



ACT/SAT Prep for Students Who Learn Differently

A parent's guide to navigating college testing when it feels like the tests were never designed for their child's success in the first place.

Written by:

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[Hooverlearninggroup.com](https://www.hooverlearninggroup.com)

Test prep shouldn't feel chaotic and last-minute.

Most families approach test prep the same way they approach other academic decisions: starting with the basics and planning to seek help later if needed.

But without a clear plan, that approach often leads to something else entirely: tight timelines, increased pressure, and a student trying to figure it out as expectations rise.

If you've downloaded this guide, you're already taking a more intentional first step.

In this guide, we will cover:

- ✓ When to start preparing and different support options
- ✓ What the different tests are and what they focus on
- ✓ Why the tests harder for some students than others
- ✓ The Hoover approach to test preparation
- ✓ How to improve ACT/SAT scores beyond practice tests
- ✓ Summer Intensives at Hoover

When should students actually start preparing?

Many families find themselves in the same situation: junior year arrives, the first test date comes quickly, and the scores come back lower than expected.

Suddenly, what once felt far away becomes urgent. Families are left scrambling for support while students feel the pressure to improve within an already demanding academic schedule.

Ideal starting points:

Summer before junior year, but the best-case scenario is during Sophomore year when pressure is at it's lowest.

Why early prep works:

Instead of a few weeks of stress and crammed studying, students benefits from at least 3-6 months of steady preparation and improvement.

Types of ACT/SAT support:

Group Classes

- Broad instruction that supports typical student profiles
- Lower cost
- Limited personalization

Private Tutoring

- Individualized support tailored to the student's needs
- Flexible pacing
- Varies in quality and approach

Specialized Skill-Based Prep

- Focuses on how students learn
- Integrates reading and processing strategies
- Especially effective for students with learning differences

Not all students approach reading, processing, or test-taking in the same way. For students with dyslexia, ADHD, or other learning differences, traditional test prep methods can feel frustrating.

The typical approach doesn't align with how they learn.

Specialized support is designed to bridge that gap.

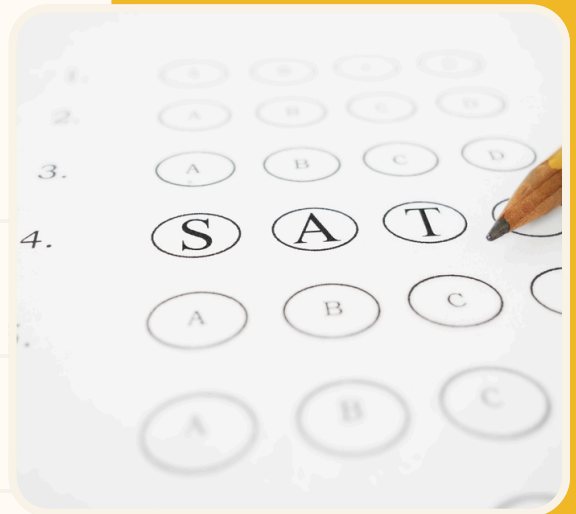
Skip test prep overwhelm

Preparing for the ACT or SAT can feel unclear for many families—not because there’s a lack of information, but because there’s too much of it, and much of it lacks context. When your child has dyslexia, ADHA, or learning differences, the “standard” practices make the need for a clear plan even greater.

Parents of these types of learners are often left trying to answer questions like:

- When should we realistically begin?
- How much preparation is actually necessary?
- What type of support is most effective?
- How do we help without increasing the student’s stress?

This guide is designed to provide a clear, structured understanding of the test prep process so you can make informed decisions based on your child’s needs.



Here’s the truth: Test prep doesn’t need to be complicated. It just needs to be intentional.

Understanding the tests: ACT vs. SAT

ACT:

- Sections: English, Math, Reading, Science
- Timing: Faster-paced
- Focus: Speed + accuracy
- Scoring: Composite score (1–36)

SAT:

- Sections: Reading & Writing, Math
- Timing: Slightly more time per question
- Focus: Problem-solving + reasoning
- Scoring: 400–1600 scale

While both tests are accepted by colleges, they differ slightly in structure and emphasis. Interestingly, most students are naturally better suited to one test over the other. Choosing the right test can be one of the easiest ways to improve outcomes early.

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What the tests actually measure and why:

It's not just academic knowledge.

The ACT and SAT measure a combination of:

- Reading comprehension
- Processing speed
- Time management
- Pattern recognition
- Decision-making under pressure

This is why students who perform well in school don't always perform well on these tests and require additional support.

