



ACT OVERVIEW TIPS & TRICKS

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What is the ACT?

The American College Testing (ACT) exam is a standardized test that college and university admissions officers use to measure the academic achievements of current applicants. First offered in 1959, the ACT was originally created as an alternative to College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Test (now known as the SAT exam).

The ACT is offered six times per year in testing locations across the country. It is comprised of four required sections -- English, mathematics, reading and science -- and one optional writing section. Each required section of the test is scored out of a possible 36 points, and a test-taker's final score represents a 'composite score' of the four sections. The optional writing section is graded separately and scored using a different method (see below). The exam is designed to measure 'college readiness' in high school graduates by testing their reading comprehension, scientific reasoning skills and ability to form logical arguments.

When is the ACT?

The ACT is offered up to six times per year, although the number of annual tests will vary by testing location. ACT testing dates always fall on Saturdays, although alternative dates are available for students with religious conflicts on that day of the week. The following table features key dates and deadlines for the 2020 calendar year.

ACT Test Date	ACT Registration Date	Late Fee Required
June 13, 2020	May 8, 2020	March 9-22, 2020
July 18, 2020	June 19, 2020	June 20-26, 2020
September 12, 2020	August 14, 2020	August 15-28, 2020
October 24, 2020	September 18, 2020	September 19-October 2, 2020
December 12, 2020	November 6, 2020	November 7-20, 2020

Where is the ACT taken?

The test center locator on ACT.org allows you to search for available testing centers near your residence. There may be several options in your city and/or state; options are also available for students living in U.S. territories and Canada. In response to Coronavirus (COVID-19), the ACT will begin offering a new option for students to take the ACT online at home through remote proctoring. This is planned to begin late fall or early winter of 2020.

How can I register?

Registering for the ACT requires the following five-step process.

- **Step 1:** Visit the official website for students, ACT.org, to sign up for an account.
- **Step 2:** Create an account to be able to print your test-admission ticket, make changes to your ACT registration and check scores online.
- **Step 3:** To complete ACT registration, you will answer a series of questions about your academic background and future college plans. During this step, you will also be asked to list the four schools you want your ACT scores submitted to and upload a current headshot.
- **Step 4:** Paying is the last step of your ACT registration. Once you have paid the required fees or entered a waiver or voucher number in lieu of payment, you have finished ACT registration.
- **Step 5:** Print your admission ticket for test day.

How much does the test cost?

The current fee required for ACT registration without the writing test is \$52, which includes up to four colleges for reporting. With the writing test, the cost is \$68; the additional \$16 writing test fee is refundable with written notice if you change your mind before test day. Requesting additional schools (more than four) to receive ACT scores will incur [additional costs](#). UWA will accept an electronic copy of your score report or a screenshot of your scores at no extra cost.

Are fee waivers available?

Fee waivers for the ACT exam and the optional writing section are available for students that meet specific criteria. Eligible waiver recipients must be currently enrolled in the 11th or 12th grade, currently reside in the United States or a U.S. territory, and complete an ACT waiver form demonstrating financial need. Waivers must be requested through your high school counseling office. A total of two waivers may be applied to each exam, and will be used as soon as you register for a testing date. Free ACT learning resources are also available to eligible waiver recipients.

Are there accommodations for people with disabilities?

Disabled individuals who register for the ACT may request specific accommodations for their testing date, such as extended testing time, longer breaks and visual and hearing aids. You can request accommodations via <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/registration/accommodations.html>

Can I retake the test?

You are allowed to take the ACT as many times as you wish, and a large number of today's students sit for the exam at least once during both their junior and senior years of high school. More than half of graduating seniors who take the exam more than once manage to increase their composite score on subsequent tests. You will ultimately decide which score to send to colleges and universities, so definitely consider retaking the ACT if you aren't satisfied with your first score. UWA will accept your highest composite score.

What does the ACT cover?

The current ACT covers core skills in five academic areas: English, reading, mathematics, science and essay writing.

What is a good ACT score?

The average ACT score in 2019 was 20.7. 36 is the highest score attainable. A "good" score depends on which schools you're considering. The Princeton Review offers a college search tool, which includes average ACT scores of enrolled students.

What do I bring to the ACT?

- **Your Admissions ticket:** It's that thing you were supposed to print after you registered for the test. If you lost it, don't worry; you can log in to your account and print another one before the test.
- **A Photo ID:** Preferably a driver's license or student ID
- **No. 2 pencils:** NOT mechanical. Bring several and have them already sharpened.
- **A Calculator:** Check the ACT website to make sure your model isn't prohibited.
- **Remember cell phones are NOT allowed.**
- **A watch:** borrow one if you need to. It's easier to look at your wrist for the time than to look up at the wall. With 2 minutes left on a test, just fill in any blank circles.
- **Snacks and/or drinks:** to consume outside the test room only during the break.

Success in 7 Easy Steps

1. DO Keep Calm & Carry On

On test day, relaxation is key. Easier said than done, right? There's actually strategy involved here, too. Take it easy and give yourself plenty of time to wake up, get ready, and get to the test center. Breathe.

2. DON'T be a zombie

Have a protein-rich breakfast before you leave. Get good sleep starting two nights before the test. Seriously. Functioning on eight hours of sleep is so much nicer than functioning on any less.

3. DO stay positive

Tests can be kind of boring. Still, if all you do is think about how horrible this test is going to be and how badly you're going to do on it, chances are your experience will be really horrible and you're going to do badly (self-fulfilling prophecy, anyone?).

Belief affects behavior, simple as that. So, think positively. Give yourself a pep talk as you're driving to the exam, even try smiling while you're taking it. Have a few laughs with your friends. It'll work.

4. DO practice, practice, practice

How does that saying go? Anything worth doing is worth doing right? If you want to be good at something, you have to practice. Do the on-line practice tests, as well as any needed math tutorials. Take advantage of free ACT prep resources and ACT question of the day.

