Preparing for the test

You’re probably asking yourself (or maybe your parents are asking you) whether you should study for the ACT or SAT with test prep courses or materials.

Here’s the main thing to keep in mind: **you shouldn’t stress about this test!** There’s nothing riding on these scores. The point of taking an above-level test at your age is diagnostic. It is used to measure your strengths in different areas so you can use that knowledge to decide what kinds of classes, camps, and other academic opportunities you may want to take advantage of later. If you do a lot of preparation for the test, your results may not be the best reflection of your current strengths, and that would mean it’s not a helpful diagnostic tool.

You have access to prep materials developed by the testing agencies. Use these materials to become familiar with the structure of the test and general test-taking tips, and to complete the practice test, if you want. Knowing what to expect might help you relax and focus better when test day comes. But remember that this experience is meant to assess your current abilities—your only real job is to do your best!

More details and materials found at tip.duke.edu/7testprep.

The Talent Search Experience for Students

Welcome to Duke TIP! You may have lots of questions right now about the 2019–2020 7th Grade Talent Search and taking the ACT or SAT. The Talent Search Experience can answer them, as well as provide advice on making the most of your middle school experience as an academically talented student.

The Testing Experience

Even when it doesn’t count for college admissions purposes, it can be stressful to take a test like the ACT or SAT—making sure you have the date and time right, waking up on time, getting to the testing center, testing alongside high school students, and keeping track of all the required documents. Here’s what you need to know first:

Before being admitted into the test center on test day, you are required to present an accepted talent search ID and the admission ticket.

- **ID:** You must bring the accepted talent search ID form with you to the testing center (visit tip.duke.edu/7testday). The good news is that this is the only ID you need. **You do NOT need a photo ID.**
  - If you selected the ACT, the ID is the ACT Talent Search Student Identification Form.
  - If you selected the SAT, the ID is the 2019–20 Talent Search/SAT ID Form.
- **Admission ticket:** Both ACT and SAT will send an admission ticket to you in the mail before the test. If your admission ticket has not arrived two weeks before your test date, call ACT at (319) 337-1270 or SAT at (866) 756-7346 to request a replacement. If you are thirteen, you can also make an account on the ACT or SAT websites and print your own ticket.
- **Date, location, and time:** You already selected a test date and test center location! Your admission ticket will confirm the details, as well as what time to arrive on test day; typically at 7:45 a.m.
1. Self-knowledge

This is the point in your life when you start to figure out who you are and who you want to be. It's a time to explore your interests, take some intellectual risks, and understand how you work best.

Research has found that sometimes gifted students have concerns that other students don't, like matters of fairness and justice. This can be frustrating for you. Gifted students are also good at a whole lot of things, making it hard to focus on just a few—though it may be necessary to do so. Other gifted students may avoid taking risks for fear of being bad at something—but taking risks is part of discovering who you are.

So what do you do? There's no easy answer, but your best choice is to take the time to try different things. Take classes and check out books on new subjects. Join clubs on different topics. Talk to your parents, coaches, teachers, guidance counselors, and mentors. Try journaling. To determine what's best for you, above all, be honest with yourself and the people who care about you when it comes to how you feel about the activities and topics you are exploring.

2. Fitting in—or not

"The nail that sticks out is the nail that gets hammered"—that's a saying that can describe what it feels like to be the smart kid in class.

Unfortunately, it's not uncommon for academically talented teens to be made fun of, especially when they're excited about their schoolwork and let other, less academically motivated students know it. That means you might have to do something that can be hard: decide whether you really care about the opinion of the person who's teasing you.

The most important thing is to never, ever compromise who you are. You are smart, so stay smart! In the long run, the opinions of a few mean-spirited classmates will mean far less than where your abilities take you and the joy you will find in doing things you truly love.

One thing you can do to feel good about who you are is to find people who appreciate the same things as you and who support you in being yourself. That's something you can find in many different places, including special interest clubs, accelerated academic classes, summer camps, and online message boards.

There's one other important thing to remember: teasing is something everyone experiences, but sometimes things go beyond teasing and become bullying. That's something you should never accept. If you're being bullied, you can learn more at stopbullying.gov.