Common misconception:
"If my child is a strong student, they'll do well."

In reality, many capable students underperform simply because they haven't learned how to approach the test itself.





Why timing and pressure affect some students more than others:

Even when students understand the material, the ACT and SAT introduce a layer of pressure that changes how they perform.

Students are expected to:

- Read quickly and accurately
- Process information in real time
- Make decisions under strict time limits
- Maintain focus across long testing periods

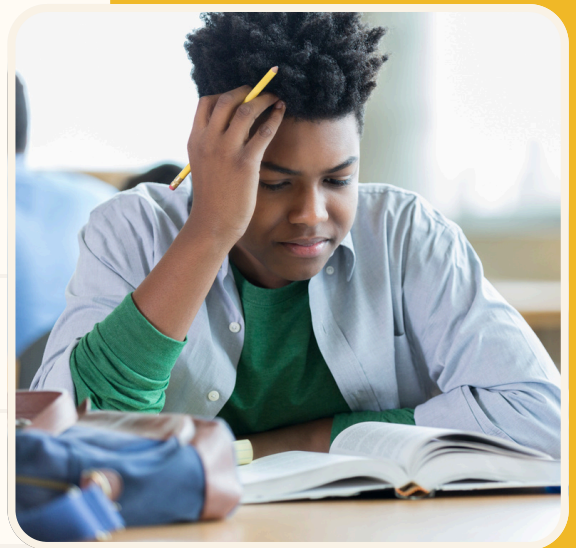
This is challenging for many students, but for students with dyslexia, ADHD, or learning differences, it can be significantly more demanding. Students can run out of time, miss questions they would otherwise answer correctly, and experience increased anxiety, which can lead to lower scores.

The often overlooked role of reading in test performance:

Both the ACT and SAT are often thought of as tests of math, grammar, and reasoning. But in reality, they are heavily dependent on reading—not just in the reading section, but across the entire test.

Students are expected to:

- Interpret complex passages quickly
- Understand nuanced language
- Extract key information under time pressure
- Apply that understanding to answer questions accurately



Efficient reading is not just the ability to read correctly—it's the ability to:

- Read with accuracy and speed
- Process meaning on the first pass
- Retain key information without constant rereading
- Move through passages with purpose and focus

When reading requires more effort, every section becomes more demanding.

How issues present for different learners:

A student with dyslexia may:

- Read accurately, but more slowly
- Need additional time to process written information
- Reread passages to fully understand the meaning

A student with ADHD may:

- Lose focus partway through a section
- Rush through questions and make avoidable mistakes
- Struggle to pace themselves consistently

Students with processing challenges may:

- Understand the material, but take longer to interpret questions
- Feel mentally fatigued earlier in the test
- Have difficulty balancing speed with accuracy

The challenge is that many traditional test prep methods are designed for students who already process reading, timing, and test-taking demands efficiently.

But don't worry, we have an incredibly effective test prep solution.



When traditional test prep methods fall short, a different approach is needed:

Many test prep programs are built around a standard model: Take practice tests, review.

For students with dyslexia, ADHD, or other learning differences, these approaches often rely too heavily on repetition, independent practice, and generalized strategies without addressing the underlying skills impacting performance. This method leads to a student:

- Feeling mentally fatigued more quickly during practice
- Becoming discouraged when effort doesn't translate to score improvement

This is not a reflection of ability—it's a reflection of approach.

We focus on the skills behind the score.

Our instruction is rooted in structured literacy principles and evidence-based learning strategies that are proven effective.

This means students are taught:

- Explicitly rather than expected to “pick it up” independently
- Systematically, with skills building on one another
- Through multimodal instruction that supports different learning styles

Instead of simply reviewing answers, students learn why mistakes happen, how to recognize patterns, and how to approach questions more efficiently.

Students with dyslexia, ADHD, and processing challenges often benefit from:

- Clear instructional structure
- Repetition with purpose
- Guided strategy implementation
- Reduced cognitive overload

Our goal is not to overwhelm students with more information, practice tests, or pressure. It is to help them approach the test with strategies and support that align with how they learn, process information, and perform most effectively.

What meaningful test prep actually requires:

Effective ACT and SAT preparation is about more than repeated practice tests. Meaningful improvement happens when students build familiarity, develop personalized strategies, and strengthen the underlying skills that support performance under pressure.

At Hoover Learning Group, we begin with a diagnostic process designed to identify where a student needs the most support.

This allows us to quickly recognize patterns related to:

- Reading comprehension
- Processing speed
- Timing and pacing
- Accuracy and decision-making
- Test-taking confidence and consistency

Rather than using a one-size-fits-all approach, the diagnostic helps us create a clearer, more targeted starting point for each student.

