

Editors Column

The ACT Dilemma: Digital or Paper?



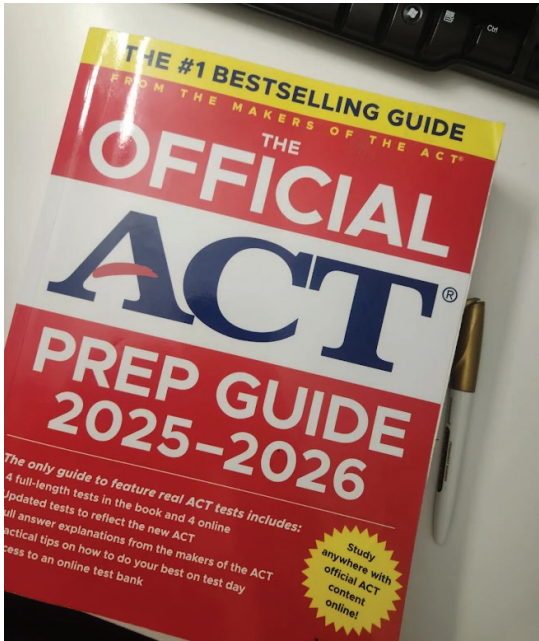
Kaylyn Yu

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Chantilly High School

As if choosing one standardized testing format out of many was not enough, the ACT presents one more selection: the digital version on a computer or a traditional version on paper. Many people may not know which type of test suits them best, and I was one of them. Here are my honest reflections after my first ACT testing experience when choosing paper.

First, the two tests have one fundamental difference: the physical representation of the test. While a computer may seem convenient, staring at a bright screen for up to four hours can cause great strain on one's eyes and also reduce concentration levels over time. In contrast, testing on paper allows the tester to remain focused through direct interaction with the test, such as underlining or circling. I noticed the value of the paper test, especially in the Reading section, because I was able to stay alert without running out of time.

Second, the time difference is drastic. Because the paper ACT does not allot extra time, students must work faster to fill in the bubble sheet at the end. Since the ACT is known for its tight timing, these



Many ACT resources are on paper, such as books, but students face difficulty choosing between the paper and digital test. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Yu]

extra minutes are precious and are a real cost in the test. Another related difference is that the computer version will show a timer for each section, but the paper version will expect the tester to keep their own time. Compared to my online practice tests, the paper one definitely felt shorter

on time.

Another important feature is the calculator difference within the Math section. The digital ACT provides a built-in DESMOS calculator, compared to the paper ACT, which requires the tester to bring an approved calculator, such as a

TI-84. One may believe that both deliver the same answers, but using a handheld calculator demands that students memorize functions in order to use them effectively within the test, which may be a challenge for some who struggle with mathematics. Personally, math is my weakest subject, so I regretted that I could not use DESMOS.

Sakethorama Kollima, a senior in Chantilly High School, reflected on taking both the paper and digital versions of the ACT. "At first, I signed up for the paper test because I assumed it would be easier, but I struggled to manage my time. On my next try, I opted for the digital version, which definitely felt easier. I scored a lot better, so I personally believe the digital test works better for me. Both versions have their pros and cons, but the digital benefits outweigh the paper ones."

In the end, the final call depends on various factors, including your own strengths and weaknesses. Use these main differentiating factors to determine your suitable test. The type of test may greatly impact a student's scores, so choose wisely!

Student Reporter

A Day at Lorrimer Sanctuary



Ashley Kim

Grade 7
Little Ferry Memorial Middle School

It was around 8:00 A.M. on a sunny morning when I arrived at school, and everyone was hyped for the field trip. As soon as I walked through the doors, I found my friends to talk about our plans. I shoved my backpack into my locker, ran to the classroom, and watched the clock while chatting with my classmates. Thirty minutes later, the bus finally arrived. We headed inside to grab a two-seater, and my friend and I were so excited that we couldn't stop talking. Once attendance was finished, the engine started, and we began to cruise, laughing until our stomachs hurt. Suddenly, we arrived at our destination, the New Jersey Audubon's Lorrimer Sanctuary.

As soon as we got off the bus, a cool breeze hit us, and the sanctuary guides split us into smaller groups. My group started with bird-watching, where we were able to see a wide assortment of birds that really surprised me. The guide showed us how the binoculars worked. We then went into the gated forest area where numerous plants, fungi, insects, and small animals were



The entrance to the New Jersey Audubon's Lorrimer Sanctuary, where many activities and nature are headed inside and out, was an exciting site to see as the school buses pulled up for the field trip. [Source: Author, Ashley Kim]

located. We used the binoculars to view other types of nature, which was really interesting. After this fun station, we went to the top balcony to observe different birds, trees, and distant buildings.

Our group, following a different team, had lunch afterwards, which gave me fuel and more energy to do lots more. We took

some time to eat and settle down until it was time for us to go to the old-fashioned apple press. We learned about different apple varieties, when they grow, and how the old machine makes fresh cider. Surprisingly, we got to have our own apple and take turns pressing it to produce juice. When it was my turn, I steered the wheel, which made a crunchy popping sound as the apple was crushed.

