

ACT Overview and Tips

1. **Sleep well and eat breakfast.** You need to be on your A-game the day of the test, so get to bed early. Eat breakfast, but eat something that will give you energy and not make you feel sluggish later. Try not to do anything drastically out of your normal routine, and certainly don't eat something you wouldn't normally eat.
2. **Answer every question.** You won't be penalized for guessing. If you are running out of time, make sure you fill in any remaining bubbles with the same letter before time is called.
3. **Pace yourself.** You'll have a little less than 30 seconds to answer each question, so keep that in mind. Don't spend three minutes staring off into space or re-reading a longer passage; stay focused.
 1. **English – 5 passages; 45 minutes → 9 minutes per passage**
 2. **Math – 60 questions; 60 minutes → 1 minute per question (most will vary)**
 3. **Reading – 4 passages; 35 minutes → 9 minutes per passage (slightly under)**
 4. **Science – 7 passages; 35 minutes → 5 minutes per passage (will vary)**
4. **Bring a watch.** You can pace yourself by setting the watch to 12 at the beginning of each subject test -- it will be easier to see if you have spent too long on a particular passage. **Make sure your watch does not make noise!**
5. **Try to eliminate wrong answers first.** Each question will have at least one answer that's way out there. Physically cross off that answer so you won't be tempted to use it, and you'll increase your odds of guessing correctly. Then go back and see if you can cross off at least one more.
6. **Start easy.** Answer all of the easy questions first; then, move on to the difficult ones. Every question is worth the same amount of points, so don't waste time!
First Pass – answer all of the easy questions. Circle and skip the questions you can do, but they might be time consuming. For ones you can't answer, use process of elimination, and then guess (try to guess the same answer choice every time).
Second Pass – go back to the ones that you skipped. Pay close attention to answer numbers!
7. **Mark up your booklet.** Do your work in your booklet, and don't be afraid to cross out answers, underline key words in passages, and make notes – it will help keep your brain focused.
8. **Fill in bubbles and erase completely.** Your answer sheet needs to be as neat as possible. The machine scans the center of the bubble, so make sure to fill in from the middle first, and then fill outwards. The center should be dark. If you erase, make sure you erasing completely with a good eraser. You don't want to lose points because of machine-reading errors!
9. **Don't second-guess.** If you marked B for question 18, there was probably a good reason for it, so don't go back and change it unless you've found information in a later part of the test to disprove your original theory. Statistics prove that your first guess is usually the best one.
10. **Cross-check bubbles.** Every five questions or so, double-check your answer sheet to make sure you haven't skipped an oval. There's nothing worse than getting to the end of a test and realizing you missed filling in a bubble somewhere.
11. **Bring your own calculator.** The test center will not provide you with one, so bring an approved calculator for easier math work.
12. **Practice.** You've heard it before, but it's really the truth. Use an ACT prep book, and answer every single question in it. You'll gain confidence and a lot of extra points by doing so. See Mrs. Erickson in Room 300 for copies of practice tests, and use the provided online prep resource (you have a username and password) up until the test day.

- Online Availability: <http://www.actstudent.org/sampletest>
- ACT Prep Class Online: <http://www.actstudent.org/onlineprep/>

Some parts adapted from [Kelly Roell](#), About.com Guide

English Test Overview and Tips

75 questions; 5 total passages ; 45 minutes (9 minutes per passage)

40 Usage/Mechanics (punctuation, grammar, sentence structure)

35 Rhetorical Skills (writing strategy, organization and style)

- You will be expected to make decisions to revise and edit a given piece of writing.
- You will demonstrate your grasp of standard English conventions (excludes conversational and slang expression).
- Decide if the underlined portion makes sense in its location in the sentence and that it is as **concise** (short and to the point) as possible.

