

ACT

Test Taking Strategies



More Predictable than Standardized

Since the exam draws from a body of knowledge that doesn't substantially change over the years, it is limited in the variety of questions it can ask. Therefore, knowledge of the College Readiness Standards is the test's best preparation

<http://www.act.org/standard/pdf/CRS.pdf>

Predictability = Points

The test NEVER changes so you know exactly
what to study

English

75 Questions-45 Minutes

- 10 Punctuation
- 12 Grammar Usage
- 18 Sentence Structure
- Rhetorical
 - 12 Strategy
 - 11 Organization
 - 12 Style

Bubble in Blocks

- Answer the questions in blocks of 10 on your test and then transfer to the bubble sheet in one action-this will shave off about 8 seconds per question, which may translate into a tester's ability to answer an additional TWO questions.
- Start answering 1-to-1 at the 5 minute mark.
- Reserve the last couple of minutes to make sure all of your bubbles are filled in (no penalty for guessing)

Math

60 Questions-60 Minutes

- 33 Algebra Questions
 - 14 Pre-Algebra
 - 10 Elementary Algebra
- 23 Geometry Questions
 - 14 Plane Geometry
 - 9 Coordinate Geometry
- 4 Trigonometry Questions

Know what to study and invest your time in!

Sacrifice to Succeed

- 215 questions on the test. Answer 125 correctly and you achieve the national mean. On most tests, 55% correct equals a fail. On the ACT 55% represents the national mean
- Therefore, it is important to recognize and answer the easier questions correctly while saving the most difficult questions for last
- In other words, you sometimes need to sacrifice to succeed. Recognize the difficult questions, save them, guess if unsure, and live to fight another, more winnable battle.

Three Pass System

Now-Later-Never: *TRIAGE*

- Do NOT answer the questions in order
- Do the questions you know that you know first
- Bubble in your “letter of the day” for the ones you KNOW and DON’T know
- Circle questions that you’re not sure about but want to leave some time for at the end to give another try. Don’t get stubborn and try to work tough questions out on your first pass
- If you get stuck midstream on a questions, DON’T get stubborn. You’re probably not going to have an “Ah Ha” moment but you might on a second pass with fresh eyes
- By answering the easy question on your first pass, you’ll have more confidence during your second pass

Process of Elimination

POE

- Incorrect answers may be easier to spot and eliminate than your ability to work out the correct answer
- Example: Which of the following alternative to the underlined portion is LEAST acceptable?
 - a) Aside from
 - b) Except for
 - c) Besides
 - d) Apart from

Many times answer choices are too close to one another so the odd answer out must be correct

Letter of the Day

- No guessing penalty
- Go into the test with a “Letter of the Day”
- Don’t guess yourself right out of your guaranteed 25 %
- If you’ve used Process of Elimination to eliminate your “Letter of the Day” then randomly guess from what’s left (now you have a 33.3% chance)

Math Timing

- Questions “tend” to proceed from easier to more difficult although this distinction can be largely personal. You must recognize what’s easier or harder for YOU.
- The test will typically throw in one REALLY difficult question/s early to slow you down and cause frustration
- Typically, you can judge difficulty by how many steps are involved: 1, 2, or 3 vs. 3 or more

Examples

- **Medium**

#22-Four carpenters built an average of 42 chairs each last week. If Cynthia built 36 chairs, Nancy built 74 chairs, and Kevin built 13 chairs, how many chairs did Peter build?

- **Hard**

#41-Four carpenters each built an average of 42 chairs last week. If not chairs were left uncompleted, and if Peter, who built 50 chairs, built the greatest number of chairs, what is the least number of chairs one of the carpenters could have built, if no carpenter built a fractional number of chairs?

Question 22 has two steps whereas question 41 has four steps. Therefore, question 41 might be a good one to save.

Math

Bypass the Bogs

- Skip the questions (on your first pass) that you know are tough for YOU. What's tough varies from person to person
- Don't spend five-minutes to miss number seven, leaving yourself less time to devote to numbers 28, 29, and 30, which may be appreciably easier
- Determine questions difficulty early (i.e., is it 1,2, or 3+ step problem)
- Know your natural strengths and weaknesses(i.e., you might be great at geometric slope questions, but very poor at cosmic algebra, where you're not necessarily solving for x).

Math

Now, Later, Never

- 1st Pass: You're sure you know how to do it
- 2nd Pass: You think you know how to do it so you give it quick try but you probably circle it and wait until a second pass
- 3rd Pass: You're sure you don't know the answer, so you bubble in the "letter of the day" and you might take another shot, time allowing
- By doing all the easier questions on the first pass, you gain confidence going into the second pass

What Calculator to Use

- Ideally use a TI-83
- TI-89 and TI-92s are NOT allowed

Plugging in and Backsolving

- When asked to solve for x , then try “working backwards” from your answer choices always starting with the middle answer choice, this way you’ll never have to plug in more than two choices
- When not asked to solve for a particular variable you can “plug-in” reasonable numbers