It was a really cool experience to see how cider was made years ago. Out of the blue, we even got to try some pre-made cider from the guide. We got a small cup, and we all tried it at the same time. It was sweet and tasted completely real. It even attracted bees, showing how sweet it was.

The last place we went to was the animal ambassador station. We learned about different reptiles like snakes and turtles. The guide explained their traits and showed us a live turtle and snake. We even got to touch the turtle's back, which was a first for me, though we couldn't touch the snake since they are sensitive.

On the bus ride back, my friend and I couldn't stop talking about the trip and argued over who did the best job cranking the apple press. Everyone was tired, but the bus was still buzzing with energy. It was easily the best field trip of the year.

The entrance to the New Jersey Audubon's Lorrimer Sanctuary, where many activities and nature are headed inside and out.

Student Reporter

Model UN at New Covenant Academy



Jisu Wi

Grade 10
New Covenant Academy

New Covenant Academy implemented club time this school year, offering a variety of clubs, including badminton, 3D printing, basketball, journalism, and gardening. However, one special club was created by a few students to add to the existing options: Model UN, which focuses on debating global issues and sharing ideas about them. Two sophomores proposed this idea, and I joined and earned the secretary position.

Since it has only been about half of the first semester of this school year, there have not been many opportunities for club time, as meetings are held only once a week on Fridays for 50 minutes. However, as our team continues to promote the club, more students are joining; as of now, there are 13 students in Model UN. Considering that New Covenant Academy is a small private school with about 70 high school students in total, our program is growing quickly.

Model UN at New Covenant Academy is designed to alternate between a debate one week and a fun activity the following. The purpose of those activities is mainly to explore the cultures of the countries that are included in the debate topics. For example, our first debate focused on the question, "Should other countries



Members of the Model UN club share their research on a debate topic and listen to different viewpoints. [Source: Author, Jisu Wi]

have been punished for their war crimes, like Germany for World War II?" After debating this, we had a cultural food activity, where members brought foods from the countries that they represented during the debate, such as Germany, Japan, and France. Such ac-

tivities give members a break after deep, serious discussions and allow them to enjoy their time in the club more.

Leadership meetings are held every Tuesday after school for 45 minutes. The president, vice

president, and secretary meet to brainstorm the next debate topics, make slideshows introducing those topics, track members' participation, and organize the club materials. These meetings help the leaders prepare for club sessions and ensure that everything runs smoothly.

As secretary of the Model UN club, I write meeting summaries and record what our club did every time we meet. I also remind members to do their research and make sure that everyone understands their responsibilities before the next meeting. Members often approach me with questions or ask for help with their assignments. As secretary, I work closely with club members while helping to keep the club organized.

I personally think that Model UN is extremely helpful for students because it allows them to learn about global issues and freely share their opinions on them. Even though some people may have different ideas from others, the club helps them to understand different perspectives and persuade others through debate. During this club time, members can give public speeches well and enhance their research skills. Overall, Model UN provides an environment where students can build useful skills.

Student Reporter

Mira Costa High School’s Key Club



Jordyn Bak
Grade 11
Mira Costa High School

Known as the oldest and largest student-led international service program, Key Club offers high school students the opportunity to provide community service under Kiwanis International's guidance. Kiwanis International is a global volunteer organization whose mission is to improve children's lives and the communities they live in. Key Club operates as a youth branch of Kiwanis and often collaborates with its local Kiwanis.

With the new school year starting, many clubs have begun kicking off service activities and events. As the president of Mira Costa High School's Key Club, ensuring that members are updated with announcements and events has been my primary focus. The downside to Key Club events is that most of them take place outside of school. This makes it difficult for some students because of transportation. However, the trade-off is that each Key Club connects with other local schools within their division during the events

Every Key Club is expected to participate in their school's Club Rush to gain new members each



Mira Costa High School's Key Club promotion with mascot during club rush. [Source: Author, Jordyn Bak]

year. To incentivize and promote our club, Mira Costa's Key Club had a member wear an inflatable penguin costume, the mascot for Division 19 North, on October 8th. Compared to last year, Key Club saw a significant increase in interest because of the penguin mascot alone. This made me realize that utilizing marketing strategies is essential to stand out from other clubs.

Although the school year just started, Key Club has been hosting volunteer events since the summer. Most recently, September's Division Council Meeting (DCM) had a service project where Key Clubbers made sandwiches to donate to homeless shelters. But beyond just service, Key Club ensures that members have a fun time. At the DCM, members participated in a flour fight to increase spirit and fun. This made

me realize a balance of work and fun is essential for a healthy club. Key Club divides regions into divisions, with about ten schools in each. Each division is also divided between north and south to ensure events can be held on a small scale as well.

Mira Costa's Key Club secretary Jade Soriano says, "I really like DCM because I always meet new people from other schools within our division, making Key Club feel more like a community rather than a single club activity." Division 19 North's Lieutenant Governor, Katim Gossaye, says, "Key Club offers you not only amazing opportunities for service/leadership/networking, but it gives you a group of genuine people. It's not often an organization connects you with people who are so passionate about service and giving back, but Key Club does it so effortlessly." As the Lieutenant Governor, Katime ensures each school's Key Club within her division is active in participating with one another. Whether you want volunteer service hours, awards, or to meet new people, Key Club offers a plethora of new experiences.

