

ACT OVERVIEW

The **American College Testing (ACT) Assessment** is a multiple-choice examination required for admission to colleges. Performance on the ACT is one of the important items of information that college admissions counselors consider when deciding whether to accept an applicant. Since the ACT is taken by students all over the country, colleges use the scores to compare the achievement and ability of applicants from a variety of secondary schools.

The ACT contains five parts.

Test	Minutes	Questions	Topics
English	45	75	Run-ons, fragments, grammar, usage, punctuation, organization, style, and strategy
Mathematics	60	60	Pre-algebra, algebra, geometry, and four questions on trigonometry
Reading	35	40	Arts, Social Studies, Natural Sciences, and Literature
Science Reasoning	35	40	Science reasoning; all questions may be answered by reading the information stated or implied in the passages, graphs, or tables; no specific background knowledge is required
Writing	30	1 essay	Write about your perspective on an issue relevant to high school students

There are a total of 215 questions and an essay to answer in 205 minutes; 205 minutes is 3 hours and 25 minutes. There is one ten-minute break between tests two and three (the Mathematics and the Reading tests). Including the time in the classroom spent giving out the tests, explaining the directions, checking ID, and so on, the test will last 4.5 to 5 hours.

Although the ACT is based on subjects studied in high school, the test emphasizes thinking skills. Rather than asking students to recall facts or to remember the content of courses, most of the questions require students to solve problems, draw conclusions, make inferences and think analytically. Colleges like to know that prospective students have the depth of mind for figuring out answers rather than just memorizing information.

Important Information about the ACT:

- ✓ The ACT has **no** penalty for wrong answers. *Never* leave any answers blank. (Fill in something, anything, on the chance that you might get lucky and get the question correct.)

- ✓ The ACT does **not** have a verbal portion that specifically tests vocabulary.
- ✓ You **are allowed** to use a calculator on the Mathematics Test. (*The ACT registration booklet tells you which types of calculators are acceptable.*)
- ✓ You **can** study for the ACT. (*The ACT tests grammar; you can certainly refresh your memory of the grammar rules. The ACT has algebra, geometry, and arithmetic questions on it; you can study formulas and rules in those areas.*)

Important Information about the ACT continued:

- ✓ A little preparation can make you very comfortable with the format and timing of the test, helping to reduce test anxiety and ultimately improve your score.
- ✓ There is no such thing as a passing or failing score on the ACT. (*Every college has its own way of evaluating your ACT score.*)
- ✓ You **can** take the ACT more than once. (*If your score is not as high as you would like, you can retake the ACT next fall.*)

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE ACT

The following are suggestions for improving your ACT score:

Know How Much Time You Have

You can determine how much time you will have to answer each question:

English	About 30 seconds per question
Math	1 minute per question
Reading	Just less than 1 minute per question
Science Reasoning	Just less than 1 minute per question

Don't let this intimidate you. Instead it should give you a goal toward which to aim. The more you practice, the faster you will become.



Understand the Directions

By understanding the directions for each section, you will save time on the actual ACT. Since you have only a limited amount of time for each section and each question, don't waste time reading and rereading directions when you can learn them ahead of time. Memorize directions so you don't even have to read them on the day of the test.

Understand the Question Formats

Each section of the exam presents the material in different formats. However, there will be no surprises. Learn the different formats for each of the four sections. If you are comfortable with that format, you will be more relaxed on the day of the test.

Fill in the Blanks Carefully

Nothing would be worse than getting to the end of the test to find that you have run out of little answer ovals because you skipped one. Mark answers in the booklet and on the answer grid.



When you answer a question, circle the answer in your test booklet first and then shade in the appropriate oval on your test grid. That way if you make a mistake on the answer sheet, you can quickly find your original answer without having to redo the problem. Make sure that you are careful about filling in the answer ovals, especially if you decide to skip some questions so you can come back to them later.

Erase Completely

If you have skipped an oval and need to go back, or you have answered a question incorrectly, make sure you erase the incorrect answer completely. If you don't, the machine reading your answer page may mark it incorrectly.

Answer Every Question

Remember that your ACT score is based on the number of questions you have answered correctly. You are not penalized for wrong answers. Simply guess if you do not know an answer. Do not leave any blank!

Practice Under Simulated Situations

As you do practice tests, time yourself. Pretend that you are in the room where you will be actually taking the test. Use a stopwatch to time each section.



Know How to Get to the Testing Center

Be sure that you know the exact location of the examination. If the test is not at your high school, go to the testing center the week before to find the exact room where the test will be. You do not want to spend time on the day of the test searching for your classroom. That will increase anxiety and allow for the possibility that you might be late.

