

ACT Background and Tips

To help you demonstrate what you know and understand how to do

A dark blue diagonal graphic that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, covering the lower half of the slide.

Why do we even take the ACT?

1. This is one of the college entrance exams.
2. So what if you are not planning to go to college right after high school? Do your best anyway. You never know. You might decide a year or two or more later that you really want to go. If you are going into the military, one of the best benefits is the GI bill. Depending on the route you take, you will need ACT or SAT scores.
3. Scholarships may or may not depend on how well you score. If I could give you advice about your education and your future, do everything you can do to prevent accumulation of college debt. Scholarships are the best form of financial support.
4. Use your brain to open doors...

What should I expect from this test?

Four parts: Math, Reading, English/Writing, Science with optional essay (3 hours plus 30 minutes)

Points: max of 36 for the test and 12 for the essay

Speed: This is not a slow test like the EOGs and EOCs. You are going to have to press through the questions. It is very likely that you will need to guess. It is common to not make it through all questions.

Stray marks: Be very careful with the marks you make on the bubble sheet. Stray marks can invalidate a right answer. **DO NOT MARK THE BUBBLE SHEET** to come back to that problem or question. Mark the test if you need to come back.

Day of the test

Bring your ID

Bring a calculator

Dress comfortably and in layers

Bring a snack for the break that will occur after the second section

Do not be late from the break. They will start without you.

Guessing Strategies

You will know some of the answers without a doubt. Chances are, however, that there will be some questions that you just will not know an answer..

If you can eliminate some answers for certain, rely on your past knowledge and make the best guess you can make based on what you know.

What if you can only eliminate one answer or none? You need to stick with letter of the day.

Letter of the Day

So, the answers will be in rows like

1. A B C D
2. F G H J

This helps you keep things aligned.

If you do not know an answer or if you are running out of time, you need to use the letter (really column) of the day plan. For instance, for everything you do not know or can't get to, bubble the same column for the empty ones. **BE CAREFUL TO NOT MARK TWO BUBBLES FOR A QUESTION!**

Do not leave answers blank, whatever you do.

More things to pay attention to...

Do not waste a long time on something you do not know or understand. Keep moving and come back later to fill in your letter of the day.

Make sure you **carefully and completely fill** the bubbles and do not leave stray marks.

Do not leave any questions without a response. Remember....letter of the day. You should decide before you ever begin the test. If you are committing to the third letter (C or H). Do not skip around! Bubble anything you do not know straight down the column.

English

75 questions - 45 minutes

Always the first section of the ACT

They are looking for the **best** answer, not just one that works. Some of the answers will be NO ANSWER. The ACT is designed to be tricky, so pay attention to details.

They are assessing editing skills...look for common errors such as subject verb agreement, correct pronouns, parallel structure.

English Continued

Know the 6 comma rules!!!

1. Separate elements of a list
2. Before a conjunction between complete thoughts
3. Set off introductory phrases
4. Set off phrase that if removed would not change the essence of the sentence
5. Set off quotes
6. Interrupters like....,however,

Vocabulary and spelling are not scored in this section.

Breakdown

Punctuation 10-15%

Grammar and Usage 15-20%

Sentence Structure 20-25%

Rhetorical Skills (Big Picture)

Organization 10-15%

Style 15-20%

Math

You can find a pretty comprehensive description of what you need to consider and prepare to do for the math section at

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/whats-tested-on-act-math-concepts-subjects-and-skills>

The content breakdown for ACT math is:

- Pre-Algebra (20-25%)
- Elementary Algebra (15-20%)
- Intermediate Algebra (15-20%)
- Coordinate Geometry (15-20%)
- Plane Geometry (20-25%)
- Trigonometry (5-10%)

Most of the math test is pre-algebra and only a tiny bit of trigonometry. Know the basics like integers, prime, composite.

Math Continued

You need a calculator, because you can use one on some sections. Bring one.

Formulas are not provided. Know the basic formulas.

You can review them at

<https://blog.prepscholar.com/the-31-critical-act-math-formulas-you-must-know> .

60 questions - 60 minutes.

These questions go easiest to hardest. In the beginning they will be easy and progressively get harder. So...if it seems too hard at the beginning, you are probably making it harder than it really is.. If it seems too easy at the end, look again. It should be hard.

Get the answer any way you can get it. Guess and check. Pick numbers. Use functions on your calculator.

Reading

There will be 4 passages which are pretty long and detailed. If you are not a super fast and accurate reader, aim to do three really well and use “letter/column of the day” to answer the questions for the fourth passage.

