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2025–2026**

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**THE  
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ACT<sup>®</sup>  
PREP GUIDE**

The **ONLY** Official Prep Guide  
from the Makers of the ACT

**ACT<sup>®</sup>**

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# Preface

You want to do your best on the ACT<sup>®</sup> test, and this book can help. It supplements our free booklet, *Preparing for the ACT*, and our *ACT Online Prep*<sup>™</sup> (a web-based preparation program for the ACT). This book features four actual ACT tests—all of which include the optional science and writing tests—which you can use for practice, and it gives detailed explanatory answers to every question to help you review.

Using this book will help you become familiar with the following:

- The content of the ACT
- The procedures you'll follow when you're actually taking the ACT
- The types of questions you can expect to find on the ACT
- Suggestions on how to approach the questions
- General test-taking strategies

This book is intended to help you **know what to expect** when you take the ACT so you can relax and concentrate on doing your best. The more you know about what to expect on any test you take, the more likely it is that your performance on that test will accurately reflect your overall preparation and achievement in the areas it measures. Knowing what to expect can help reduce any nervousness you may feel as you approach the test.

The ACT measures your understanding of what you've been taught in core high school courses that you should have completed by the time you finish high school. Because it

has taken you years to learn all this material, it might take you some time to review for the ACT. You can't expect to cram for the ACT in a night or two. However, any review should be helpful to you, even if it just makes you more comfortable when you actually sit down to take the ACT. We hope this book helps you to gauge how much reviewing you feel you need to do and identify subject areas on which to focus your efforts.

Your purchase of *The Official ACT<sup>®</sup> Prep Guide* includes access to four full-length, digital practice tests via the Wiley Online Platform. Use these assets to simulate the test day experience. Detailed rationales and official explanations are provided for every question from the makers of the ACT<sup>®</sup> test.

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# How This Book Is Arranged

This book is divided into five parts:

- Part One: Getting Acquainted with the ACT.** Chapters in this part introduce the ACT, explain how to prepare, and present general test-taking techniques and strategies for you to consider.
- Part Two: Taking and Evaluating Your First Practice Test.** This part includes a practice test along with guidance on how to use the test to identify areas where you may need to invest more time and effort.
- Part Three: Improving Your Score.** Chapters in this part present test-taking strategies tailored for each subject test—English, math, and reading—along with suggestions for taking the optional science and writing tests.
- Part Four: Taking Additional Practice Tests.** In this part, you have the opportunity to take three additional practice tests, see the results, and interpret your scores to determine how well prepared you are to take the ACT.
- Part Five: Moving Forward to Test Day.** This part prepares you for test day by explaining how to register for the ACT and describing what to expect on the day of the test, so you show up on time with everything you need.

The parts are identified by bars on the edge of their right-hand pages.

## **Before You Begin**

There is no standardized way to prepare for the ACT. Everyone learns and prepares differently. Some people prepare best when they are by themselves. Others need to work with fellow students to do their best. Still others function best in a structured class with a teacher leading them through their work. Use whatever method works best for you. Keep in mind, though, that when you actually take the ACT, it will be just you and the test.

As you use this book to prepare for the ACT, consider working in 1-hour segments (except when you're taking the timed practice tests, of course). If you want to invest more than 1 hour a day, that's fine, but take breaks to stretch and give your mind a chance to absorb the material. Toiling to the point of burnout is counterproductive.

# Part One: Getting Acquainted with the ACT Test

## In This Part

This part introduces you to the ACT, the five tests that it is composed of (English, mathematics, reading, and optional science and writing tests), and testing procedures. It also features test-taking strategies and skills that apply to all of the component tests. Specifically, you will do the following:

- Find out what is covered on the tests.

- Determine when you can use a calculator and the types of calculators you are permitted to use and prohibited from using.

- Get a preview of what you can expect on test day.

- Obtain guidance on how to prepare for test day.

- Learn test-taking strategies that may improve your scores on all of the tests.

# Chapter 1: About the ACT

The ACT<sup>®</sup> measures your achievement in core academic areas important for your college and career success: English, math, reading, science, and (optionally) writing. It isn't an IQ test—it doesn't measure your basic intelligence. It's an achievement test that's been carefully designed—using surveys of classroom teachers, reviews of curriculum guides for schools all over the country, and advice from curriculum specialists and college faculty members—to be one of several effective tools for evaluating your college and career readiness.

The individual tests that make up the ACT consist of questions that measure your knowledge and skills. You're not required to memorize facts or vocabulary to do well on the ACT. Of course, all the terms, formulas, and other information you learned in your classes will be useful to you when you take the ACT. However, last-minute cramming (such as memorizing 5,000 vocabulary words or the entire periodic table of elements) won't directly improve your performance on the ACT.

## Description of the Full ACT Test

The full ACT consists of four multiple-choice tests—English, mathematics, reading, and science—and an optional writing test. Topics covered on these five tests correspond very closely to topics covered in typical high school classes. Table 1.1 gives you a snapshot of all five tests.