The following may HURT your ACT score:

Losing Concentration

When you're in the middle of one of the reading passages, the worst thing you can do is let your mind drift off. Although visualization (picturing yourself doing something relaxing or fun) is a good stress-reduction technique, it does not help you raise your ACT score. Even if you have to pinch yourself, stay focused!



Panicking over Time

You know exactly how many questions you are supposed to do and how much time you have to do them. You can waste a lot of time and drive yourself crazy if you keep flipping pages ahead, counting up how many more questions you have to do. Just do what you can. Looking ahead and panicking only wastes time and is counterproductive.

Messing up Numbers on the Answer Grid

Suppose you decide to postpone doing question number 11, hoping that inspiration will strike. But now you accidentally put the answer to 12 in 11's blank...and mess up all the numbers from that point on. You don't realize it until you are on question 30! When you choose an answer, *circle that answer in your test booklet first* and then fill in the answer on the answer grid. Doing so takes virtually no time and helps you not only in this situation, but also as you go back and double-check your work. Be sure to erase the incorrect answers *completely* on the answer grid.

Rubbernecking

Rubbernecking is craning your neck around to see how everyone else is doing. You have too much to do on your own to waste precious seconds checking out anyone else. Also try not to sit by the clock in the classroom. Because everyone looks at the clock constantly, you may become self-conscious, thinking that *you're* being checked out. You need to keep your mind entirely on what you're doing, not continually looking up and catching someone's eye.



Cheating

Cheating on the ACT is a loser's game. Apart from the moral and ethical questions, it's not practical: You can't predict what types of grammatical mistakes will show up on the questions; what will you do copy a textbook on the palm of your hand? All the math formulas you need can't fit onto the bottom of your shoe. Copying everything you think you need would take more time than just learning

it. Besides, the ACT tests critical reasoning skills, not just copying down a formula. Bad idea!

Worrying About the Previous Sections

Think of the ACT as four separate lifetimes. You are reborn three times and so you get three more chances to do it right. Every time the proctor says, "Your time is up. Please turn to the next test and begin," you get a fresh start. The ACT rules are very strict: You cannot go back to a previous section. If you try to do so, the proctor will catch you, so there is no reason to even think about the previous section. Forget one test as soon as you begin the next.

Worrying About the Hard Problems

The ACT contains some incredibly hard problems and questions that almost no one gets right. A ridiculously few total 36s are scored every year, and if you get into the 25s, you are in a super-elite group of only a few percent of the thousands and thousands of students who take the ACT annually. Just accept the fact that either you won't get to--or can't answer--a few of the hard questions. If you do get to the hard questions, don't waste too much time on them. If you can't think of how to begin, choose an answer at random. Then go back and double-check your easy questions. Remember that every question in a section counts the same.

Forgetting to Double-Check

If you finish a test early, go back and double-check the easy and medium questions. Don't spend more time trying to do the hard questions. If you make a careless mistake on an easy question, you are more likely to correct your answer and therefore gain points than trying to do a problem that is too difficult for you. Remember that every question counts the same. A point you save by catching a careless mistake is just as valuable a point you earn by solving a difficult problem.

Looking Back and Doing "Coulda-Shoulda"

Don't discuss the questions with your friends during break. They don't really know any more than you do. If you get depressed because your friends got different answers than you did, you're only hurting yourself. The same is true after the exam. It's over; no sense fretting about it until you get your scores back.



Please answer the following questions regarding the ACT.

1. What does ACT stand for?

2. How do colleges use the ACT?
3. The ACT has how many parts? _____ What are they?
4. What topics are covered in the mathematics section of the ACT? Do you need to know Calculus?
5. How many questions are on the ACT? _____ How long does it take?

6. Do you have to write an essay? _____ What types of questions are on the English section?
7. How can you study for the ACT?

8. Can you fail the ACT? _____ Explain your answer.

9. Can you take the ACT more than once? _____
10. List three concerns you have about the ACT.
 - 1)
 - 2)
 - 3)

What are the eight suggestions for improving your ACT score?

- 1) _____ 2) _____
- 3) _____ 4) _____
- 5) _____ 6) _____
- 7) _____ 8) _____

Which three of the above suggestions do you find the most useful and why?

Useful Suggestion	Why it is Useful
1)	
2)	
3)	

What is rubbernecking? Why should it be avoided?

What is the difference in the number of points that easy, medium and difficult problems are worth on the ACT?

What should you do about the hard problems on the ACT?

When you decide on an answer, what should you do *before* you fill in the oval on the answer grid? Why?