

LEARNING MADE EASY



5-HOUR QUICK PREP

ACT[®]

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

- 5 hours of prep in focused study blocks
- Take a practice test
- Know what to expect on test day

Lisa Zimmer Hatch, MA
Scott A. Hatch, JD



ACT[®] 5-Hour Quick Prep

by Lisa Zimmer Hatch, MA,
and Scott A. Hatch, JD

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

ACT® 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies®

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Start Here

Welcome to *ACT 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies*. The goal of this book is to show you exactly how to survive the ridiculous situation called the ACT. No one wants to deal with a standardized test for too terribly long. This book has one goal: to help you prepare for the ACT as quickly and painlessly as possible.

About This Book

You likely can't escape the ACT. Many colleges require you to take this entrance exam before they'll even look at your application. Virtually every college accepts scores from either the ACT or the SAT. (Wiley just so happens to publish *SAT 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies* as well, should you choose to take that exam.)

In *ACT 5-Hour Quick Prep For Dummies*, you find five study blocks that add up to five hours. Depending on how much you know about each subject and how fast a test-taker you are, each block might take a little more or a little less time than promised, but the time promise does give you a good idea of how much time to set aside for each study block so you pace yourself and show up for the ACT as sharp as a no. 2 pencil.

Some study blocks are short and others are long, depending on what you're trying to accomplish. Here's a rundown of what you'll find in each block and about how much time it takes to complete:

- » **Block 1 (20 minutes):** Find out what you need to know about registering for the ACT, exam rules and tips, the topics covered, and ACT scoring.
- » **Block 2 (1 hour, 15 minutes):** Discover the question types you find on each test and content-specific knowledge you'll need to know.
- » **Block 3 (45 minutes):** Take closer look at the question types you find on each test and review detailed explanations of the answers.
- » **Block 4 (2 hours, 30 minutes):** This block contains an abbreviated practice test. By taking this practice test, you'll understand how to pace yourself, what content you need to review, and so on before you take the real ACT.
- » **Block 5 (10 minutes):** The shortest block in the book offers quick tips to review the night before you take the ACT.

Foolish Assumptions

We're betting you picked up this book because you have to take the ACT. (Isn't it good to know at the outset that your authors have a remarkable grasp of the obvious?) And because we weren't born yesterday, we figure that

- » You're taking the ACT in anticipation of applying to college. How exciting for you!

- » Getting the best ACT score you can is important to you and you care enough to sacrifice some of your free time to achieve that goal. Good for you!
- » You're busy and you don't want us to waste your time with a bunch of stuff that isn't on the ACT. For instance, we don't share vocabulary flashcards with you in this book because you don't need to memorize word meanings to ace the ACT.
- » You've spent some years engaged in a secondary school curriculum and you've written an essay or two. Therefore, we don't bore you too much with elementary stuff but do cover the basic math and grammar concepts that you may have forgotten.

Icons Used in This Book

Some information in this book is really, really important. We flag it by using an icon. Here's a list of the icons we use and details about what they mean:



TIP

Follow the arrow to score a bull's-eye by using the tips we highlight with this icon.



REMEMBER

Burn this stuff into your brain or carve it into your heart; it's the really important material. If you skip or ignore the Remember icons, you won't get your money's worth out of this book.



WARNING

Pay heed to this advice and avoid the potential pitfall.

Where to Go from Here

We suggest two ways to use this book:

- » **Fine-tune your skills.** Maybe you're already a math whiz and you just need help with the English grammar. Go right to the English review in Block 2.
- » **Start from scratch.** Grab a sack of food and some sharpened pencils, lock yourself in your room, and go through this book word for word. It's not as bad as it seems, and starting from scratch is the preferred method. Many students make what we call the "mediocre mistake": They're good at one section, mediocre at a second, and dismal at another. They spend all their time in their worst section and barely look at the sections that they're mediocre or good in. Big mistake! A couple of points that you gain in your mediocre section are just as valuable as — and a heck of a lot easier to get than — the same number of points you gain in your weakest section. Humor us and read the book from cover to cover. You'll pick up some great material.

Whichever way you progress through the blocks, absolutely take the practice test in Block 4. To use the practice test, we suggest two tried-and-true methods:

- » **Diagnostic:** Take the practice exam first to see how you score. Then devour the subject reviews and advice we provide in Blocks 2 and 3.
- » **Pure practice:** Devour the reviews and advice first and use the full-length exam to practice and reinforce what you've learned in the rest of the book.