Again, you are going to have to press to get through the passages and questions.

Though you have to read the answers quickly, pay attention to what makes the answers different.

40 questions - 35 minutes

Look for answers that are provable in the passage. Don't over analyze. Pick the one that could be the true answer. Extreme answers cannot be right. Watch out for true statements that are not mentioned in the passage.

Be sure to answer the question asked.

Reading Continued

There are 4 types of passages you will read. You may choose to read the passage you are most comfortable with first. BE CAREFUL to record your responses in the correct space if you do this.

Social Studies: anthropology, archaeology, biography, business, economics, education, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology

Humanities: architecture, art, dance, ethics, film, language, literary criticism, music, philosophy, radio, television, and theater

Literary: short stories, excerpts from novels, memoirs, or personal essays

Natural Sciences: anatomy, astronomy, biology, botany, chemistry, ecology, geology, medicine, meteorology, microbiology, natural history, physiology, physics, technology, and zoology

Science

This is not really about how much science you know. It is about reading graphs and charts and answering the questions that go with them. It measures the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills. It does not measure how much science you know.

There will be preliminary information for seven passages that tells you about the graph or chart to give background information. **YOU DO NOT NEED TO READ IT FIRST.** They are trying to get you to slow down and not get through the questions. Look at the charts and questions first. If you need to read then, you will know what you are looking for when you read. You might be able to answer the 4-7 questions per passage without even reading the passage.

Study the graph or chart. There should be enough information there for you to answer the questions.

40 questions - 35 minutes

Science Continued

The breakdown is as follows:

Data Representation 30-40% = about 15 questions

This section is all about reading charts and interpreting data.

Research Summaries 45-55% = about 18 questions

You need to understand the scientific method and data collection methods.

Conflicting Viewpoints 15-20% = about 7 questions

You will review opposing viewpoints from scientists. You will need to be able to compare (similarities) and contrast (differences).

Essay

Topics are really open ended easy topics to write on. There is no correct answer to the essay.

They are scoring you on your writing structure. They want

1. an intro paragraph with ends with a thesis statement.
2. 2-3 paragraphs with supporting details (if you can elaborate on details, that is better),
3. and a conclusion paragraph that starts with a restatement of your thesis and wraps up your paper.

Take a few minutes to plan before you write. Examples do not have to be real...you can make up something to have your supporting details.

Try to leave a few minutes at the end to reread your work and edit and catch any careless mistakes.

Important Terms You Will See on the Test

Excerpts from PrepScholars website –
see site for more definitions and details
<https://blog.prepscholar.com/act-vocabulary-words-you-must-know>

The ACT loves to use words with multiple meanings. These terms are common and might be used in a variety of ways. Note that only the most common use is included here

Analyze: to examine in detail

Compose: to write or create

Correlate: to have a mutual relationship or connection

Critical: involving the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment

Determine: to ascertain or establish exactly, typically as a result of research or calculation

Differentiate: to recognize or ascertain what makes (someone or something) different

Engage: to participate or become involved in

Vocabulary You Need to Know Continued

Emerge: to become apparent, important, or prominent

Evolve: to develop gradually, especially from a simple to a more complex form

Infer: to deduce or conclude (information) from evidence and reasoning rather than from explicit statements
(*inference*)

Omit: to leave out or exclude (someone or something), either intentionally or forgetfully

Precede: to come before in order or position

Redundant: not or no longer needed or useful

Reflect: to think deeply or carefully about

Relevant: closely connected or appropriate to the matter at hand

When taking the test

Do not go back into the section that you should already have finished. The administrators will note and invalidate all of your work.

Do not touch your cell phone...and it must be OFF.

The test is long and you are going to be tired. **Do the best you can do** on as many of the questions as possible.

What else can I do to prepare?

There are lots of videos and online practice materials.

The Khan Academy videos are short and get to the point. They are a good overview.

I like the Brightstorm videos and PrepScholars online resources.. They take each section and give you best tips for attack on those sections.

There are also practice materials that you can do online. Do not make yourself stressed before this round, but do take it seriously and give your best. You want a really good starting point. Know that you can take the ACT or SAT to get better scores to submit for applications.

Going forward, what do I need to do to prepare for senior year and applications?

The main thing to remember is that you cannot wait until your senior year to take the SAT or ACT again. If this is not your one and done, you need to look at dates to retake the ACT or take the SAT before August. There are spring and summer dates.

TIP: Students who are strong math students tend to do better on the SAT. Students who are stronger English/Reading students tend to do better on the ACT. You want to take the test that allows you to demonstrate your strengths.