Student Reporter

Ayala Girls Tennis Senior Night



Kaylyn Wee
Grade 11
Ayala High School

As the season is almost to an end, October 13 marked senior night for the Ayala Girls Tennis team, a time to honor our graduating seniors. Everyone in the group had been waiting for this night to arrive and preparing endlessly to ensure that the evening was memorable and special. On the night of the event, we worked quickly to set everything up after a match against another team, making sure to highlight the seniors and ensure that the night was memorable for their friends and families. After Senior Night, we headed to our team dinner, where we ate and talked about our favorite moments from this year. The night was filled with so much spirit and gratitude.

To prepare for the special night, the juniors created a group chat and a shared Google Doc to plan all the details. By collecting \$15 from every girl on the team, we were able to give each of the three seniors a basket full of snacks, items related to or liked by them, and a giant signed tennis ball. We also gifted them their own giant poster with their name and their baby photo. As a junior who contributed to the planning,



The team continued Senior Night at California Pizza Kitchen for a tasty meal and unforgettable memories. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Wee]

I believe we did a great job organizing the celebration and demonstrated leadership and collaboration skills, making this year's Senior Night a success.

Before we could start the big night, we had to force the seniors to stay away from the tennis courts so we could set up the gifts without them noticing. We used practice balls to spell out "Seniors" and arranged a fold-up table to display the baskets,

posters, tennis balls, sashes, and flowers. After we finished, we had three girls guide the seniors to the courts while the rest of us formed a "victory" tunnel with our hands for them to run through. We also made sure to take a lot of pictures and gave the seniors opportunities to get photos with their friends and family members who came to support. To end this celebration, some of the girls from the team gave speeches to the seniors, thanking them for all they

have done for the team and how much we appreciate them.

After pictures and some tears, the laughter would continue at our team dinner at California Pizza Kitchen. At the restaurant, we enjoyed pizzas, salads, dessert plates, and complimentary Shirley Temples donated by CPK. The team spent time chatting about this season, and since this was almost the last game of the season, we all made an effort to have fun and cherish the moment. Many girls shared how this season was the best in the past few years, as everyone truly had fun moments every day.

Overall, Senior Night turned out amazing and was a great way to have fun before the season officially ends. From the preparation to the night of the event, the team was able to become closer and express our gratitude to our seniors and captains who have made such a positive impact on the team. Although the night was emotional, it was also fun and exciting, and it inspired the team to maintain our energy through the end of the season and into CIF. It was a night that we will all remember.

Student Reporter

Help Without Cost



Tae Lee
Grade 11
Science Academy STEM Magnet

Scientists have suffered and learned from the devastating effects of infectious diseases. Since late 2019, COVID has taken countless lives, forcing us to shift our lifestyles significantly. COVID is only one of many other infectious viruses, prompting the crucial question: How can global health systems better prepare for and prevent the next inevitable pandemic?

The answer is to encourage people to receive vaccinations. Vaccinations are medical processes that introduce antigens, which are weakened germs, proteins, or genetic instructions, to train your immune system to recognize and battle specific infectious diseases in a harmless manner. This vital process lowers the risk of infection or severe illness up to 99%, guaranteeing at least 30% efficacy rates.

Vaccinations sound flawless and beneficial; however, they are not always accessible or affordable. People can struggle with other serious complications in their lives and oftentimes forget to pay attention to their safety regarding these dangerous diseases. At POCO (Power Of Choosing Out), members acknowledge the difficult con-

ditions behind people's backgrounds and encourage free vaccinations for the flu. POCO led these vaccination stations with the helpful supervision of trained pharmaceutical professionals, with options for COVID vaccines as well (if insurance covered it).

During the two days POCO hosted these vaccination days, I served as a guide to welcome and walk people through the stations. First, they had to check in at the front desk, filling out a form that asked them about basic health requirements and a consent form for the vaccinations. Then, they line up to receive the selected vaccinations, including the flu shot or the COVID shot. After that, I encourage them to take optional blood pressure and blood sugar tests to inform them of their levels. Finally, they are free to leave and collect goody bags that POCO made by hand for them. Throughout this ex-



A POCO volunteer and a trained professional helping give out a free flu vaccine to a woman. [Source: Author, Tae Lee]

perience, I was able to converse with people who live with different conditions and had a really fun time doing something truly beneficial for others. One person I spoke to stated, "I'm really grateful to have this opportunity that you guys showed us by going out of your way for this."

The feeling of helping someone out, potentially even saving a life, felt really fulfilling. By pro-



The waiting line for free vaccinations that POCO volunteers and helpers give out to the public. [Source: Author, Tae Lee]

viding the necessary resources for underserved communities, I learned from POCO the true importance of simple acts of kindness. This is not POCO's first time helping out with vaccinations. The group did this last year for the same worthy cause, and will remain dedicated to helping with future initiatives, including free vaccinations for years to come to protect our community.