5. DO guess intelligently and with purpose

You're not penalized for guessing but try to narrow down the possibilities. There are usually at least one or two answers that are definitely wrong. "Duds," if you will. If you can get rid of these dud choices, you'll have a much better chance of guessing correctly.

6. DO mark up the test booklet

Take notes, write little hints to yourself, identify words you don't understand (it'll come in handy later on)...basically, just be an active reader. Plus, it's a good way to keep you focused.

7. DON'T be a statue

You're limited to the one square foot that your test chair encompasses, so you won't be able to have a dance party or anything but move around as much as you can. Shake out the limbs, stretch, whatever. Just get the blood flowing.

Preparing for the ACT?

Understanding the ACT format is crucial to earning a high composite score on the exam. For this reason, extensive pre-exam studying is encouraged. According to PrepScholar, there is no set-in-stone amount of study time that will guarantee success on the ACT. Instead, you should first use ACT prep materials become familiar with the exam format. Then, calculate a reasonable goal for your composite score and take multiple practice tests. Finally, calculate the difference between your scores on the practice tests and your goal score and study additionally as needed. A one-point differential may call for an extra 10 hours of study, while six to nine points may require more than 150 hours of additional study.

Test Taking Tips

- Prepare your backpack the night before: This assures you that you have everything you need for the test and keeps you calm in the morning by having everything nicely organized. If you are driving to the test, make sure your car keys are in a location that is easy to find.
- Memorize the directions BEFORE TEST DAY! (See below). During the test, you won't get extra time to read the directions, so if you take 5 minutes to figure out what to do, that's 5 fewer minutes you'll have to get points.
- Read each question carefully. A math diagram may show an x on the side of a triangle, but ask for perimeter.
- Pace yourself—don't spend too much time on a single passage or question.
- Use a soft lead No. 2 pencil with a good eraser. Do not use a mechanical pencil or ink pen.
- Answer the easy questions first; then go back and answer the more difficult ones if you have time remaining.
- On difficult questions, eliminate as many incorrect answers as you can, then make an educated guess.
- ***Answer every question. There is no penalty for guessing.***
- Pay attention to the announcement of five minutes remaining on each test. Go back to questions you narrowed down earlier and guess from the remaining choices. Then just pick a letter (NOT C) to fill in for any remaining questions.
- ***Letter of the Day*** As counterintuitive as it may seem, you will pick up more points consistently if you always guess the same letter. Contrary to popular opinion, you won't get more questions right if you guess (C) rather than any other choice (in fact, C seems to be the least likely answer on the last (hardest) questions of the mast test). Go crazy, guess (A) or (F) on the next ACT you take. Just be consistent.

- Exception: “cannot be determined from the information given” is virtually never the answer for the math section.
- If you complete a test before time is called, recheck your work on that section of the test.
- Mark your answers properly. Erase any mark completely and cleanly without smudging.
- Do not mark or alter any ovals on a test or continue writing the essay after time has been called. If you do, you will be kicked out and your answer document will not be scored.

Test Booklet Instructions

- The following instructions are printed on the cover of the multiple-choice test booklet. The instructions for the ACT Writing Test are different.
- This booklet contains tests in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science. These tests measure skills and abilities highly related to high school course work and success in college. ***CALCULATORS MAY BE USED ON THE MATHEMATICS TEST ONLY.***
- The questions in each test are numbered, and the suggested answers for each question are lettered. On the answer document, the rows of ovals are numbered to match the questions, and the ovals in each row are lettered to correspond to the suggested answers.
- For each question, first decide which answer is best. Next, locate on the answer document the row of ovals numbered the same as the question. Then, locate the oval in that row lettered the same as your answer. Finally, fill in the oval completely. Use a soft lead pencil and make your marks heavy and black. ***DO NOT USE INK OR A MECHANICAL PENCIL.***
- Mark only one answer to each question. If you change your mind about an answer, erase your first mark thoroughly before marking your new answer. For each question, make certain that you mark in the row of ovals with the same number as the question.
- Only responses marked on your answer document will be scored. Your score on each test will be based only on the number of questions you answer correctly during the time allowed for that test. You will NOT be penalized for guessing. ***IT IS TO YOUR ADVANTAGE TO ANSWER EVERY QUESTION EVEN IF YOU MUST GUESS.***
- You may work on each test ONLY when your test supervisor tells you to do so. If you finish a test before time is called for that test, you should use the time remaining to reconsider questions you are uncertain about in that test. You may NOT look back to a test on which time has already been called, and you may NOT go ahead to another test. To do so will disqualify you from the examination.
- Lay your pencil down immediately when time is called at the end of each test. You may NOT for any reason fill in or alter ovals for a test after time is called for that test. To do so will disqualify you from the examination.
- Do not fold or tear the pages of your test booklet.

ACT Test Breakdown

The ACT test is comprised of four timed multiple-choice sections in English, math, reading and science. Students who elect to take the optional writing test will also be asked to answer a writing prompt. Each of the four required sections includes subdivisions designed to test a specific competencies in that particular subject. Our section-by-section ACT exam breakdown is found below.

ACT English Section

The English section of the ACT test is comprised of 75 multiple-choice questions that must be completed within 45 minutes. The section covers usage and mechanics of the English language, as well as rhetorical skills. The ACT English test puts an examinee in the position of a writer who makes decisions to revise and edit a text. Short texts and essays in different genres provide a variety of rhetorical situations. Passages are chosen for their appropriateness in assessing writing and language skills and to reflect students' interests and experiences.

Strategy

Your first step with each question should be to eliminate all answers you know to be incorrect. The process of elimination will help you narrow down the list of possible answers, thereby increasing your chances of choosing the correct one if a guess is required.

