

June SAT: Takes place 1-7 days after most schools' final exams end. A big challenge if students are going out of town and/or can't be convinced to study over Memorial Day.

June ACT: Most students who are camp counselors have already left town, or family summer vacation conflicts. Note: You can take the test anywhere in the US! Summer camp or travel plans don't have to ruin the June test date!

Case Study from a Class of 2018 Parent

One of our clients gave us permission to anonymously use her son's story. She emailed us around Thanksgiving of her student's sophomore year and asked about taking mock tests, while joking that she realized she's "super early." Her son took a mock SAT one weekend and a mock ACT the next weekend. The ACT ended up being his stronger score by a landslide. There are six ACT test dates during junior year to play with: September, October, December, February, April, and June. This student had conflicts that immediately eliminated multiple test dates. Her son couldn't do the April test because of a school service trip during spring break, and the state swim meet knocked out the February date. Another obligation knocked out the September test date. Thus, while this student was an early, Type-A planner, when it came down to it, he had just one intelligent runway allowing him a "one-two punch" with which to prepare: taking the October and December ACTs.

Given that students usually begin their preparation about two months before the test, had this student waited and taken mock tests sometime after late August of junior year, he would have had some very tough choices to make (pursuing his weaker test (i.e. the SAT instead of the ACT), skipping the state swim meet, dragging standardized testing into senior year, or other suboptimal options).



How do I sign up for diagnostic mock SATs and mock ACTs?

A full list of our upcoming mock SAT/ACT exams is continually updated at the following link: www.edisonprep.com/mocks/. Mock tests are free and take approximately 3 hours and 15 minutes. Students bring pencils and a calculator. An email RSVP is required to hold your student's spot.

Questions?

Email us at edison@edisonprep.com or call us at 404-333-8573!

What else can I do to get informed?

1. Like Edison Prep's Facebook page. We post relevant info and links on test prep, financial aid changes, and admissions strategy on a weekly basis.
2. RSVP for one of our info sessions on the SAT/ACT, college admissions, and scholarships. A full list of upcoming info session dates is always at the following link: www.edisonprep.com/infosession/



Edison Prep