

ACT Exam Primer

Overview

The ACT is a multiple-choice standardized test that students take in their junior and senior years of high school. The test is used as criteria for admission to most colleges. It is also used to determine eligibility for many scholarships, including the merit scholarships offered by universities for promising students.

The ACT Exam is composed of 5 sections. The exam is about 3 hours long, 3 and a half with the optional essay. In total, the exam consists of 215 multiple-choice questions and 1 essay.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>ACT Exam Format: 5 sections</u> English – 45 minutes, 75 questions Math – 60 minutes, 60 questions Reading – 35 minutes, 40 questions Science Reasoning – 35 minutes, 40 questions Essay (optional) – 30 minutes, 1 question</p>

Scoring

The maximum composite score that you can attain on the ACT is a 36. Scores for each of the 4 mandatory sections range from 1 – 36. The composite score is the average of these 4 scores. The essay does not count towards this score, but receives a separate score, ranging from 2 – 12.

Schedule and Registration

Students can register online at www.act.org or obtain an application from their school counselor. The ACT is given during the school year on the following dates:

Test Date	Registration Deadline	Late (w fee)
September 11, 2010	August 6, 2010	Aug 7 - Aug 20
October 23, 2010	September 17, 2010	Sept 18 - Oct 1
December 11, 2010	November 5, 2010	Nov 6 - Nov 19
February 12, 2011	January 7, 2011	Jan 8 - Jan 21
April 9, 2011	March 4, 2011	Mar 5 - Mar 18
June 11, 2011	May 6, 2011	May 7 - May 20

Note: The September test only offered in some states. The February test not offered in NY.

Cost

\$33.00 without the writing section

\$48.00 with writing

\$21.00 late fee

Fee waivers are available. Ask your counselor.

ACT Test Strategy

General Tips and Strategies for the ACT

1. YOUR GOAL IS TO GET A 36 POINT SCORE.
2. The ACT tests the same information, the same way, every year. Learn the content and structure of the exam. Knowing what to expect will help you to raise your score!
3. Take practice tests to increase your familiarity with the types of questions asked.
4. You don't have to come up with the answer from scratch; you just have to identify it amongst the choices. Every correct answer is right in front of you.
5. The ACT does not take any points away for wrong answers. Thus, **never leave any bubbles blank.**
6. When you don't know the right answer to a multiple choice question, look for the wrong answers instead. They're often easier to find.
7. Use process of elimination. When you find a wrong answer, eliminate it.
8. When should I guess? You should guess when you are able to eliminate at least one answer. This will increase the probability of getting the question right.
9. Own your test booklet. Feel free to use it for scratch paper and to keep ideas fresh in your head.
10. **Manage your time:** Know how much time you have to complete each section and each question. For example, 36 seconds per question in English, 60 seconds per in math.
11. If you run out of time near the end of a section, a preferred plan is to choose a column and fill in the blanks for the remaining questions in a vertical line.

ACT English Test Strategy

- The English Test covers concepts in 4 areas:
 - Grammar
 - Punctuation
 - Sentence Structure
 - Rhetorical Skills
- The English Test will present 5 essays on the left side of the page. There will be words and phrases underlined throughout each essay. Your task is to determine whether the underlined portion is correct as written or whether one of the other answer choices is correct.
- Be sure to read ALL of the text in the English Test. Determining the correct answer often requires you to understand the context around the underlined portion.
- The English Test is a test of standard written English. Do not choose answers just because they ‘sound’ right. You will often see answer choices that sound like things you hear every day, yet are grammatically incorrect.
- If you narrow the choices down to two that don’t contain any errors, choose the shortest of the two.
- Do not be afraid to select NO CHANGE, which is frequently offered as the first answer choice. NO CHANGE will be the correct answer several times during the English Test.
- **Sentence Structure concepts to know:** Sentence Fragments, Independent and Dependent Clauses, Comma Splices and Run-Ons, Misplaced Modifiers and Construction Shifts, Parallel Construction
- **Grammar and Usage concepts to know:** Pronoun Case, Subject-Verb Agreement, Pronoun-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense
- **Punctuation concepts to know:** Commas, Semicolons, Colons, Apostrophes, Dashes
- **There are several types of Rhetorical Skills questions:**
 - Some questions ask you to choose which answer is the WRONG answer. For instance, it might ask you to choose which answer choice is NOT acceptable.
 - Some questions will ask about the main idea of the passage or whether a given statement strengthens or weakens the passage.
 - You will also be asked where a particular word should be placed in a sentence, or what the logical order of sentences or paragraphs should be.
- **Manage your time:** The English Test is 45 minutes long and has 75 questions. That is 9 minutes per passage, or 36 seconds per question on average. Stay on pace to finish strong!