Tips & Tricks

1. Quietly read each sentence aloud. Sometimes grammatical errors are more easily heard than read on paper.
2. Read carefully. ACT English passages might be fairly straightforward but answering questions can be tricky—even if they look easy. In fact, obvious answers should be a warning sign. Since most of the questions consist of underlined words or phrases, always refer to the passage and make sure that you can identify the sentence and what it is about, even if you have to read a couple of extra sentences. In the same way, always glance over the entire paragraph or essay when the question asks you to.
3. Remember: you're looking for grammatically correct answers. Avoid choices that sound colloquial, even if they are commonly used in casual conversation. When dealing with grammar, it's especially tempting to go with whichever answer "sounds" right. Unfortunately, the wild and wonderful world of grammar doesn't always match up to what you hear spoken every day. Even if a sentence like "I could of danced all night" sounds like something you'd say, remember that "could of" should be "could have" or "could've" in formal English.

4. Never blindly guess. At the very least, try to eliminate one answer. The odds of guessing correctly on the ACT English Test are even better. Since you're only facing four choices, not five, each answer you can eliminate brings you that much closer to the possibility of landing on the right one. There's no penalty for a wrong answer. There's absolutely no difference between leaving an answer blank and choosing the wrong answer.
5. Don't spend too much time on one question. If you don't immediately know the answer, make a note of the question number and come back to it when you've finished the rest of the section.
6. Go with your gut. It's important to know grammar rules inside and out. Apply your skills to the questions, but don't second-guess yourself once you have your answer.

Sample Questions

1. My house was filled with paintings, tapestries and other decorations hanging on the walls; a ceramic kiln in the kitchen; sculptures in the backyard; and bookshelves packed with colorful, hardbound art books.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. hanging, on the walls
 - c. hanging on the walls,
 - d. hanging on the walls
2. The dog being anxious whenever its owner leaves the house, so it paces from room to room until he returns.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. Since the dog becomes
 - c. The dog becomes
 - d. The dog,
3. Dr. Haskell concluded his diagnostic tests, and told Suzie she would be fine in two or three days (1). "Welcome," Dr. Haskell said to Suzie and her mother as he entered the room (2). He then gave Suzie a piece of candy and sent them on their way (3). Suzie was nervous, and her mother held her hand throughout the examination (4).

Which of the following sequences of sentences make the paragraph most logical?

- a. 4,2,1,3
- b. 3,1,2,4
- c. 2,1,4,3
- d. 2,4,1,3

Answers:

1. A is the best answer
2. C is the best answer
3. D is the best answer

ACT Math Section

The math section of the ACT features 60 questions that must be completed within 60 minutes. The section covers various mathematical and analytical functions found in arithmetic, algebra, geometry and trigonometry. Approved calculators are allowed for the entire section. The ACT mathematics test assesses the skills students typically acquire in courses taken through grade 11. The material covered on the test emphasizes the major content areas that are prerequisites to successful performance in entry-level courses in college mathematics. Knowledge of basic formulas and computational skills are assumed as background for the problems, but recall of complex formulas and extensive computation are not required.

Strategy

Get to know your calculator before the exam; knowing all of its specific functions and shortcuts will save a great deal of time during the testing period.

Tips & Tricks

1. Identify your mathematical strengths and weaknesses early on in the studying process, and focus on areas where you struggle.
2. Use the process of elimination to arrive at answers. Whenever possible, don't decide on an answer until you've narrowed it down to a single option.
3. For some questions, using a calculator will actually take more time than solving the problem by hand.
4. Don't spend too much time on one question. If you don't immediately know the answer, make a note of the question number and come back to it when you've finished the rest of the section.
5. Take two passes on the ACT Math test
 - a. **Pass 1:** Start with Question 1 and work your way forward, answering questions that look relatively quick and easy and jumping over those that look difficult or time-consuming.
 - b. **Pass 2:** After you've answered all the quick and easy questions, circle back to the first question you skipped over and work your way forward to the end again.
 - i. Don't guess at any answers while you're still on the first pass (see the previous section, "Take two passes on the ACT Math test," where I discuss tackling the test in two separate passes). Instead, begin guessing on your second pass of the test. At this point, if you can confidently rule out a couple of answers but don't know how to proceed with a question, you can save time by guessing at the answer and moving on to the next question.

- ii. Keep track of the questions that you guess on. If you have time at the end of the math test, you can revisit these questions and make a more educated guess.
6. **Solve the problem first**, then locate your answer, rather than plugging each option into the problem – UNLESS you have no idea how to solve it, and you have completed all the questions you know how to do—then plug in answers to find the correct one.
7. **Use all of the time provided.**
8. **Go back and check your work.** If nothing else, check any problems you weren't particularly sure of.
9. **Use scratch paper to figure stuff out. Label diagrams and Draw pictures** and simplify algebraic expressions.
10. **DON'T spend more than one minute on any problem** on your first tour through the exam. The test is designed to give you plenty of time, but don't waste any minutes early on. You are better off missing one hard problem than not getting to four easy problems at the end of the test.
11. **DON'T do any complicated computations that need a calculator.** A calculator isn't required, so if your solution absolutely depends on one, you are probably headed down a time-consuming and incorrect path.
12. **DON'T leave any questions unanswered.** Even if you have no idea what the question means, you should give it your best shot, and then just bubble something in. You have a small chance of guessing correctly, and incorrect guesses aren't penalized.
13. If two answers look similar (positive and negative of the same number, or reciprocals), the correct answer is probably one of them.
14. The instructions say the drawings are not necessarily to scale, but they generally are. You can use this to make an educated guess if you are stuck, or see if your answer looks reasonable, but not as proof.

Pre-Algebra

Pre-algebra questions are generally about being able to perform simple operations on whole numbers, integers, fractions, and decimals. This includes exponents, roots, taking the absolute value, and ordering lists of numbers from least to greatest.

