

1. You did great on the PLAN (the "PSAT" for the ACT) or had a PSAT or SAT score inconsistent with your academic performance in school.
2. Your vocabulary is not as strong as your reading. You read well and relatively quickly. Arguably, the ACT is a test that is three parts verbal — English, Reading and Science (the latter section requires no knowledge outside of what the test presents).
3. You are great at writing papers but haven't had formal grammar instruction. The English portion of the ACT is more a test of punctuation and sentence and paragraph structure. Many students find the English to be common sense, much like proof-reading a paper.
4. You prefer to write essays that are argumentative, persuading with ideas even if you lack perfect recall of facts and figures. Or you prefer to answer questions that ask about everyday issues in your life or school.
5. You fear you will choke under pressure. The ACT effectively has "score choice." If, when you register, you do not indicate schools you want to receive your scores, you can wait until you have taken the ACT several times and then select the best scores to send. On the SAT, all scores (SAT and SAT Subject Tests) will be part of your score report. You cannot "hide" a low score on the SAT as you can on the ACT.
6. You are more academic than "test savvy." The ACT seems to most people to be more curriculum-based and thus more straightforward. There is more advanced math content (logarithms, trigonometry, conic sections, etc.), but it seems more like a regular test you might encounter in school.
7. All of your friends aren't doing it. You dread telling people what your scores are, imagining that they are immediately making judgments about how you "stack up." Tell your friends you have a 580-620-590 on the SAT, and the ranking begins. Tell them you got a 27 on the ACT, and they'll ask "is that good?"

*Ned Johnson runs Prep Matters, a standardized-test tutoring firm in Washington, D.C.*