1. **The Shortest is usually the best answer.** When “Omit” is an option, carefully consider it (“omit” means to take something out). **The ACT hates extra words!** Look for repeated ideas and overly long descriptions.
2. If the shortest answer doesn’t **make sense**, then choose another option. Use common sense. Consider what the author is trying to say, and help the author fix it.
3. **Sentence Structure:** Avoid fragments and run-ons. Make sure every sentence has a subject and a verb and completes a thought. Combine two complete sentences with either a semicolon (;) or with a comma and a conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)

I studied for the test; I will succeed. **OR** *I studied for the test, so I will succeed.*

4. **Modifiers:** Modifiers should be as close as possible to the things they modify.

WRONG: <u>Walking</u> down the street, <u>raindrops</u> fell on my head.	This is wrong because it means that the raindrops are walking, and that makes no sense (they don’t have legs).
RIGHT! <u>Walking</u> down the street, <u>I</u> felt raindrops fall on my head.	Revise this to be sure a person is “walking.”

5. **Idiom:** Make sure words in the sentence are used in the correct manner (how most Americans would use them).
ie: *I believe **in** Santa* , **NOT** *I believe **of** Santa*. Most Americans say believe **in** rather than **of**.
6. **Pronouns:** Make it clear to who or what the pronoun refers. ie: “**Abraham Lincoln’s father** was a model of hard-working self-sufficiency. **He** was born in a log cabin **he** built with his own hands.” Pretty weird that Abe’s father could be born in a cabin that Abe’s father built. The author means that Abe’s father built the cabin and Abe was born in the cabin, so check out your pronouns.
7. **Verb Usage:** Make sure verbs match their subject and the tense of the surrounding context. That means you need to read the sentences before and after the question.
8. **Tone:** The tone of the text should be kept consistent. If a passage is a serious scientific piece, it shouldn’t suddenly switch to “science rocks, dude!” Look for variations in word choice – this usually indicates a change in tone.
Informal: “science rocks, dude!” Formal: “Science is important to the advancement of society.”
9. **Commas:** For the ACT, consider natural pauses in speech – frequently, your best judgment for these pauses will be the correct use of commas. Use commas for items in a series and to isolate non-essential information. Examples would be introductory information like:
 - a. ***On my way to class, I stopped at my locker.***
“On my way to class” is an additional phrase that does not change the meaning of the sentence.
 - b. ***Ricky, my brother, is a college student.***
“My brother” adds detail to “Ricky,” but is not need to make meaning in the sentence.

Math Test Overview and Tips

60 questions; 60 minutes – approximately 1 minute per question

24 Pre-Algebra/Elementary Algebra 14 Pre-Algebra Questions 10 Elementary Algebra Questions	18 Intermediate Algebra/ Coordinate Geometry 9 Intermediate Algebra Questions 9 Coordinate Geometry Questions	18 Plane Geometry/Trigonometry 14 Plane Geometry Questions 4 Trigonometry Questions
---	--	--

Unlike any other test in the ACT, the Math test becomes gradually more difficult as the number increases:

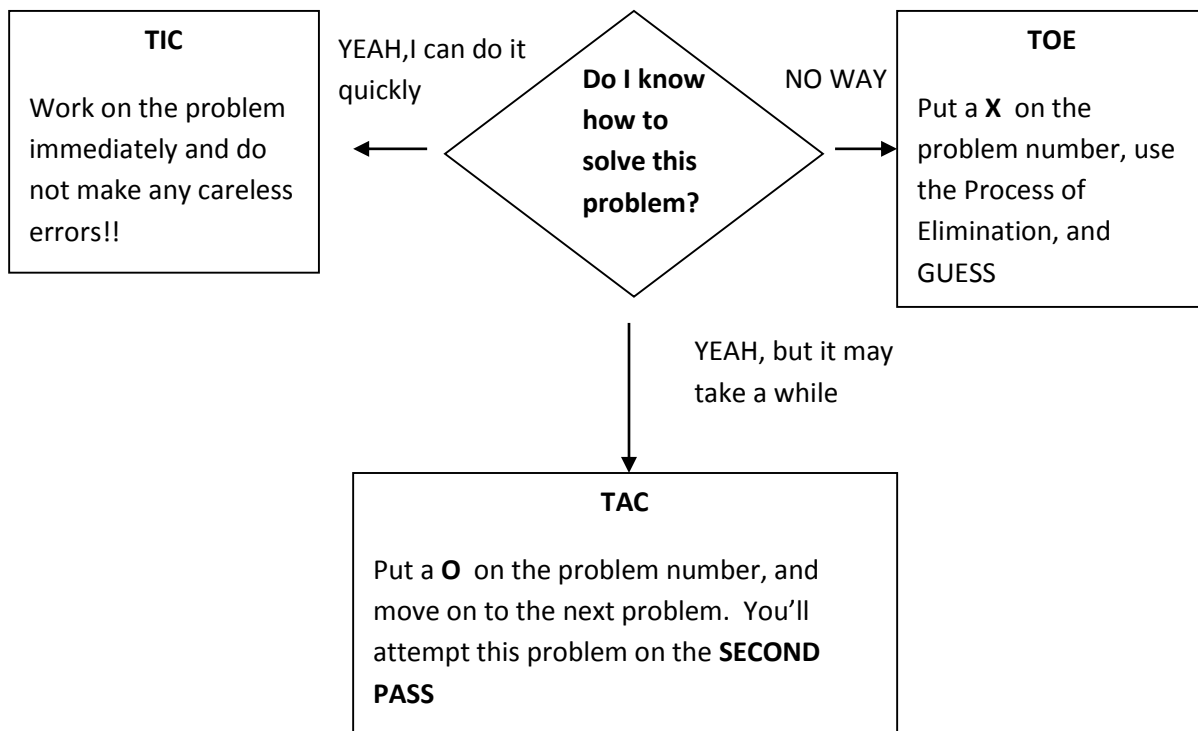
REALLY EASY at the **BEGINNING** (1-15)
PRETTY EASY (16-30)
PRETTY HARD (31-45)
REALLY HARD near the **END** (46-60)

Some math questions take a few seconds while others take a few minutes, so this is a very rough guideline. The Math test is NOT broken into passages, so use the Tic-Tac-Toe method on the entire Math test.

“TIC-TAC-TOE” STRATEGY

The Tic-Tac-Toe Strategy is a 2 pass method that allows you to focus your effort and time on the problems that you are most likely to get correct.

After you read the question for each problem, you must immediately answer the following question:



- **1st Pass:** Do the **TICs** and **TOEs (X)**
- **2nd Pass:** Do the **TACs (O)**

By using this strategy, you will not waste any time trying to solve impossible problems, and you will be able to attempt all the easiest problems.

MATH STRATEGY



- READY!** 1. **IDENTIFY** the **CONCEPT** being tested.
- AIM!!** 2. **SETUP** the problem very carefully.
Make sure you know what they are asking for and take into account all conditions.
- FIRE!!!** 3. **SOLVE** the problem. Don't make any careless mistakes!

THE SETUP IS EVERYTHING. The ACT test writers are testing your problem solving skills, not your calculation skills. If you take a little extra time to **methodically set up the problem**, the calculation step will be very easy.

SETUP PROCESS

- Identify exactly what they want you to solve for.
- Design a plan that will allow you to use standard equations to solve for the answer.
- Calculate every piece, one at a time and calculate your final answer.

