Registration is now open for the Dec. 12 ACT achievement test. This date is a great time for seniors to take the ACT before submitting college applications. Students who wish to take the college admission and placement exam must register before Nov. 6.

The ACT is a curriculum-based achievement exam. It tests what students have actually learned in school, not their aptitude for learning.

The ACT also measures what students need to know to be ready for entry-level college-credit courses based on ACT College Readiness Standards™. Every student's results can be tied directly to these consistent standards.

The ACT has four sections–English, mathematics, reading and science–and takes about three hours to complete. Students who take the ACT Plus Writing complete an optional writing test that requires an additional 30 minutes.

Unlike other exams, students are not penalized for guessing or answering all the questions on each test section. In fact, it is beneficial for test takers to answer all questions within the time allowed.

During registration, students may select up to four universities to receive their score reports. ACT scores are accepted by all four-year colleges and universities across the United States.

ACT reports scores only when requested to do so by the student. Additional score reports are available for a small fee.

All students complete a detailed inventory of questions during ACT registration. Each test taker receives an ACT score report that includes a wide variety of information to assist with high school course selection, college readiness, career planning, and college admissions.

The cost for the ACT test without writing is $32. When combined with the optional ACT Writing Test, the total cost is $47. Students who qualify may apply for a fee waiver through their high school counselor.

The ACT website, www.actstudent.org, has helpful information, free sample items, and options to order inexpensive test prep materials to assist test takers get ready for the exam. However, the best preparation is to take rigorous core courses in school, study hard, and learn the academic skills needed in college.

Most students register online at www.actstudent.org. Students may also pick up registration forms from their high school counseling offices; these forms must be postmarked by Nov. 6. Late registration is available until Nov. 20 for an extra $21 fee.