Block **1**

ACT Overview in 20 Minutes

In a nutshell, the ACT is designed to test what you learned in high school (or secondary school if you're outside the United States) and how well you can apply critical thinking and analysis skills to what you read — or numerical problems in the case of the math test. Your score on the ACT helps admissions folks at colleges and universities understand how well prepared you are for college-level work.

Of course, it's more than a little weird to judge everything you learned over about four years into about four hours. But that's the task before you, and you give yourself an advantage if you have some idea of what to expect on the ACT.

In this block, you get the facts about signing up for the test, including how to request accommodations if you're eligible. You find out what to bring, what rules you have to follow during the exam, and some basics about the ACT format. You also find pointers about understanding your score and what to do if you didn't score as well as you'd hoped.

Registering for the ACT

If your school has a day when all students take the ACT, the school probably takes care of your registration for you.

However, if you want or need to take the SAT on your own, you need to know when you want to take the test and plan far in advance if you need to request accommodations for a learning disability, English learner accommodations, or a fee waiver. You must have certain details and documentation ready when you register, so read on to find out how to make all this paperwork go smoothly.

Choosing when to take the test

Currently, the ACT is offered at testing sites nationwide and internationally on weekends every February, April, June, July, September, October, and December. Additionally, some school districts offer the ACT during the school day in March, April, October, and November, depending on the high school. If you live in a district that offers one of these schoolday tests, your test date is set for you, but all other options allow for a little freedom of choice.

The best time to take the ACT is not a one-size-fits-all consideration. You may want to wait to take the test until you feel most prepared, but you also need to give yourself plenty of time to retake the test before you apply to college. Most colleges don't require you to send the scores from every time you take the ACT, so you don't necessarily have to be completely prepared before you take your first official test. Also, many colleges allow you to superscore your ACT scores, which means they'll consider only your highest English, math, reading, and science scores from all the times you take the ACT. In fact, the ACT even creates a superscore score report if you take the test more than once. Therefore, there's not a major downside to taking the test sooner rather than later.

Generally, if you've taken algebra II and trigonometry during your sophomore year, we suggest that you consider taking your first ACT test in the first semester of your junior year in either September, October, or December. (If you're taking algebra II and trig during your junior year, you may want to wait until February or April of your junior year to take the first test.) The beauty of testing in the fall of your junior year is that you can devote the summer before to extensive ACT study.



TIP

A perk of taking the December test is that it offers Test Information Release (TIR), which means you can pay extra to get a copy of your test questions and a report of the ones you answered correctly and incorrectly. This valuable information can come in handy when preparing for subsequent tests. This service is also available for the April and June exams.

If you take the test in the fall, you have plenty of options to retake the ACT in the spring and summer to achieve your top score. You can even get some extra summer study time in during the summer before your senior year and take the September ACT. Your scores from this test should be available in plenty of time before the earliest application deadlines in October and November. If you postpone taking your first ACT until April or June of your junior year, you may not have enough retakes to optimize your score.

Table 1-1 summarizes these scenarios to help you choose when to take the ACT.

TABLE 1-1 When to Take the ACT

If You Take Algebra II and Trig at This Time	Then Take Your First ACT at This Time	Pros	Cons
Sophomore year	Fall of junior year	Time to study over the summer and more time to improve your score	None
Junior year	Spring of junior year	Better prepared for the math test	Less time overall to improve your overall score

Deciding whether to take the writing test

The ACT provides an optional Writing Test in addition to the other four multiple-choice sections. Its importance in the college application process is dwindling, and most colleges don't require or even recommend it. If you need to write the essay to enhance your application, make sure you present your best effort, as explained in Block 2.

Asking for accommodations or English learner supports

Not everyone takes the ACT under the same conditions. You may have a special circumstance that can allow you to change the date of the ACT or the way you take your exam. Here are a few of the special circumstances that may affect how you take the ACT:

- » **Learning disabilities:** If you have a diagnosed learning disability (LD), you may be able to get special accommodations, such as more time to take the test. However, you must specifically request such accommodations way in advance. Prepare your requests for fall tests by the prior June and for spring tests by the prior September. Please note that in order to be eligible for special testing on the ACT, your LD must have been diagnosed by a professional, and you should have a current individualized education plan at school that includes extended test time. Talk to your counselor for more information. Note that you can only request special accommodations in conjunction with a test registration.
- » **Physical disabilities:** If you have a physical disability, you may be able to take a test in a special format — in Braille, large print, or on audio. Go to the official ACT website (www.act.org) for complete information about special testing.
- » **Religious obligations:** If your religion prohibits you from taking a test on a Saturday, you may test on an alternate date. The ACT registration website specifies dates and locations in each state.
- » **Military duty:** If you're an active military person, you don't complete the normal ACT registration form. Instead, ask your Educational Services Officer about testing through DANTEs (Defense Activity for Nontraditional Educational Support).
- » **English language learner:** In the United States, if you aren't proficient in English, the ACT enables you to apply for English learner supports. Because these supports expire yearly, you have to apply for the accommodation each year you take the ACT. English language learners must submit documentation of their status, such as WIDA or TOEFL scores or an official accommodations plan. If your request for English language learner supports is approved, you may be eligible for extended time, a word-to-word dictionary, directions in your native language, or small group testing. The ACT registration website explains how to apply for these accommodations and provides more details.