CALCULATOR CRUNCH. The test writers know that students have become dependent on their calculators and often start punching in numbers without writing anything down. **WRITE OUT STEPS** and you will:

- ✓ **INCREASE ACCURACY-** When nothing is written down, it is easy to accidentally add when you should subtract or multiply when you should divide. The test writers use common calculator errors to derive their wrong answers.
- ✓ **SAVE TIME-** Using your calculator can actually cost you more time than writing out steps!
 - **When your answer is Not an answer choice-**It is a lot easier to find a mistake quickly if you have the steps written out as opposed to starting over from the beginning.
 - **When answer choices have π or Square roots ($\sqrt{\quad}$)**
 - **Canceling Terms-**Calculations often breakdown easily through cancellation
- ✓ **IDENTIFY ERRORS-** Reviewing your incorrect answers is a big part of improving accuracy, especially in the Math test. If you do not write down your work, it will be very difficult to identify what you are doing wrong.

LAST RESORT MATH TRICKS

If you are unable to figure out a problem, you can try one of these **Last Resort Math Tricks**. These should be attempted during your **SECOND PASS** from the **TIC TAC TOE STRATEGY**.

- **PLUG IN NUMBERS:** Plugging in Numbers can be extremely effective trick for solving Inequalities, difficult Algebra problems, or complex Equation Translation problems. You can use this trick whenever you see equations in the answer choices. When plugging in numbers **MAKE SURE YOU ARE USING LEGAL NUMBERS** (taking in to account all restrictions such as the denominator cannot be 0 etc.) and use numbers that are easy to work with such as -2,-1,0,1,2 etc..
- **BACK SOLVE:** Back Solving is a form of **Plugging In**, but instead of choosing random numbers, you start with answer (C) and move up or down accordingly. You can use this trick when you are asked to solve for a variable.
- **EYEBALL:** On most Geometry problems that have a figure, you can **EYEBALL**, an angle or area and eliminate at least a few of the answers.
- **PROCESS OF ELIMINATION:** If you don't know how to solve a problem or run out of time, you can sometimes look at the answer and immediately eliminate a few of the answer choices.

Reading Test Overview and Tips

40 questions; 4 total passages; 35 minutes (8 ½ - 9 minutes per passage)

1. Decide your reading “Attack Order.” Practice different types of passages. Time is often a factor on this test, so try to choose the passage that will be easiest for you first, and leave the most difficult for last. That way, if you have to guess at the end, you won’t risk losing easy points. Scan the titles – sometimes you will recognize a topic, and having even a tiny bit of background knowledge may help you to stay focused on that passage.

- **First Passage: Prose Fiction** - An excerpt from a short story or novel; generally narrate events that reveal a character’s beliefs and motivations. Questions focus on setting, plot, character, theme, mood, and tone.
- **Second Passage: Social Science** – Non-fiction; Anthropology, Archaeology, Business, Economics, Education, Geography, History, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology. Pay careful attention to **cause-effect relationships, vocabulary, comparisons, and the sequence of events**. This section contains factual questions about what the author says and inferential questions about what the author *means*.
- **Third Passage: Humanities** – Non-fiction; Architecture, Art, Culture, Dance, Film, Literature, Music, Philosophy, Radio, Television, Theater. Pay attention to **details, vocabulary, inferences, the author’s view, and the important contributions** of the subject.
- **Fourth Passage: Natural Science** -- Non-fiction; Anatomy, Astronomy, Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Ecology, Geology, Medicine, Meteorology, Microbiology, Natural History, Physics, Technology. This passage contains an excerpt from an article or text that explains the importance of a scientific topic or natural phenomena. Pay attention to **laws, rules, and theories of nature**. This asks the most specific of the questions.

2. Time Yourself: Do Your Best to Read Each Passage in 3 Minutes! *PACE is the key to the reading ACT! You only have 8 ½ minutes to read four passages and answer ten questions.* Try to read the passage in **3 minutes** and answer the questions in **5 minutes**. If you finish the passage early, use that time to check over questions that were more difficult. Most people will need to use the entire 35 minutes, so practice keeping a swift pace.

3. Mark up the passages. Underline specific details that you find to be important. Circle any names, dates, or places that are relevant to the passage. Some find it helpful to write two to three words next to each paragraph that provides a “road map” summary of the passage. This helps with finding specific parts of the passage quickly.