You must be able to:

- Compute greatest common multiples
- Find simple probability
- Find factors
- Find ratios, proportions, and percents
- Recognize small primes
- Recognize patterns that describe a sequence
- Solve simple linear equations

Elementary Algebra

Elementary algebra introduces variables, and you'll mostly be tested on how to use them in a variety of equations and expressions.

You should be:

- Comfortable using equations to relate two variables
- Able to solve linear and quadratic equations and linear inequalities
- Able to add and factor polynomials, as well as solve for their roots
- Able to substitute
- Familiar with order of operations to simplify expressions involving variables

Intermediate Algebra

Intermediate algebra involves solving more complicated problems.

You must be familiar with:

- Binomials
- 2x2 matrices
- The quadratic formula
- Logarithms
- Radical and rational expressions
- Complex number

You must be able to:

- Solve a quadratic equation by factoring
- Solve systems of equations
- Recognize patterns in sequences
- Solve equations involving absolute value and inequalities (both linear and quadratic)

Plane Geometry

Plane geometry involves recognizing shapes that lie on a plane.

You will be tested on:

- Triangles
- Trapezoids
- Rectangles
- Circles
- Parallelograms
- Polygons

You should understand:

- What angles are and what their measurements can be
- General proof technique should also be familiar to you
- How to compute the surface areas and volumes of simple 3D shapes
- Basic postulates and definitions about parallel and perpendicular lines

- Names of simple 3D shapes should be known
- The basic ways to translate, rotate, and reflect a shape to obtain a congruent shape
- General facts about congruent triangles used in proof
- How to compute perimeters and areas of 2D shapes

Coordinate Geometry:

Coordinate geometry involves familiarity with and the use of the standard (x, y) - coordinate plane (a.k.a. the Cartesian plane). You must be familiar with labeling points in the plane. Familiarity with the real number line, inequalities, and number line graphs are also prerequisites.

You must be able to:

- Graph functions
- Determine slopes of lines
- Recognize and graph the equations for points, lines, polynomials, and circles
- Compute distances between points
- Recognize the equations of parallel and perpendicular lines
- Understand the transformations: translation, rotation, and reflection
- Calculate midpoints of line segments
- Understand the relationship between graphs and functions

And you should be familiar with:

- The graphs and equations of the three major types of conic sections: ellipses, hyperbolas, and parabolas
- Performing transformations of these equations

Trigonometry

You must know:

- How to solve trig equations
- How to model simple situations with trig functions
- How to recognize trig graphs
- The values and properties of the trig functions
- The trig identities
- How to use the trig functions to solve for lengths of sides and angles within right triangles

Sample Questions

1. A car averages 27 miles per gallon. If gas costs \$4.04 per gallon, which of the following is closest to how much the gas would cost for this car to travel 2,727 typical miles?
 - a. \$44.44
 - b. \$109.08
 - c. \$118.80
 - d. \$408.04
 - e. \$444.40
2. When $x = 3$ and $y = 5$, by how much does the value of $3x^2 - 2y$ exceed the value of $2x^2 - 3y$?
 - a. 4
 - b. 14
 - c. 16
 - d. 20
 - e. 50
3. Sales for a business were 3 million dollars more the second year than the first, and sales for the third year were double the sales for the second year. If sales for the third year were 38 million dollars, what were sales, in millions of dollars, for the first year?
 - a. 16
 - b. 17.5
 - c. 20.5
 - d. 22
 - e. 35

Answers:

1. D is the best answer
2. B is the best answer
3. A is the best answer

ACT Reading Section

The ACT reading test measures the ability to read closely, reason logically about texts using evidence, and integrate information from multiple sources. The test questions focus on the mutually supportive skills that readers must bring to bear in studying written materials across a range of subject areas. Specifically, questions will ask you to determine main ideas; locate and interpret significant details; understand sequences of events; make comparisons; comprehend cause-effect relationships; determine the meaning of context-dependent words, phrases, and statements; draw generalizations; analyze the author's or narrator's voice and method; analyze claims and evidence in arguments; and integrate information from multiple texts.

The reading section includes 40 multiple-choice questions (based on four written passages) that must be completed within 35 minutes. The passages are typically comprised of non-fiction humanities, social science and natural science subjects, as well as one fictional passage. The material is comparable to college freshman-level curriculum, and is designed to assess reading comprehension and evaluation skills, rather than acute vocabulary or memorization techniques.

Strategy

Read each passage as many times as necessary, and use the process of elimination to narrow down possible answer choices. The questions ask you to go back over that passage with a fine-toothed comb and find all the important details and themes. We have strategies to help you approach the questions in the most efficient and effective way possible.

General Reading Tips & Tricks

1. **Answer the questions in order, but skip the hard ones and come back to them later.** This strategy is especially helpful when taking the ACT because the questions are in order of difficulty.
 - a. The first four or so questions test referring skills: they will point you to specific parts of the passage and ask relatively straightforward questions.
 - b. The next six questions will be a jumble of main point questions, tone questions, more difficult questions that test referring skills, questions that test reasoning skills, and so on. You should use the first few easy questions to warm up, and then as you move forward, you can slow down a little and take more time on the last few questions. If you don't understand the second-to-last question, answer the last one and then go back at the very end and tackle the ones you skipped.
2. **Cross out the answer choices that you know are wrong.** Narrowing down your answer choices will greatly improve the odds of you picking the correct answer. Maybe two of the answer choices mention stuff that is totally irrelevant to the passage itself. You can go ahead

and cross them out, giving yourself a 33% chance. Not too shabby. If you can eliminate even one answer, you should make an educated guess. Actually, you should always guess if you don't know the answer, regardless of how many answer choices you can eliminate. It's totally worth it.

