ACT Tips and Tricks

After 30 years of helping students get the ACT scores they need to get into their dream schools, here’s the biggest secret we know:  A smart test taker is a strategic test taker.

The [ACT](https://www.princetonreview.com/college/act-test-prep) is different from the tests you take in school, so you need to approach it differently too. These simple strategies are tailor-made for the ACT and come from our proven test-cracking methods.

4 Simple ACT Tips to Maximize Your Score



1. Work questions out of order.

Spending too much time on the hardest problems means you may rush through the easiest. Instead of working questions in order, ask yourself whether a question is a Do Now, Later, or Never.

No need to agonize—this decision can be made very quickly:

* NOW: Does a question look okay? Do you know how to do it? Do it now.
* LATER: Will this question take a long time to work? Leave it and come back to it later. Circle the question number for easy reference.
* NEVER: Know the topics that are your worst, and learn the signs that flash danger. Don’t waste time on questions you should never do. Instead, use more time to answer the Now and Later questions accurately.

2. Choose a “Letter of the Day.”

Just because you don’t work a question doesn’t mean you don’t *answer* it. There is no penalty for wrong answers on the ACT, so you should never leave any blanks on your answer sheet. When you guess on Never questions, pick your favorite two-letter combo of answers and stick with it. For example, always choose A/F or C/H. If you’re consistent, you’re more likely to pick up points.

Don't waste time on ACT questions you should NEVER do.

[](http://ctt.ec/_VW2n)

3. Forget the right answer—find the wrong ones.

Multiple-choice tests offer one great advantage: They provide the correct answer right there on the page. ACT hides the correct answer behind wrong ones, but when you cross off just one or two wrong answers, the correct answer can become more obvious.

4. Know the best way to bubble in.

If you’re worried about accidentally filling in the wrong bubble on your answer sheet, this tip will save your score.

Work a page at a time on English and Math and a passage at a time on Reading and Science. Circle your answers right on the booklet. Then, transfer a page’s worth of answers to the answer sheet at one time. It’s better to stay focused on working questions rather than disrupt your concentration to find where you left off on the scantron. (1)

[TAKE A FREE PRACTICE TEST](https://www.princetonreview.com/college/free-act-practice-test) On Line

<https://www.4tests.com/exam/act/0/33540390>

## Exam Description:

To beat the ACT, one of the most important things you can do is educate yourself for what to expect. The testing day is very structured and strict in terms of what is allowed, but it is pretty straight forward and simple to follow as long as you keep focus in the place where it belongs, and that is on the test itself. We've taken a moment to break it down for you. The following represents the type of content you should expect and what you should know about scoring.   
  
**English**  
  
The first 45 minutes of the ACT exam is reserved for English. During this time, you will demonstrate your skill level for word usage, mechanics and rhetorical skills through a series of multiple choice questions. The testing battery is designed to weigh what you do know against a national scale of high school students. Technically, you are not penalized for guessing as the assessment involves determining how many questions you answered correctly.   
  
When your test results come back a few weeks later, you will learn where you stand compared to others throughout the country. College readiness usually begins at 18, but the average is a tad higher (20.6). Anything north of that is considered above the average, though a 22 or 23 on this part of the exam - or any part of the exam - will not necessarily make you eligible for a scholarship or award. More on that later.  
  
**Math**  
  
Math scores tend to improve throughout one's secondary education pathway, so it pays to take the ACT more than once. You will not necessarily be exposed to trigonometry in the ninth or tenth grade, so you may be at a disadvantage if taking the ACT early in your high school career. No matter. It's good to have a benchmark of the knowledge you have and the knowledge that you still need for focusing future study efforts.   
  
The battery itself consists of 60 questions and a 60-minute time limit. Topics covered include pre-algebra as well as elementary and intermediate, geometry (both standard and coordinate) and elementary trigonometry. The average student will score around 21, while 22 is generally considered "ready for college."  
  
**Reading**  
  
The entire reading portion of the ACT is structured around your level of comprehension. In other words, you read a passage and answer 40 multiple choice questions that relate to that passage in a 35-minute time period. The time element makes this battery a bit more difficult, but you can master it if you know how to summarize and interpret while reading, and if you focus primarily on word groupings rather than making sure you read every "a," "an," or "the." The college readiness barometer starts at 21. The average student is able to edge that total with a 21.4 score.  
  
**Science**  
  
The science portion of the exam seems to be the one that gives students the most trouble. While the 20.9 average is a little higher than the average English score, the 24 college readiness score presents the widest margin between expectations for the next level of education and actual performance.   
  
Science reasoning is a rather difficult thing for many students to wrap their minds around. They have 40 questions and only 35 minutes to answer them, and the section is structured in such a way that one must possess strong reading and science skills - two content areas that generally attract polar opposites on the educational spectrum.   
  
**Optional writing**  
  
One does not have to take the writing portion of the ACT - it is completely optional - but should you be thinking "What's the harm," here's what to expect: one essay prompt, 30 minutes, the major objective being a quality thesis statement supported with compelling evidence and communicated in a clear and concise manner. The average score is 7.7.   
  
**Composite**  
  
The ACT scoring on each of the required subsections are averaged together for a final composite score. The average high school student earns a composite score of 21.1 out of 36. While scoring above this number places you in the "above average" realm, most colleges and universities require a minimum composite of 24 before earning one a scholarship or award.  
  
The great thing about the ACT is that you can take it as many times as you desire. You'll never take the same test twice, but the concepts remain the same, and with a never-say-die attitude, significant improvement is possible. And rewards are scalable depending on how well you do, so even if you are eligible for a scholarship after that first exam, it is best to keep taking it for as long as possible. (2)

1 - https://www.princetonreview.com/college-advice/4-act-tips

2 - https://www.4tests.com/act