4. Preview Questions (if it works for you). **DO** preview the questions if you are someone who loses focus easily while reading and needs a “job” (i.e. matching the content of the questions to the details in the story). **DO NOT** preview the questions if you are someone who will be easily distracted by the questions (worrying about difficulty, focused too much on answering questions and not understanding the passage as a whole...) Most will want to read first.

5. Read the Entire Question. The ACT knows that you will be rushing through the questions. Many of the questions include details in the second half of the stem. Take the time to re-read if you do not immediately know what it’s asking.

6. Eliminate the Enemies. If the answer is not immediately obvious – then eliminate as many answer choices as possible. Process of eliminate is usually the KEY to success on the Reading test. If you see any of these, eliminate immediately:

- **Misused Detail:** answer choice is a true detail from the story, but it does not answer the question.
- **Distortion:** answer choice changes or twists a detail to make it a false statement.
- **Out of Scope:** answer choice was either not mentioned or entirely incorrect in its conclusion.
- **Opposite:** answer choice is the exact opposite of a detail mentioned in the story
- **Extreme:** answer choice uses vocabulary that is too definitive and not supported by the passage. Look for statements like “always,” “never,” “all,” “none.”

Science Test Overview and Tips

7 Passages in random Order (40 questions total)

- 3 Graphing passages – 5 questions per passage (15 questions total)
- 3 Experiment passages – 6 questions per passage (18 questions total)
- 1 Theory passage – 7 questions per passage (7 questions total)

- The seven passages in the Science section of the ACT are arranged in a random order. The order of least to most time consuming passage question types to answer is **graphs, experiment**, and then **theory**. Often times, ACT test makers will put a more time consuming passage in the beginning of the Science section, which possibly prevents the easier types of questions to be answered if time runs out. Therefore, it is imperative for your success on the Science section to approach it with a plan of attack incorporating a time management strategy. The strategy is known as **GET set!**

GET Set Breakdown

Passage Type	# of Questions/Passage	# of Passages/Test
<u>G</u> raph	5	3
<u>E</u> xperiment	6	3
<u>T</u> heory	7	1

- 1) **GET Set:** The GET set strategy is to identify the seven passages of the Science section by counting up the number of questions in each passage. This should be done before answering any questions on the Science section. You simply count up the amount of questions in each passage, label the passage number as being a Graph passage, Experiment passage, or Theory passage, then complete the Science section in the order G-E-T.
- 2) **Misconceptions:** Ironically, the Science section is not a test of science knowledge. The test requires ABSOLUTELY NO SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE whatsoever. In fact, the Science section is much more like a reading comprehension test because ALL of the information needed to answer the questions can be found in the passage next to them. In order to score well, you must utilize your reading comprehension skills and develop your data, chart, and graph reading skills.
- 3) **Trend Arrows:** When reading charts of data the first time, look for trends of increasing or decreasing values. As you notice these relationships, place an up arrow ↑ or a down arrow ↓ next to the data. This will dramatically reduce the amount of time that you spend reviewing the data trends as you attempt to answer questions.
- 4) **Question Type- Big Picture (~50 % of Questions):** These types of questions are a summary of the passage or experiment. These deal with overall trends of data or results (i.e. “according to the data, as temperature increases...”).
- 5) **Question Type- Detail (~50% of Questions):** These types of questions are much more specific based on data from a table or specific information given in a passage (i.e. “according to the figure, which of the following gases exhibits the largest change in pressure at 10 degrees Celsius?”)
- 6) **Science Strategy Objective:**
 - READY! 1. COMPREHEND the “Big Picture” of the passage using the Attack Reading Technique. Underline important pieces of information and paraphrase sections to help summarize what was read.
 - AIM!! 2. READ each question and use the invasion strategy based on the question type and your knowledge of the passage.
 - FIRE!!! 3. ELIMINATE wrong answers using the process of elimination.