



The Best Testing Strategy

By Kevin McMullin, Collegewise Founder and President

I have no affection for the SAT or ACT. They don't measure intelligence. They don't predict college success. And they've inspired new levels of anxiety in the college admissions process. There are a thousand things a student could do that would be more personally valuable and fulfilling than preparing for standardized tests. But for now, the SAT and ACT don't appear to be going anywhere. And low test scores can, unfortunately, keep students out of certain colleges that interest them.

The lone standardized testing bright spot? Scores are improvable, often in a comparatively short period of time.

You can't improve your overall GPA significantly in just a few weeks like you can a standardized test score. And those gains can lead to better admissions chances, and even greater awards of financial aid and scholarships.

Standardized tests and your potential preparation deserve some attention in your college planning. But it's important that you don't assign more weight to them than the colleges do. Your course selection and GPA carry more weight than your test scores. And you shouldn't spend more time preparing for them than you do participating in activities, having fun, or spending time with your friends and family.

Have a conversation with your counselor about which tests to take and when to take them. Consider taking a practice exam to get a sense of where your scores are today. And if you and your counselor agree that some preparation is in order, don't spend more time or money than you can afford. There are plenty of prep options, from expensive tutors and courses, to cheap books, to quality [free preparation](#).

Most importantly, remember that while low test scores can hurt your admissions chances at particular colleges, they cannot prevent you from flourishing at a school that liked both you and your scores, as is. That's why you'll never meet an adult whose life and career have suffered irreparable damage as a result of a test score they earned when they were seventeen.

Test scores can be improved. Accentuate that bright spot in a reasonable and sane way. Then move on with your life. That's the best testing strategy.

Want more expert testing tips from Kevin? Check out his blog at wiselikeus.com.