We proceed to focus on **three core components** of test score improvement: familiarity, strategy, and skill development.

1. Familiarity

Students first need to understand the structure of the test itself:

- Question types and patterns
- Section expectations
- Timing and pacing requirements

This reduces uncertainty and helps students feel more comfortable walking into test day.

2. Strategy

Students then develop clear approaches for navigating each section effectively. This includes:

- Time management systems
- Decision-making frameworks
- Section-specific testing strategies
- Pacing techniques that reduce overwhelm

Rather than teaching a one-size-fits-all method, we guide students in developing strategies that work best for how they learn, process information, and maintain focus under pressure.

For many students with dyslexia, ADHD, or learning differences, individualized strategy development is critical to building consistency and confidence.

3. Skill Development

This is where the most meaningful and lasting progress often occurs. Students strengthen the underlying skills that directly impact test performance, including:

- Reading comprehension
- Processing efficiency
- Accuracy under time constraints
- Sustained focus and cognitive endurance

As these skills improve, students are better able to:

- Apply strategies consistently
- Work through sections more efficiently
- Demonstrate what they truly know without being limited by timing or processing barriers

Putting the Right Support Into Action

Once students begin building effective strategies and strengthening the underlying skills impacting performance, test prep becomes more productive—and significantly less overwhelming. For students with dyslexia, ADHD, or other learning differences, having the right support and enough time to develop these skills can make a meaningful difference in both confidence and outcomes.

For many families, summer provides the ideal opportunity to focus on this growth without the added pressure of a full academic schedule. Our Summer Intensive Programs are designed to help students build familiarity, develop personalized strategies, and strengthen the skills needed to approach the ACT and SAT with greater confidence and clarity.

More about Hoover:

Expert-led, individualized test preparation rooted in evidence-based teaching — not just score coaching, but genuine skill-building.

Collect test preparation that works:

- Instructors hold advanced degrees with **20+ years of experience** and over a **decade of specialized ACT/SAT prep**
- Uniquely **trained in dyslexia intervention and learning differences** (ADHD, processing challenges), making them effective for all learners
- **Explicit instruction techniques** — scaffolding, repetition, strategy — that improve retention and performance
- **Full cross-subject coverage** with a focus on how sections connect
- Attention to **executive functioning**: time management, test anxiety, and stamina
- **Fully individualized plans** based on each student's profile, goals, and accommodations
- **Data-driven**: practice tests and analysis pinpoint gaps and guide instruction

Students leave with not just better scores, but stronger academic habits, self-awareness, and confidence that carry into college. The environment is calm and encouraging, focused on clarity and strategy over pressure and shortcuts.

Summer Test Prep Intensives at Hoover

Now Enrolling	Now Enrolling	Now Enrolling
ACT Prep	ACT Prep	SAT Prep
June 1-5	June 15-19	July 27-31

Program Features:

Our Summer Intensives are led by educators with years of experience supporting students with dyslexia, ADHD, and language-processing challenges. In a structured, small-group environment, students receive focused instruction designed to strengthen reading efficiency, test-taking strategies, processing skills, and confidence—helping them approach the ACT and SAT with greater clarity and preparedness.

- **Small groups** (3–6 students)
- **Multimodal, structured literacy instruction**
- **5 days of focused prep** (3 hours/day)
- **Personalized diagnostic report:** detailing exactly where your student stands and what they need to focus on before test day—highlighting focus areas through strengths and weaknesses evaluation.

Students and parents leave with a plan—not just practice.

[Click here to reserve your spot!](#)

Test Prep FAQ's:

▶ **When should we start?**

Ideally, the summer before junior year—but earlier is even better.

▶ **Will this overwhelm my child?**

We specialize in supporting students with dyslexia ADHA and other learning differences, and right prep reduces stress by building clarity and confidence.

▶ **How many times should my child test?**

Typically 2–3 times for best results.

▶ **SAT or ACT for my child?**

Start with a diagnostic test to determine the best fit.

▶ **What if my child struggles with reading?**

That's exactly why a structured literacy method makes the biggest impact for test prep.

▶ **Are test scores still important?**

Yes—they can open doors to admissions and scholarships.

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"We came back to Hoover for ACT prep because we already knew what they were capable of. Elizabeth had worked so hard to get where she was, and we wanted to make sure she had every advantage going into this next chapter. A 5-point increase in just a few sessions said it all. Hoover delivered, again." — **Elizabeth's Parents**

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