Requesting a fee waiver

In the United States, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories, you can request a fee waiver. The fee waiver means you don't have the pay to take the ACT, which currently costs about \$60 to \$85, depending on whether you take the optional writing test. Your school counselor can help you understand whether you're eligible or you can read the information at www.act.org. If you qualify, you can take the ACT up to four times for free and receive free learning resources. You'll receive a fee waiver code that you enter when you sign up for the test.

Signing up for your test

To register for the ACT, you need about 30 minutes and the following items:

- » A computer with Internet access
- » Credit card or other payment
- » High school course information
- » Headshot photo



REMEMBER

If you need accommodations, English learner supports, or a fee waiver, read those earlier sections before you register so you get the resources you're entitled to.

When you're ready, go to www.act.org. Choose Start Your Journey Here → Take the SAT as shown in Figure 1-1. You need to create an account or sign in and then follow the prompts online to register.

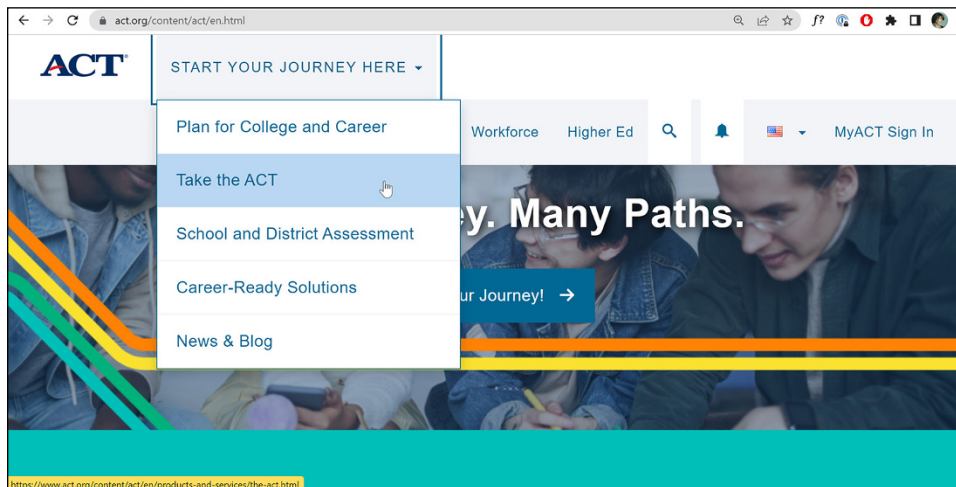


FIGURE 1-1:
Signing up
for the ACT
online.

<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act.html>

Identifying What to Bring to the Test

If you can't borrow the brain of that whiz kid in your calculus class for the day, you're stuck using your own. To compensate, be sure that you have the following with you before you leave for the ACT test center:

- » **Admission ticket:** You receive your ticket immediately after you register online. Be sure to print it out so you have it for test day.
- » **Pencils:** If you take the ACT in the United States, the ACT is a paper test. Take a bunch of sharpened No. 2 pencils with you. You may also want to take good erasers (nothing personal — everyone makes mistakes). Mechanical pencils aren't allowed.
- » **Map or directions:** Go to the test center a few days before the actual exam to scope out your driving route and parking area. Often, the ACT is given at high schools or colleges that have parking lots far, far away from the test rooms. Drive to the location a few days in advance, park your car, and see just how long it takes you to get to the room. You don't need the stress of having to run to the test room at the last minute on test day.