3. **Find clues in the context.**

- a. Some questions will point you to specific sentences or phrases within the passage, and in these instances, it is important to read a little bit above and below the area in question to get the gist of the section. Also, some of the passages (especially the natural science passage) might include words you haven't heard before or can't really define. Don't let this worry you. We repeat, don't let this worry you!
 - b. Sometimes the language will be specific to a certain field. For instance, a passage about biology might include some scientific terms you haven't heard before. Circle them. If knowing the meaning of a word or phrase is crucial to understanding the passage, the next sentence or paragraph will clue you in to what the unfamiliar word or phrase means. To be on the safe side, always read the sentence before and the sentence after to get an idea of what is being discussed.
 - c. For instance, if you see the word "Phalaenopsis," the next sentence will probably be something like this: "This Orchid genus has approximately sixty species." We can tell from the sentence that "Phalaenopsis" is a kind of orchid. See how easy that was? Don't know what the heck an orchid is? The sentence right before the sentence in question says, "There are thousands of night-blooming species of orchid in the Amazon rainforest alone." At this point, you can probably guess that an orchid is a type of flower.
4. **Fill in the blank.** Some questions (usually about three total in the Reading section) will ask you the definition of a word found in the passage. If you can take a stab at what word or idea fits best in the blank before looking at the answer choices, you will help yourself immensely because all you will need to do is find an answer that matches your guess. Much like the previous strategy, you should use contextual clues to figure out a confounding word in an otherwise benign sentence. (Could you figure out what —benign means by taking a guess? If you guessed "not harmful" or "non-threatening," you're on the right track.) Sometimes you will see a single word that you don't know:

If you covered up the unknown word and read the sentence again, what word would you use to fill in the blank? Boom. You just defined a tricky word by coming up with a close synonym.

5. **Forget what you know.** We know this sounds a little strange in a test prep course, but bear with us here. Keep in mind that ACT Reading is an open-book test and you can ONLY be tested on information that is in the passages. Knowing about or having interest in a particular subject, such as jazz music or great white sharks, can help keep you interested in the

passage, and interested reading is active reading, which is good. However (and this is important), *you must not bring outside knowledge in when tackling the questions.*

6. **Save EXCEPT/NOT questions for the end.** These questions are the most time-consuming questions on the ACT. Why? Because instead of looking for the correct answer, you will be given three right answers and one wrong answer—the wrong answer is the one you want. A typical question might ask you, "The author suggests each of the following about William Shakespeare EXCEPT...," so three of the answer choices will be things that the author does say about Shakespeare and the fourth will be the EXCEPT part—the one answer choice that cannot be found anywhere. You will need to examine each and every answer choice to see if it is referenced in the passage. If it is not in the passage, you have the right answer. Save these questions for the end, and answer them after you've gotten a feel for the passage and the rest of the questions. (In terms of question type, EXCEPT questions are usually referring skills questions because they are looking to see if you can find what is directly missing from the passage...more on that later.)
7. **Play to your (sub) strengths.** If someone asked you, "Hey man, do you like Humanities?" you'd probably say, "Uh, no, what is that?" What if someone said, "Do you like dance? How about piano? Mark Twain?" You might have a different answer, and all of these subjects fall under the humanities umbrella. Are you into literature, drama, music, or whatever's being discussed in the humanities passage? If so, answer the questions in this section first, before you conquer the other sections. If not, leave this section for last, and knock off the other ones first.
8. **Take careful notes.** Since a humanities passage, unlike prose fiction, can sometimes contain a lot of facts and details, it is important to keep track of these important tidbits. Circle, underline, or otherwise mark important concepts, arguments, and terms. And read between the lines, just as you would in the prose fiction section. That's how you'll catch the author's intentions or attitude toward the topic, as well as the main idea of the passage.
9. **Get ready to interpret.** Though some humanities writers are clear and concise, others like to try to dazzle us with big, flashy words that can range from super-technical literary or art jargon to obscure words you have never seen before in your life. These types of writers also tend to bury symbols, images, and meanings in the text, so expect a lot of reasoning skills questions in the humanities passage.

Reading Tips & Tricks for the Social Science Section:

If you're really interested in history, psychology, political science, or something else that falls into this category, you might want to think about doing this section of the test first. Since the **ACT doesn't penalize you for skipping questions**, it makes sense to do the sections you're most confident in before all the others. That way, you don't risk not having time for them after you've slogged through the sections that are harder for you.

1. **Watch for relationships.** Remember, this is social science we're talking here, meaning you are most likely going to be reading something about the interactions of individuals or groups of people. This section is all about relationships: between people, between concepts, between dates, between events. Relationships are typically full of problems, right? Look for conflict, disagreement, social issues, diseases, wars, and all of that not-so-fun stuff that can occur when people come together. You might not have to wrestle with the highly technical language you could see in the natural science section, but you will still need to underline, circle, or draw stars—whatever it takes to clearly mark important arguments and terms.
2. **Make it easy for yourself.** If you need to refer back to the passage, you don't want to comb through it for three or four minutes, searching for that little detail you know is in there. If you mark the important stuff clearly on the first read-through, you'll make your life a whole lot easier.
3. **Pay attention to the author's viewpoint.** Don't forget that, unlike biology or physics, social sciences such as history and political science are not always 100% objective. Even though you can be fairly certain that a passage written by a sociologist will be more scientific and therefore impersonal and analytical, an essay by a former slave about the Civil War might have a different opinion. Look for clues that suggest the author's beliefs, attitude, or agenda. Sometimes this won't be obvious or important, but sometimes it will be, so be aware.
4. **Watch for main point questions.** Lots of questions in this section will ask you to choose the main purpose, point, or idea of the passage. If someone asked you, —Hey, what was that passage about?‖ you'd want to be able to say, —Oh, it was about ____‖. The answer to this question will probably be broad, and show up in every paragraph, rather than be narrow and specific.