3. Extracurricular activities

Middle school often means losing old friends and trying to find new ones—and that can be especially hard on gifted teens. As John Gowan, an expert in gifted education, once said, "When you're a kid in a thousand, it means you have to go through 999 other kids to find one who is like you." But you will find them if you look!

That's why extracurricular activities can be a great outlet. They give you a chance to meet people who have the same interests as you. If you're interested in sports, join a team at your school or in your community. If you're really into science, look for a science club or participate in a local science fair. If you're a writer, see if you can join the school newspaper or a book club. Research academic competitions like Odyssey of the Mind, MATHCOUNTS, or Future Problem Solving, which are filled with other high-achieving students.

If you can't find something that interests you, talk to your teacher or a community member about starting a new activity or club! As long as you're open to possibilities and are willing to try new things, you will find something that interests you—and other people who appreciate you for who you are.


In this book by Judy Galbraith and Jim Delisle, gifted teens can find many ideas for succeeding in school and in life. It's a great resource!

Check out these TIP blogs to learn about competitions, extracurricular activities, and advice from TIP alumni:

Gifted Today at giftedtoday.org
Ready for College at tip.duke.edu/readyforcollege
Educational Programming with Duke TIP

We know academically talented students often need more challenge and enrichment. We’ve developed a reputation as one of the leading organizations in the world for providing these students with accelerated academic programming. These programs also have associated fees, but need-based financial aid is available. Some of our programs also have a minimum ACT or SAT qualifying score requirement. Here’s an overview of some of our educational programs.

Summer Studies (grades 7–10) is a three-week residential summer program. It’s TIP’s longest-running and largest program, taking place on college campuses across the country. Advanced classes combine coursework and residential activities in order to meet the academic and social needs of gifted students.

eStudies (grades 7–10) is an innovative seven-week online summer program with small classes, live course meetings, and daily interaction with an expert teacher. It offers advanced academics through live chats, discussion boards, blogs, and email.

Scholar Weekends (grades 7–11) are intensive two-day weekend courses taking place during the academic year, giving students the chance to explore a topic not typically covered in school. There are no minimum score requirements and it is a great way to supplement classroom learning with accelerated coursework while allowing students to sample in-depth advanced topics in preparation for choosing a college major or career path.

Independent Learning (grades 4–12) allows students to challenge themselves academically, on their own time and at their own pace, in Algebra 1 or over twenty languages.

For more detailed information about TIP’s educational programs, including specific eligibility requirements, visit tip.duke.edu/programs.
**International Baccalaureate**

The International Baccalaureate (IB) offers an education for students from age three to nineteen, comprising of four programs that focus on teaching students to think critically and independently, and how to inquire with care and logic. The IB prepares students to succeed in a world where facts and fiction merge in the news, and where asking the right questions is a crucial skill that will allow them to flourish long after they've left high school. IB programs are in almost 5,000 schools in over 150 countries around the world. (Learn more at ibo.org.)

**Advanced Placement Courses**

The Advanced Placement (AP) program is run by the College Board, which also administers the SAT. Students can take AP courses in one subject or many subjects, depending on their abilities and schedule. Currently, there are thirty-eight courses offered across a variety of subject areas. Typically, students take AP classes because they offer a higher level of instruction, accelerated learning, and may result in earning college credits, depending on the university they eventually attend. (Learn more at collegeboard.com/apcourses.)

**Dual Enrollment**

Dual enrollment allows high school students to enroll in college courses while still in high school, simultaneously earning high school and college credits. The college-level coursework challenges students with rigorous content and pace, and allows them to experience a slice of college life while still living at home. Some dual enrollment programs are offered in traditional high school settings with regular classroom teachers serving as adjunct university faculty. Other programs take place on community college or university campuses. Personnel at your local high school should be able to tell you whether this option is offered in your area or not.

Help your student create an effective precollege academic plan: visit tip.duke.edu/readyforcollege.

Visit TIP’s Gifted Today blog at giftedtoday.org for recent research on gifted education and practical advice based on that research.

Visit TIP’s Opportunity Guide at tip.duke.edu/opportunity-guide to find resources for contests, educational programs, and scholarships of interest to high-achieving students.