READING STRATEGIES

Reading

40 Questions-35 Minutes

- Prose Fiction 25%
- Social Sciences 25%
- Humanities 25%
- Natural Science 25%

*Always in this order and Always this percentage

Know Your Strengths

- Testers typically find that one type of passage is consistently more difficult for them than the other three, typically by up to 20%. Save this passage for last
- The toughest passages are usually either prose fictions(sub-text, metaphor, allegory, etc.) or natural science (unfamiliar terminology)

Skip to Score

- Testers have approximately 9 minutes per passage if they're going to attempt all four. With this time pressure and the existence of a "tough" passage, tests will typically make several careless errors while rushing through easier passages just to get to the tough passage, which they'll typically do very poorly on
- If testers choose to concentrate on 3 passages, they have almost 12 minutes per passage, thus they'll probably make fewer careless errors. Assuming the tester guesses into 25% on the tough passage, this tester will achieve a score in the top 10 percentile of the country by only concentrating on 3 passages
- Of course, this strategy must be used with discretion dependent upon the tester's realistic target score

The Loop

1. Find the critical words and phrases in the questions
2. Find those same critical words and phrases in the answer choices
3. Skim the passage and not the main idea of each paragraph. You're not reading for comprehension but rather the main idea
4. Practice the "loop"

Extremes are Inexcusable

- ACT is careful to avoid correct answer that represent extreme views
- Preferred answer words:
 - May, can, should, usually
- Questionable answer words
 - Always, never, will, must

Example...

Based on the passage, how does the author feel about the work of Langton Hughes?

- a. He was the greatest black author of his time
- b. His appeal was universal
- c. He was one of the greatest authors of the 20th century
- d. His work only appealed to Americans

Beyond the Scope...is Beyond the Answer

- Many incorrect answer appear perfectly acceptable except, that upon closer inspection, they contain word/s that have nothing to do with the subject matter at hand
- Simply look for the one word that you can't justify was actually talked about even though it seems reasonable

ENGLISH STRATEGIES

English

75 Questions-45 Minutes

- Punctuation 13%
- Grammar and Usage 13%
- Sentence Structure 24%

RHETORIC

- Strategy 16%
- Organization 15%
- Style 16%

Refrain from Rhetoric

Rhetoric questions are usually the last and most time consuming in the English section

- Do the questions in order leaving the Rhetorical questions for last (if for no other reason than rhetorical questions are more time consuming than the other types of questions).

Some of Their Favorite Kinds of Questions

- Look for comma splicing i.e., linking two independent clauses without any punctuation
- Pay very close attention if a verb or adverb is the answer choice. Odds are that the answer is based on their proper usage

Science

40 Questions-35 Minutes

Drawn from Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and
Physical Science

- Data Representation 38%
- Research Summaries 45%
- Conflicting Viewpoints 17%

Know What's in the Section

- Charts and Graphs
 - 15 questions: 3 passages
- Experiments (aka Research Summaries)
 - 18 Questions: 3 passages
- Fighting Scientists (aka Conflicting Viewpoints)
 - 7 questions: 1 passage

****Always this way-100% predictable****

GENERAL TESTING CONSIDERATIONS

Night Before and Morning of the Test

- Do NOT try to learn any new information or take any NEW quizzes
- Review information you already know and take quizzes you've already completed and done well on
- Read the newspaper the morning of the test to warm up-particularly the Opinion/Editorial page
- Only review areas of strength
- ONLY REINFORCE THE POSITIVE

Other ACT Facts

- The ACT is for grades 11 & 12
11th grade is the best time!
- The ACT is actually 4 tests:
 - English, Math, Reading & Science and an optional Writing Test
- The ACT Includes:
 - A career interest inventory
 - A student profile
 - HS course & grade information

Complete All Registration Information

- Colleges use this information for scholarship, advising, and course placement
- Checking yes on the “EOS” box gets students into colleges’ scholarship and recruitment pools

More on Admission...

- Many Colleges begin contacting prospective students as early as the 10th grade – using PLAN'S EOS information
- If you are a junior and do not score as well as you believe you can, there will be opportunities to retake the ACT during the fall of your senior year.

ACT

- English, math, reading, science
- Curriculum-based
- Writing Essay: Optional
- Writing Essay: 30 min
- Basic Fee: \$33 (\$48 w/essay)
- No penalty for guessing
- Perfect score=36
- Student choose best score to report to colleges
- Accepted nationally (Ivy leagues included)
- Pre-ACT : PLAN (10th)
- Career Interest Inventory

SAT

- Critical reading, math, writing
- Reasoning
- Writing Essay: Mandatory
- Writing Essay: 25 min
- Basic Fee: \$45
- Penalty for wrong answers
- Perfect score=2400
- All scores reported to colleges
- Accepted nationally (Ivy leagues included)
- Pre-SAT: PSAT (11th)

To Write or Not to Write?

- Take the Writing test only if your college(s) of choice requires it.
- Why spend more time and take the test that isn't necessary?

Cost Differences: ACT \$33

Plus Writing \$48

- ACT strongly recommends that you contact college admission offices for their current Writing policy, although you can go to www.actstudent.org for a list