<b>Table 1.1: ACT Tests</b>
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<b>Table 1.1: ACT Tests</b>			
<b>Test</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Content Covered</b>
<b>English</b>	50 questions	35 minutes	Measures standard written English knowledge and skills along with English language conventions
<b>Mathematics</b>	45 questions	50 minutes	Measures mathematical skills students have typically acquired in courses taken up to the beginning of grade 12
<b>Reading</b>	36 questions	40 minutes	Measures reading comprehension

**Table 1.1: ACT Tests**

<b>Test</b>	<b>Questions</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Content Covered</b>
<b>Science</b>	40 questions	40 minutes	Measures the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences
<b>Writing (optional)</b>	1 prompt	40 minutes	Measures writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses

Questions on the tests are intended to help assess college and career readiness. The following sections provide an overview of what you should know to perform well on each test. For additional details, check out the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards presented in [chapter 12](#).

### ***English Test***

**50 questions (40 scored), 35 minutes**

The English test consists of six or seven essays or passages, each of which is accompanied by a sequence of multiple-choice test questions. The length of the passages will vary; longer passages of approximately 340 words will be accompanied by ten items, while shorter passages of approximately 185 words will be accompanied by five items. Different passage types are employed to provide a variety of rhetorical situations. Passages are chosen not only for their appropriateness in assessing writing skills but also to reflect students' interests and experiences.

You will receive four scores for the ACT English test: a total test score based on all 40 scored questions and three reporting category scores based on the following:

- Production of Writing
- Knowledge of Language
- Conventions of Standard English

## **Production of Writing**

Production of Writing questions test knowledge and skills in two areas of English composition:

- Topic development in terms of purpose and focus
- Organization, unity, and cohesion

### ***Topic Development in Terms of Purpose and Focus***

Examples of knowledge and skills tested include the following:

- Determine the relevance of material to the topic or the focus of the passage or paragraph.
- Identify the purpose of a word or phrase (for example, to identify a person, to define a term, or to help describe an

object).

- Determine whether a passage has met a specific goal.
- Use a word, phrase, or sentence to accomplish a specific purpose, such as to convey a feeling or attitude or to illustrate a given statement.

### ***Organization, Unity, and Cohesion***

Examples of knowledge and skills tested include the following:

- Determine the need for transition words or phrases to define relationships in terms of time or logic.
- Determine the most logical place for a sentence in a paragraph or in the passage as a whole.
- Provide a suitable conclusion for a paragraph or passage.
- Provide a suitable introduction for a paragraph or passage.
- Rearrange sentences in a paragraph to establish a logical flow.
- Determine the most logical place to divide a paragraph to achieve a stated goal.

### **Knowledge of Language**

Knowledge of Language questions test your ability to clearly and succinctly express yourself in written English. Knowledge and skills tested include the following:

- Revise unclear, clumsy, and confusing writing.
- Delete redundant and wordy material.
- Revise an expression to make it conform to the style and tone used throughout the passage.

- Determine logical connections between clauses.
- Choose the most appropriate word or phrase in terms of the sentence content.

## **Conventions of Standard English**

Conventions of Standard English questions test knowledge and skills such as the following:

- Determine the need for punctuation or conjunctions to join clauses or to correct awkward-sounding fragments, fused sentences, and faulty subordination and coordination of clauses.
- Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in verb tense.
- Recognize and correct disturbances in sentence structure, such as faulty placement of adjectives, participial phrase fragments, missing or incorrect relative pronouns, dangling or misplaced modifiers, faulty parallelism, and run-on sentences.
- Maintain consistent and logical verb tense and voice and pronoun person within a paragraph or passage.

**Note:** Spelling and the rote recall of grammar rules are not tested.

## ***Mathematics Test***

**45 questions (41 scored), 50 minutes**

The mathematics test presents multiple-choice questions that require you to use reasoning skills to solve practical math problems. The material covered on the test emphasizes the major content areas that are prerequisites to successful performance in entry-level courses in college mathematics.

Some questions may belong to a set of several questions (for example, several questions about the same graph or chart).

Conceptual knowledge and computational skills are assumed as background for the problems, but recall of complex formulas and extensive computation is not required.

Nine scores are reported for the ACT mathematics test: a total test score based on all 41 scored questions and eight reporting category scores based on specific mathematical knowledge and skills. The reporting categories are:

- Preparing for Higher Mathematics, which includes separate scores for Number and Quantity, Algebra, Functions, Geometry, and Statistics and Probability
- Integrating Essential Skills
- Modeling

## **Preparing for Higher Mathematics**

This category captures the more recent mathematics that students are learning, starting when they begin using algebra as a general way of expressing and solving equations. This category is divided into the following five subcategories:

- Number and Quantity
- Algebra
- Functions
- Geometry
- Statistics and Probability

### **Number and Quantity**

Math questions in this category test your knowledge of numbers and fundamental math concepts and operations, including the following:

- Perform calculations on whole numbers and decimals.
- Recognize equivalent fractions and fractions in lowest terms.
- Locate rational numbers (whole numbers, fractions, decimals, and mixed numbers) on the number line.
- Recognize single-digit factors of a number.
- Identify a digit's place value.
- Demonstrate knowledge of elementary number concepts, including rounding, ordering of decimals, pattern identification, primes, and greatest common factor.
- Write powers of 10 using exponents.
- Comprehend the concept of length on the number line, and find the distance between two points.
- Understand absolute value in terms of distance.
- Find the distance between two points with the same  $x$ -coordinate or  $y$ -coordinate in the coordinate plane.
- Add, subtract, and multiply matrices (tables of numbers).
- Order fractions.
- Find and use the least common multiple.
- Demonstrate knowledge of complex numbers and multiply two complex numbers.
- Comprehend the concept of irrational numbers, such as  $\pi$ .
- Apply properties of rational exponents.
- Use relations involving addition, subtraction, and scalar multiplication of vectors and matrices.
- Analyze and draw conclusions based on number concepts.

## ***Communicating with the Testing Staff***

Although you are required to work silently during the test, you may need to communicate with the testing staff under certain circumstances, such as the following:

- **If you have problems with the testing environment, let the testing staff know immediately.** Possible problems include being seated below, over, or next to a heating or cooling vent that is making you too warm or too cold; having a defective chair or desk; poor lighting that makes reading difficult; or excessive noise.
- **If any aspect of the test-taking procedure is not perfectly clear to you, request clarification.** Testing staff will be available throughout the exam. In fact, they'll be moving quietly around the room while you're working. If you have a question about the administration of the test (not about any of the test questions), raise your hand and quietly ask for information.
- **If you need to use the restroom, ask.** Bathroom breaks are permitted during the test or between tests, but you're not allowed to make up the lost time.
- **If you become ill during the test, you may turn in your test materials and leave, if necessary.** Let the testing staff know that you are ill and whether you wish to have your answer document scored. One caution: Once you leave the test center, you won't be allowed to return and continue—so be sure that leaving is what you want to do. You might try closing your eyes or putting your head on the desk for a minute first; then if you feel better, you'll be able to continue.

## ***Maintaining Your Composure and Energy***

**While you're waiting for the test to begin**, you may find yourself getting anxious or jittery. That's perfectly normal. Most of us get nervous in new situations. People handle this nervousness in different ways.

Some people find it helpful to practice **mental and physical relaxation techniques**. If this appeals to you, try alternately flexing and relaxing your muscles, beginning at your toes and moving up through your shoulders, neck, and arms. Meanwhile, imagine yourself in a quiet, peaceful place: at the beach, in the mountains, or just in your favorite lounge chair. Breathe deeply and evenly.

Other people like to **redirect that nervous energy** and turn it to their advantage. For them, concentrating on the task at hand and shutting everything else out of their minds is the most helpful strategy. If this is your style, you may even want to close your eyes and imagine yourself already working on the exam, thinking about how it will feel to move confidently and smoothly through the tests.

If you have the chance, try out the two approaches on some classroom tests and see which one works better for you. The important thing is to keep the ACT in perspective. Try not to let it become larger than life. Remember, it's just one part of a long academic and professional career. If you begin to feel tired during the test, check your posture to make sure you're sitting up straight. Getting enough air in your lungs is difficult when you're slouching. You'll stay more alert and confident if your brain receives a steady supply of oxygen.

You might want to practice those relaxation techniques again, too, because tension contributes to fatigue. As you start a new test, you might find it helpful to stretch your

neck and shoulder muscles, rotate your shoulders, stretch back in your chair and take some long, deep breaths.

You can expect a short break (approximately 10 to 15 minutes) after the second test. During this break, it's a good idea to stand up, walk around a little, stretch, and relax. You may wish to get a drink, have a snack, or use the restroom. Keep in mind, though, that you still have work ahead of you that requires concentrated effort. Eat lightly and return to the room quickly. The third test will start promptly, and you'll need to be back at your desk and ready to go on time.

## **Voiding Your Answer Documents on Test Day**

If you have to leave before completing all tests, you must decide whether you want your answer document scored and then inform your supervisor if you do *not* want your answer document scored; otherwise, your answer document will be scored.

Once you break the seal on your multiple-choice test booklet, you cannot request a test date change. If you do not complete all your tests and want to test again, you will have to pay the full fee for your test option again. If you want to take the ACT again, see [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) for your options. Once you begin filling out your answer document, you cannot change from one test option to another.

## **Testing More Than Once**

If you think you can improve your scores, you can retake the ACT. ACT may limit the number of times you take the

ACT. The current retest limit can be found at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org). Many students take the test twice, once as a junior and again as a senior. Of the students who took the ACT more than once:

- 56% increased their Composite score
- 20% had no change in their Composite score
- 24% decreased their Composite score

You determine which set of scores are sent to colleges or scholarship programs. ACT will release only the scores from the test date (month and year) and test location (e.g., national or state) you designate. This protects you and ensures that you direct the reporting of your scores.

Our mission is helping people achieve education and workplace success. Thank you for allowing ACT to be a part of your journey and good luck on test day.

## **NOTES**