Reading Tips & Tricks for the Natural Science Section:

Maybe you're a total biology nerd who's been reading Science and Nature since you were in middle school. In that case, you'll probably have no problem figuring out the type of language usually used in the natural science passage. The passage will be in English, of course, but it will be in what we at like to call science-y language (that's a technical term). If you're bursting with confidence when you flip the page and see the natural science section, do this section first. No sense wasting your time sweating over the other sections and losing valuable time to shine.

Maybe you have an honest-to-goodness phobia of science class, or maybe you're simply not a fan. If that's the case, you should probably do this section last, after you've had a chance to flex your muscles on the sections that appeal to you more.

1. **Underline key terms.** Or circle them, draw a star in the margin, or write "IMPORTANT." A big part of the natural science passage is understanding tricky scientific language, and unless

you're already an expert on the topic, you're going to have to refer back to the passage again and again. Make it easy for yourself by marking the heck out of the passage.

2. **Look for points of disagreement and agreement.** If two ideas or theories are being compared, make sure you know the difference between them. It sounds obvious, but this is a really common question in the natural science section. Understanding the differences between two ideas means being clear on what Theory A and Theory B both mean. Another opportunity for underlining, circling, and drawing stars!
3. **Expect a serious tone.** Science writers are sometimes purposely dispassionate. That is, they maintain an analytical, impersonal tone and do not get emotionally involved in the subject matter. Lab reports, research findings, or discussions about natural phenomena are not usually punctuated with gems like "along with being a keystone species of their habitat, salmon are just really awesome fish, in my opinion." One notable exception is when the scientist is trying to alert the reader to a problem, such as global warming or pollution—in this case he or she may be more opinionated or emphatic when discussing the harmful effects of these factors on a given ecosystem.

Reading Tips & Tricks for the Prose Fiction Section:

Maybe you're a total biology nerd who's The prose fiction passage is a full 180 degrees from the natural science passage. First of all, instead of cold, hard fact, you're reading fiction. This passage will be speckled with hints and suggestions about characters' emotions, motives, and personalities.

1. **Be ready to reason.** Unlike the natural science passage, which will be chock-full of questions that ask you to find facts and details, the most important parts of the prose fiction passage probably won't be clearly spelled out right there on the page. There will be some referring skills questions that ask you to remember details from the story, but the real meat of the prose fiction passage is interpretation. Questions will ask you why the author used a certain kind of language to communicate a certain thing, what the relationship is between the characters, what may have happened right before the passage in the original source, what may happen after the passage, or how the characters feel about the events taking place in the passage. See our section on Reasoning Questions for more information.
2. **Read for fun.** As you probably could have guessed, the prose fiction passage will be a narrative, or a passage that tells a story. Although the passage might contain some factual or factual-sounding information, you won't encounter a purely explanatory or argumentative passage in this section. If you love reading novels and short stories, you probably won't have much trouble with this passage. If you're more a fan of nonfiction, or if you're not into reading for pleasure, try smiling while you read—it actually helps!
3. **Read between the lines.** Think of yourself as a literary detective, asking questions like, "What's really going on here?" and "What does he actually mean?" Think about the characters' moods, their emotions, their desires, and their personalities. Are they nervous?

Sad? Aggressive? Sometimes there will be clear hints in the passage, and sometimes you'll have to do some mental digging before you figure out how situationx makes character yfeel. A good writer doesn't usually come right out and say, "Chris was angry because Erin forgot to buy groceries," or "Erin was sad because Chris was angry with her." Instead, Chris might snap, snarl, or grumble, and Erin might sniff, pout, or cry. Using those emotional clues, it's much easier to figure out how Chris and Erin are feeling.

Sample Questions

1. Public debate around climate change and its effects on agriculture tends to focus on the large-scale industrial farms of the North. Farmers who work on a small scale and use traditional methods have largely been ignored. However, as the world slowly comes to terms with the threat of climate change, Native farming traditions will warrant greater attention.

What is the main idea of the first paragraph?

- a. Attention to Native farming practices will lead to greater awareness of the threat of climate change.
 - b. Popularity of small-scale farming in the North will lead to greater attention to Native farming practices.
 - c. Global demand for food will lead to increasing efficiency of large-scale farming in the North.
 - d. It will be worthwhile to include a greater focus on Native farming practices in public discussions concerning the threat of climate change.
 - e. Despite potential climate change, public debate public debate will have little effect on industrial farming practices.
2. A young couple entered the restaurant in Andy's view. They were holding hands. Andy sat back down in his chair. He felt sick. He turned and faced his father, who was eating soup.

What is the most reasonable conclusion to make from the statement in the first paragraph, "He felt sick."?

- a. Eating soup with his father gave Andy a stomachache.
- b. Andy was upset when he saw Jennifer holding hands with Tim.
- c. Andy was unhappy about the restaurant his father selected.
- d. Andy was upset with Jennifer for making him miss the party.
- e. Andy mistakenly thought that Tim was his best friend.

3. I started in Eatonville, Florida, because I knew that the town was full of **material** and that I could get it without causing any hurt or harm. As early as I could remember, it was the habit of the men particularly to gather on the store porch in the evenings and swap stories. Even the women would stop and break a breath with them at times. As a child when I was sent down to the store, I'd drag out my leaving to hear more.

As it is used in the passage, the highlighted word material most nearly means:

- a. diversity
- b. fabric
- c. information
- d. money
- e. energy

Answers:

1. D is the best answer
2. B is the best answer
3. C is the best answer

ACT Science Reasoning Section

The ACT science test measures the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences. The test presents several authentic scientific scenarios, each followed by a number of multiple-choice test questions. The content of the test includes biology, chemistry, Earth/space sciences (e.g., geology, astronomy, and meteorology), and physics. The questions require you to recognize and understand the basic features of, and concepts related to, the provided information; to examine critically the relationship between the information provided and the conclusions drawn or hypotheses developed; and to generalize from given information to gain new information, draw conclusions, or make predictions.