ACT Math Test Strategy

- You must pace yourself. You have 60 minutes to complete 60 questions.
- The math on the ACT covers 6th grade to 11th grade math, from arithmetic to trigonometry. All concepts in that range are fair game, so you should review them thoroughly.
- Trust your knowledge of math and your intuition. Confidence is a huge part of doing well on the ACT.
- You must memorize many formulas in order to do well on the math section. Knowing formulas by heart will help you to solve answers more quickly.
- You may have learned many of the basic concepts tested in the ACT Math Test, but do not underestimate the importance of reviewing those basic skills.
- Easy, medium, and hard questions are given throughout the test. A few hard questions are given early, a few easy ones are given later.
- Make sure that you answer the ACTUAL QUESTION. Be careful not to select an answer choice that represents a ‘step along the way’ to the actual answer.
- The ACT Math questions are presented in paragraph form. You must be good at converting ‘words’ into ‘equations’. Know your math terminology well so that the words don’t trip you up. For example: prime number, quotient, factor, ratio, slope, diameter, function, etc.
- **Arithmetic Concepts:** Fractions, Decimals, Percents, Exponents, Roots, Averaging, Ratios, Absolute Value
- **Algebra Concepts:** Solving Linear and Quadratic Equations, Factoring, Collect Like Terms, Solving Simultaneous Equations, and Inequalities
- **Geometry Concepts:** Angles, Lengths, Triangles, Circles, Area, Perimeter, and Volume
- **Coordinate Geometry:** Slope, Distance, Midpoint, Parallel and Perpendicular Lines
- **Trigonometry Concepts:** You must know the SOHCAHTOA equations as well as how to use SEC, CSC and COT. Know that $TAN = SIN/COS$.
- **Manage your time:** The Math Test is 60 minutes long and has 60 questions. That is 60 seconds per question on average. A good strategy is to spend 25 minutes on the first 30 questions and 35 minutes on the last 30. Stay on pace to finish strong!
- If you find that you haven’t begun to solve a math question after looking at it for 30 seconds, then guess and move on.

ACT Reading Test Strategy

- The Reading Test will present 4 passages, each followed by 10 questions. The Reading Test consists of the same four passage types every year:
 1. **Prose Fiction** is always first.
 2. **Social Science** is always second.
 3. **Humanities** is always third.
 4. **Natural Science** is always fourth.
- The main reason that many students run out of time on the Reading Test because they spend too much time **READING!** You must have a method for answering the questions correctly without reading all of the passage.
- **One strategy for the Reading Test:**
 1. Read the preface (author and date)
 2. Read the first sentence in each paragraph (two sentences if the paragraph is long). You are looking to grab the main idea of each paragraph and understand the overall essence of what is going on in the passage. Go for big picture, not memorization.
 3. Read the last sentence of the final paragraph to see how the passage closes.
 4. Answer each question, referring back to the part of the passage that will most likely contain the answer, based upon what you saw during your first look.
 5. Remember to stay aware of the time! If you get stuck, use process of elimination and guess. **KEEP IT MOVING!**
- **The passages are NOT all the same.** As you do your initial pass through the passage, you should be looking for specific things:
 1. **Prose Fiction** questions tend to ask about how characters in the passage ‘feel’ and how they get along with each other. **Focus on the WHO, WHERE, and WHY?**
 2. **Natural Science** questions tend to ask about specific details in the passage. Thus, you should pay attention to the **WHAT, WHEN and HOW?**
 3. **Social Science and Humanities** questions are generally a mix between the prose fiction and the natural science style of questions.
- Some questions will direct you to a certain line (or lines) in the passage. The answer is sometimes right there, but it is good to read a little ahead and a little behind that part to better understand the context around that line (or lines).
- Two tricks to look out for on the Reading Test questions:
 1. Sometimes the test writers will offer answer choices that use totally different words to express the same meaning as the words in the original passage.
 2. Other times the test writers will steal words or phrases right out of the passage, but use them in a way that does not agree with the original meaning at all.
- **Manage your time:** The Reading Test is 35 minutes long and has 40 questions. That’s under 9 minutes per passage. Remember though, that does not include reading the passages! Thus you must have a strategy that keeps you on pace to finish strong!

ACT Science Reasoning Test Strategy

- The Science Reasoning Test will present 7 science based passages. There are three types of passages presented: Data Representation, Experiments, and Conflicting Viewpoints.
- **Data Representation**
 - You will see three of these passages, each followed by 5 questions.
 - Data Representation passages will present one or more charts, tables, graphs, or drawings similar to those in science magazines or textbooks.
 - The questions will ask you to interpret and analyze the information that is given.