- » **Clothing:** Schools that host the ACT often turn off the heat for the weekend (the ACT is usually offered on a Saturday), and the test room can be freezing cold. Alternately, in the summer, schools turn off the air conditioning, making the room boiling hot. Dress in layers and be prepared for anything.
- » **Photo ID:** Showing the birthmark your boyfriend or girlfriend thinks is so cute isn't going to cut it with the test proctor. You need to upload a photo when you register for the test and bring a photo ID (student ID, driver's license, passport, military ID, FBI Most Wanted mug shot, whatever) to the exam. If you don't have a photo ID, you can bring a letter of identification. The form is available on the official ACT website (act.org).
- » **Eyeglasses:** Students taking the ACT frequently forget their reading glasses at home and then squint for the four long hours of the test. The ACT is enough of a headache on its own; you don't need eyestrain, as well. If you wear contacts, be sure to bring cleaning/wetting solution in case you have to take the lenses out and reinsert them during the break. (Hey, all those tears can really mess up your lenses!)
- » **Snack:** True, you get only one 10-minute break between the Math and Reading Tests, but that's enough time to gobble down something to jump-start your brain. We often suggest taking an energy bar or some peanuts, something with protein and carbohydrates. Scarfing down a candy bar is actually counterproductive; your sugar levels rise only momentarily and then drop down below where they were before you had your chocolate fix.
- » **Watch:** Keeping track of time on your own timepiece is more efficient than wasting precious seconds seeking out the clock on the testing site wall. Place your watch on the desk where you can refer to it easily throughout the exam. Digital watches or smartwatches may not be allowed. Stick with ones that have faces and hands. Your watch can't make any sounds either. If the proctor hears so much as a beep from your watch, she will not-so-politely request that you leave the building and cancel your test.
- » **Calculator:** The ACT gurus allow you to use a calculator only on the Mathematics Test. Although the ACT information bulletin has an entire quarter page detailing which calculators you can and cannot use, generally, you can use any calculator (yes, even a graphing calculator) as long as it doesn't make a noise or have a computer algebra system. Make sure the one you bring has at least a square root function and, ideally, basic trigonometry functions. You may not use a laptop computer (don't laugh; you'd be surprised by how many students want to bring one to the test!).

Knowing What to Expect During the Test

Have you ever been so excited about something only to watch all those expectations melt into a big puddle of disappointment? This is how our friend's daughter felt when her significant other broke up with her right before prom. (But she ended up having a great time after all!) Expectations are often a great setup for disappointment, but when you're taking the ACT, having some expectations is helpful. You'll know what you're getting yourself into.

This section helps you understand the exam room rules; the order, topics, and time for each test; and what the ACT thinks you should know to be prepared for college.

Exam room rules

The ACT is pretty strict about what is and isn't allowed in the exam room. Do not, we repeat *do not*, take any of the following items with you to the ACT test room:

- » **Cellphones and other electronic devices:** Leave your cellphone in the car. You aren't allowed to bring it into the test room. One student we know was dismissed from the test because he accidentally left his cellphone in his pocket, and it rang during the exam. The same goes for other electronics, such as iPads, PC tablets, or anything else that can access the Internet or make a sound.
- » **Books and notes:** Take it from us: Last-minute studying doesn't do much good. So leave all your books at home; you aren't allowed to take them into the test room with you. (Just be sure to fill your parents in on this rule. We once had a student whose mother drove all the way to the test center with her daughter's ACT prep book, thinking the girl needed it for the test. The mom actually pulled the girl out of the test to give her the book, resulting in the girl's nearly being disqualified from the test.)
- » **Scratch paper:** You may not bring your own scratch paper to the paper-based test, and you don't receive any scratch paper during the exam. Fortunately, the exam booklet has plenty of blank space on which you can do your calculations.

When you're done with one test, know that you're done. You can't go back to a previous section and finish work there or change some of your answers. If you try to do so, the proctor will catch you and you'll be in a world of hurt.

One last rule that you should already know: Cheating on the ACT is a loser's game — it's just plain stupid. Apart from the legal, moral, and ethical questions, you can't predict what types of grammatical mistakes will show up in the questions; what are you going to do, copy a textbook on the palm of your hand? All the math formulas that you need can't fit onto the bottom of your shoe.

The order, topics, and time for each section

The ACT is actually four tests in one — or five in one if you take the optional writing test. The test for each subject follows the same order, and you can expect to see a certain number of questions, certain topics, and have a certain amount of time for each test. Table 1-2 gives you the bird's-eye view of what to expect in each section of the ACT.

TABLE 1-2 ACT Breakdown by Section

Test	Number of Questions	What They're About	Time Allotted
English	75	Most are about English usage and mechanics. About 15% ask you to identify and eliminate redundant language. About 25% ask about writing skills like organization, style, and strategy	45 minutes
Mathematics	60	About one-third of the questions are arithmetic, one-third are algebra, and one-third are geometry.	60 minutes