The science section includes 40 multiple-choice questions (based on multiple passages) that must be completed within 35 minutes. The section tests scientific reasoning skills related to Earth science, physical science and biology.

Strategy

Although this section contains science-related material, reading comprehension is equally important for choosing your answers. Read the passage below before answering the questions provided:

Tips & Tricks

1. **Read the Data Representation Passages First:** On the ACT Science test, you'll see three different types of passages: Data Representation, Conflicting Viewpoints, and Research Summaries. Data Representation passages are the easiest because they incorporate the least amount of reading. They basically ask you to interpret coordinating tables, draw inferences from graphics, and analyze other diagrams and figures. In some cases, you can go straight to the first DR question and answer it correctly without reading any explanatory material whatsoever. You may just have to refer to one chart! So it makes sense to get as many points as is possible right out of the gate by answering those questions first.

A Helpful Reminder: You'll know it's a Data Representation passage if you see several large graphics like charts, tables, diagrams and graphs. If you see a lot of reading in paragraph format, you're not reading a DR passage!

2. **Pay Attention To the Numbers:** Even though this isn't the ACT Mathematics test, you'll still be expected to work with numbers on the Science Reasoning exam, which is why this ACT Science trick is key. Often, experiments or research will be explained numerically in a table or graph, and those numbers could be explained in millimeters in one table and meters in

another. If you accidentally count the millimeters as meters, you could be in big trouble. Pay attention to those abbreviations.

3. **Use Shorthand Notes In the Conflicting Viewpoints Passage:** One of the seven passages you'll see on the ACT Science Reasoning test will involve two or three differing takes on one theory. You will interpret each theory to locate its key components and find the similarities and differences between the two. Right when you start reading, make notes in plain language on the side of the paragraph. Summarize each scientist's basic idea. Make a list of the key components of each. You won't get bogged down in the language if you summarize as you go. Since you will actually need to read this passage, save this passage for last.

A Helpful Reminder: Look for big numerical changes or differences in tables or charts. If Weeks 1, 2, and 3 had similar numbers, but Week 4's numbers spiked, you'd better believe there will be a question asking for an explanation of the change

4. **Mark up your test.** The section is yours for 35 minutes, so don't be afraid to write all over it. Come up with your own method of circling important facts and information. This will make it much easier when you get to the questions because you won't have to read over the whole passage again to get the correct answer. Some specific tips:
 - a. Circle the words you don't know the meaning of
 - b. Draw lines on graphs to mark important data points or trends
 - c. Circle numbers in tables and plotted points that are out of whack with the rest of the data
 - d. Underline statements that you don't totally understand
 - e. Write the trends you spot right on the plots and tables
5. **DO NOT waste time reading the entire passage** - you run into some data or results that you don't understand. Wait until you are asked about it, which you probably will be, rather than wracking your brain beforehand and becoming overwhelmed. If you think you need to read a specific passage in its entirety, skip that passage and come back to it after completing the others.

The one exception to this rule is the passage comparing the opinions of two scientists. You will need to read the passage to find the answers – so SKIP this passage. Go back and read it only after completing all of the other passages. If you run out of time, just guess the answers and fill in the circles.

6. **Don't get caught up in fancy scientific jargon.** Put the questions and answers in your own words.
7. **Do what you know first, and skip or guess if necessary.** Hint: Questions are often in order of increasing difficulty. If you're stuck on the last two questions of a passage and still haven't gotten to the final passage, it's time to put those two questions aside and move on to the next

section. It's up to you: you can either mark these questions if you think you will have time to come back to them, or you can guess and put them out of your mind. You definitely don't want to run out of time, leaving some easy questions unanswered in later passages. Pace yourself. You should be spending about five minutes on each passage.

8. **Perform rough calculations.** If you have to bust out your math skills, just do a quick estimate calculation. You have four choices in front of you. No exact number needed! There are no calculators allowed on ACT Science, so any math that you may need to do will be pretty simple. Don't be afraid to estimate if it will cut down on the time it takes you to solve the problem. You won't need to calculate the exact mathematical answer; a rough idea of the number should be enough for you to answer the question correctly.
9. Stay calm and focused.

Sample Questions

The Surface of Europa

Unmanned spacecraft taking images of Jupiter's moon Europa have found its surface to be very smooth with few meteorite craters. Europa's surface ice shows evidence of being continually resmoothed and reshaped. Cracks, dark bands, and pressure ridges (created when water or slush is squeezed up between 2 slabs of ice) are commonly seen in images of the surface. Two scientists express their views as to whether the presence of a deep ocean beneath the surface is responsible for Europa's surface features.

Scientist 1

A deep ocean of liquid water exists on Europa. Jupiter's gravitational field produces tides within Europa that can cause heating of the subsurface to a point where liquid water can exist. The numerous cracks and dark bands in the surface ice closely resemble the appearance of thawing ice covering the polar oceans on Earth. Only a substantial amount of circulating liquid water can crack and rotate such large slabs of ice. The few meteorite craters that exist are shallow and have been smoothed by liquid water that oozed up into the crater from the subsurface and then quickly froze.

Jupiter's magnetic field, sweeping past Europa, would interact with the salty, deep ocean and produce a second magnetic field around Europa. The spacecraft has found evidence of this second magnetic field.