Data Representation Strategy

1. Read any information in paragraphs and quickly review the charts and graphs.
 2. Don't try to memorize the data. Instead, just make sure that you UNDERSTAND the data. For instance, identify the variables (temperature, height, loudness, etc.) and the units (meters, inches, gallons, etc.) that are used.
 3. Look for any trends in the data. Are the values increasing or decreasing or random?
 4. Answer each question, referring back to the part of the passage that will most likely contain the answer, based upon what you saw during your first look.
- **Experiments**
 - You will see three of these passages, each followed by 6 questions.
 - Experiments passages will present one or more related experiments or studies like those that scientists or science students would perform.
 - The questions will ask you to interpret and analyze the information that is given.

Experiments Strategy

1. Read all of the experiments information and quickly review any charts or graphs.
 2. Don't try to memorize the information. Instead, understand WHAT is being experimented on, what METHOD was used for conducting the experiments, and what were the RESULTS of the experiment.
 3. Know the control in the experiment and the variables that were introduced.
 4. Answer each question, referring back to the part of the passage that will most likely contain the answer, based upon what you saw during your first look.
- **Conflicting Viewpoints**
 - You will see one of these passages, followed by 7 questions.
 - Conflicting Viewpoints passages will present two or more views on a scientific hypothesis.
 - The questions will ask you to about the similarities and differences between the arguments. They will also address ways to strengthen or weaken each argument.

Conflicting Viewpoints Strategy

1. Read the entire passage. Look for the overall main argument each person makes. Also look for what the arguments have in common and how they are different.
2. Answer each question, referring back to the part of the passage that will most likely contain the answer, based upon what you saw during your first look.

ACT Writing Test Strategy

- The Writing Test presents you with one prompt. You will have 30 minutes to write an essay based upon that prompt.
- Although the essay is ‘optional’, many colleges want to see the writing score, so it is recommended that you complete it when you take the ACT
- The Writing Test does not affect your 36 score. The essay is scored separately. Two readers will each give your essay a score of 1 to 6. Those two scores will be added together to give you a Writing Test score of 2 to 12 points.
- **Writing a High Scoring Essay**
 1. You must **include a clear thesis statement** in your essay. The thesis statement tells your position on the issue given in the prompt. Often it is the first or last sentence in your introduction paragraph.
 2. **Maintain your focus on the topic** throughout the essay. Once you take a position, stick to it. Do not change your mind while writing your essay!
 3. **Support your thesis with strong examples.** Your essay should include at least three paragraphs that support your position on the issue. Make sure that you think through how you will write your support paragraphs **BEFORE** you begin writing them.
 4. **Stay organized.** Your essay should contain an introduction, supportive body paragraphs, and a conclusion.
 5. **Use clear and effective language.** Avoid grammar errors and use your best vocabulary.
- **More Pointers**
 - Use your scratch paper to brainstorm ideas, especially for your supporting examples.
 - Longer essays tend to get higher scores. Try to write at least 5 paragraphs.
 - Paragraphs should be clear and to the point; stay away from writing ‘fluff’.
 - Mix up your sentence lengths. Use long sentences and short sentences throughout the essay. This makes the essay easier to read.
 - Keep the final essay neat. Stay away from excessive erasures or scratched out words or sentences.
 - Allow a couple of minutes to proofread your work before your time is up.

ACT Test - Question Breakdown

ACT English Test

Usage/Mechanics	40 questions
Punctuation	10 questions
Grammar and Usage	12 questions
Sentence Structure	18 questions
Rhetorical Skills	35 questions
Strategy	12 questions
Organization	11 questions
Style	12 questions
<u>English Test Total</u>	<u>75 questions</u>

ACT Math Test

Pre-Algebra	14 questions
Elementary Algebra	10 questions
Intermediate Algebra	9 questions
Coordinate Geometry	9 questions
Plane Geometry	14 questions
Trigonometry	4 questions
<u>Math Test Total</u>	<u>60 questions</u>

ACT Reading Test

Prose Fiction	10 questions
Humanities	10 questions
Social Sciences	10 questions
Natural Sciences	10 questions
<u>Reading Test Total</u>	<u>40 questions</u>

ACT Science Reasoning Test

Data Representation	15 questions
Experiments	18 questions
Conflicting Viewpoints	7 questions
<u>Science Reasoning Test Total</u>	<u>40 questions</u>

ACT Writing Test

<u>Persuasive Essay Prompt</u>	<u>1 essay</u>
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