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Introduction to the ACT

What's different about the ACT?

1. Each type of section only appears once and you know the order they will come in. (English, Math, Reading, Science, Writing)
2. For everything except the math there are only 4 choices (probability of guessing right increases and there is no penalty for wrong answers to always guess).
3. Section Differences:
 - A. Reading is just passages no vocab. They are longer but questions are easier
 - B. Writing multiple choice is called English and consists of grammar questions within 5 larger passages
 - C. Math has all multiple choice, no grids; concepts are the same but Trig is added
 - D. Science is on this test but it is never about science facts it's just reading graphs and tables
4. Scoring differences: Your score is a composite or average score instead of a sum total like the SAT – so strong areas can bring up weaker ones but you lose the benefit of being able to bank higher scores for retakes
5. Timing / Question difficulty: While the questions are more direct and generally easier there are more of them in a shorter period of time on the ACT sections. This is an all out sprint. The plus side is that your total time testing is only 175 minutes compared to 225 minutes on the SAT

Pacing: While the SAT is a marathon, this is a sprint. You must keep on pace the whole time

English: 75 questions arranged in 5 passages of 15 questions apiece in 45 minutes

9 minutes per passage plus 15 questions

Math: 60 questions of increasing difficulty in 60 minutes

1st 30 in 20 minutes, last 30 in 40 minutes

Reading: 40 questions arranged in 4 long passages in 35 minutes

8:30 for a passage plus its 10 questions

Science: 40 questions arranged in 7 passages of varying length in 35 minutes

5 minutes for a passage regardless of the number of questions with it.

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ACT English Strategies

1. Focus on questions one passage at a time – 15 question chunks that will take you 9 minutes to answer. Keep this pace the whole way through and don't deviate.
2. Work through a single passage and do all the questions that don't state a separate question first.
3. Go back to the longer questions for that passage before moving on to the next passage.
4. **Context** is the key for corrections – don't skip through the passage to the underlined parts. Read up to them and use the context to answer them.
5. Look for **Agreement** of the underlined portion with the rest of the context – parallelism, subject – verb, noun – number, tenses, adjectives, etc.
6. The **simplest version** of the phrase / sentence is always the best. Redundant or repetitive answers are never correct.
7. Extraneous information that doesn't pertain to the main thrust of the passage should be removed.
8. If there are multiple answers that mean the same thing then pick the other one (the one that is different from the rest).
9. Remember that NO CHANGE will be the correct answer on around 25% of questions

REMEMBER

- Try to know the answer before looking at theirs
- When crossing out answer choices try to cross the part of the answer that is wrong, not just the letter

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ACT Math Strategies

1. Questions on the math go roughly from easy to hard (1-30 easy, 31-50 medium, 51-60 hard), but remember that hard is relative to your comfortability.
2. Know the kind of question you are answering and answer accordingly – don't over-think easy ones or under-think the hard ones.
3. Pace yourself. 1-30 should take 20 minutes, 31-60 should take 40 minutes. This gives you twice as long on medium and hard questions.
4. The choices "none of the above," or "can't be determined from the data," are generally not correct answers (think about it, the people who can't do math would pick those answers so they can't be right).
5. Make sure that you read the question carefully and answer what they ask.
6. Be sure that your answers make sense.
7. Figures are drawn to scale which can be helpful
8. Remember process of elimination and estimation will help you on this test
9. You need to know your general math concepts because there are no formulas given on the test. Remember for any concept – eg triangles, there are only a limited number of things they can ask you.

REMEMBER

- Plug in numbers for variables (think about the best numbers to use)
 - Plug in their answers
 - Use your calculator appropriately
 - Break it down
 - Use logic if math isn't working

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ACT Reading Strategies

1. There are 4 types of passages: fiction, social science, humanities and natural science. Know which ones are best for you and do those first.
2. Before reading a passage, skim the questions and underline line references, key words or phrases in each question. The key word should identify the topic of the question. If you don't immediately spot something to underline, go on to the next question. Do not look at the answers at this point.
3. Questions do not go in order so you need to control the order and skip around.
4. For all questions try and tell yourself the answer before you look at their answer choices.
5. Go to the passage and answer the line reference questions first. Remember to expand around the reference to find the answer.
6. Do the key word questions next. Scan to find the key words or phrases in the passage and answer accordingly.
7. Do all big picture questions last. These would include purpose, tone, inference and assumption questions.
8. If you feel that you need to read larger chunks of text then do so very quickly. Skim do not read, you don't have time.
9. Circle names, dates and numbers in the passage. They are often answers to questions.
10. Don't get hung up on words you don't know; skip them and keep on reading. If you must figure out an unknown word in order to answer a question, use context clues to figure out the meaning of the word. For context clues, read the sentence and preceding and following sentences.

ACT Science Strategies

1. Keep up your pace: 5 minutes per passage needs to be your average speed
2. Answer the fastest passages first – your order should always be data representations, then research summaries and then finish with the conflicting viewpoints
3. Remember as with all other ACT sections – time is the challenge, the questions themselves are not meant to be difficult
4. Skip around within a passage answering the quickest & easiest questions first
5. Put your finger on the section they are asking you a question about to be certain that you answer from the right part
6. Minimize your reading time – 30 seconds or less reading per passage
 - while skimming quickly be sure to tell yourself what each figure or table shows

Data Representations

- 3/7 passages – do them first
- Just require you to deal with the data presented
- Be sure to recognize any tricks in figures they give you – multiple y-axes, switching independent variables to the y axis, multiple x axes

Research Summaries

- 3/7 passages – do them second
- Require you to deal with the data as well as the general science in the experiments
- You may need to read more of the paragraph info depending on the questions

Conflicting viewpoints

- 1/7 passages but it will have the greatest number of questions– do them last
- Treat like SAT paired passages - do all questions for each part individually before doing the comparison questions

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ACT Review: If you remember nothing else, remember this...

English – 9 min per passage plus 15 questions use the three C's

Analyze the context

Choose your own correction

Cross out the obvious wrongs

You can save the "box" questions and longer ones until the end of the passage

Math – 20 minutes for the first 30 questions, 40 minutes for the rest

Remember they go from easy to hard so adjust as you go

Get the ones you can first then for the ones you "couldn't" try your strategies – plug in #'s, plug in their answers, break it down into manageable parts, try a simple version of the problem, use logic not math, make efficient use of your calculator

Reading – FAST – 8:30 per passage plus 10 questions

Go to the questions first – :40 to underline key words and line references

Skim in chunks and skip around in the questions to answer as you go

Save all big picture questions until the end

Should be 2 definite cross outs on every question

Science – 5 minutes per passage but you need to go faster than that if there are only 5 questions

Start with a quick skim (:30) – remember to recognize the 3 different passage types (data representations, research summaries, conflicting viewpoints)

Put a finger where it tells you to go as you read the question

The simplest answer is the right one

Essay – 1-2 minutes to plan, 25 minutes to write, 3-4 minutes to edit

Go deep, be specific, stay organized, make your point and do all of this with relative few errors

In general

Keep your pace throughout the entire section (guess time <:45)

Remember that you need to control this process

Do not expect to breeze through every single question – Expect to be challenged but know that you are resilient enough to rise to meet the challenge.

Remember what makes this test hard is always just the speed of it, never the difficulty of the questions.

Always fill in a guess on each question