Scientist 2

No deep, liquid water ocean exists on Europa. The heat generated by gravitational tides is quickly lost to space because of Europa's small size, as shown by its very low surface temperature (-160 degrees Celcius). Many of the features on Europa's surface resemble features created by flowing glaciers on Earth. Large amounts of liquid water are not required for the creation of these features. If a thin layer of ice below the surface is much warmer than the surface ice, it may be able to flow and cause cracking and movement of the surface ice. Few meteorite craters are observed because of Europa's very thin atmosphere; surface ice continually sublimates (changes from solid to gas) into this atmosphere, quickly eroding and removing any craters that may have formed.

1. Which of the following best describes how the 2 scientists explain how craters are removed from Europa's surface?
 - a. Scientist 1: Sublimation; Scientist 2: Filled in by water
 - b. Scientist 1: Filled in by water; Scientist 2: Sublimation
 - c. Scientist 1: Worn smooth by wind; Scientist 2: Sublimation
 - d. Scientist 1: Worn smooth by wind; Scientist 2: Filled in by water
2. According to the information provided, which of the following descriptions of Europa would be accepted by both scientists?
 - a. Eating soup with his father gave Andy a stomachache. Europa has a larger diameter than does Jupiter.
 - b. Europa has a surface made of rocky material.
 - c. Europa has a surface temperature of 20 degrees Celcius.
 - d. Europa is completely covered by a layer of ice.
3. Which of the following statements about meteorite craters on Europa would be most consistent with both scientists' views?
 - a. No meteorites have struck Europa for millions of years.
 - b. Meteorite craters, once formed, are then smoothed or removed by Europa's surface processes.
 - c. Meteorite craters, once formed on Europa, remain unchanged for millions of years.
 - d. Meteorites frequently strike Europa's surface but do not leave any craters.

Answers:

1. B is the best answer
2. D is the best answer
3. B is the best answer

ACT Writing Section

The optional ACT writing test is an essay test that measures writing skills taught in high school English classes and entry level college composition courses. The test consists of one writing prompt that describes a complex issue and provides three different perspectives on the issue. You are asked to read the prompt and write an essay in which you develop your own perspective on the issue. Your essay must analyze the relationship between your own perspective and one or more other perspectives. You may adopt one of the perspectives given in the prompt as your own, or you may introduce one that is completely different from those given.

The writing section evaluates logical reasoning and persuasive writing by asking test-takers to compose a compelling writing prompt. You'll be given 40 minutes to write a cohesive essay that clearly expresses your perspective on the given topic and compares your stance to three other perspectives included below the passage.

This section of the ACT is optional, although some colleges and universities require students to submit a writing score along with scores from the four required sections of the exam. The writing section will not affect the composite score of the exam, but the writing score will add an English Language Arts (ELA) score to your ACT records; an ELA score is a prerequisite for admission to some colleges.

UWA does not require the writing portion of the ACT.

Strategy

Read the passage a couple of times, making notes beginning on the second read-through, and carefully examine all three perspectives to find the ones that are most relevant to your position.

Tips & Tricks

1. Produce a rough draft on scrap paper to work out the kinks in each sentence and improve the clarity of your overall message.
2. Citing evidence from the passage will bolster your arguments and potentially increase your score.
3. Avoid extreme comments; a focused, rational argument will land you the best possible score.
4. If possible, cite all three perspectives in order to create the most balanced possible argument.

Scores

The Act utilizes a composite scoring system, awarding composite (or average) scores out of a possible 36 points.

Each required section is graded on a scale of one to 36 points. The first step in determining the exam score is tallying the raw scores for all four of the required sections. Each section awards one point for each correct answer, and then the total number of correct answer points is scaled to a score between 1 and 36. The scores of each section are then added together and divided by four to calculate the composite, or average, final score.

For example, let's say you scored the following: 28 for the math section; 26 for the reading section; 23 for the science section and 24 for the English section. Your composite score would be these four numbers divided by four, or 25.25. This figure is rounded down for a final composite score of 25.

The writing test, like the other sections, is scored on a scale of one to 36 points. Additionally, ACT readers will grade the essay on four domains, or subsections: Ideas and Analysis, Development and Support, Organization, and Language Use and Conventions. Two readers will grade each domain on a scale of one to six points, for a possible score of two to 12 points in each domain. An image of the essay and the test/domain scores will be included in your ACT records if you choose to participate in this optional section -- but the essay will not affect the composite score whatsoever.

ACT multiple-choice scores are released anywhere from 10 days to eight weeks after the exam date. If you opt for the writing test, then your composite score will not be released until the essay has been graded. Writing scores are generally available two weeks after multiple-choice scores have been announced. Reasons for delayed scores include errors on ACT documents or incomplete forms, as well as outstanding exam fees. Scores will be directly sent to schools.

Recent reports place the national average ACT test score at 21, with those in the midwest and upper east coast among the highest-scoring states. While the number of students with a perfect composite score of 36 on the ACT has increased dramatically since 2013, this group is still representative of less than 1% of all students completing the test.

How ACT Figures the Multiple-Choice & Composite Scores

You've answered the questions and we've scored the results. Here's how:

1. First we counted the number of questions on each test that you answered correctly. We did not deduct any points for incorrect answers. (There is no penalty for guessing.)
2. Then we converted your raw scores (number of correct answers on each test) to "scale scores." Scale scores have the same meaning for all the different forms of the ACT® test, no matter which date a test was taken.
3. Your Composite score and each test score (English, mathematics, reading, science) range from 1 (low) to 36 (high). The Composite score is the average of your four test scores, rounded to the nearest whole number. Fractions less than one-half are rounded down; fractions one-half or more are rounded up.
4. Each reporting category includes the total number of questions in that category, the total number of questions in that category you answered correctly, and the percentage of questions correct. ACT reporting categories are aligned with ACT College and Career Readiness Standards and other standards that target college and career readiness.

Sources

- <https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/act-prep/>
- <https://www.sheffield.k12.oh.us/Downloads/ACT%20Tips.pdf>
- <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act-educator/the-act-test.html#english>