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THE **ACT**

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Tip  
Sheet





## ACT EXAM TIP SHEET

The ACT tests your knowledge of grammar, reading, science, and math. In addition, the ACT includes an optional writing test. Many colleges require you to take this entrance exam before they'll even look at your application. Virtually every college accepts scores from either the ACT or the SAT. Many students decide to take both tests to see which one they do better on. If you have the option of taking the ACT or the SAT, take both.

### The Test Sections of the ACT

The ACT comprises several different test sections, and each section has its own time limit. The following table shows you how many questions each ACT section has and how much time you have to answer them.

#### ACT Breakdown by Section

Test	Number of Questions	Time Allotted
English	75	45 minutes
Mathematics	60	60 minutes
Reading	40	35 minutes
Science	40	35 minutes
Writing (optional)	1	30 minutes

If you add up the numbers, you find that you have 216 questions to answer in 205 minutes. You get one 10-minute break between the second and third tests (the Mathematics and Reading Tests). If you opt not to take the optional Writing Test, then you get to walk out right after the Science Test.

### Tips for Avoiding Mistakes on the ACT

Taking the ACT requires quite a bit of preparation. If you've taken the time to prepare, you don't want to jeopardize a good score by making a silly mistake. So be aware of the following catastrophes so that you can prevent them from happening to you:

- **Losing concentration:** When you're in the middle of an excruciatingly boring reading passage, the worst thing you can do is let your mind drift off to a more pleasant time. Although visualization (picturing yourself doing something relaxing or fun) is a good stress-reduction technique to practice *before* the exam, it stinks when it comes to helping your ACT score during the test. Even if you have to pinch yourself to keep from falling asleep or flaking out, stay focused.
- **Panicking over time:** Every section on the ACT begins with directions and a line that tells you how many questions are in the section. The ACT is no big mystery. You can waste a lot of time and drive yourself crazy if you keep flipping pages and counting how

many more questions you have to do. You can do what you can do; that's all. Looking ahead and panicking are counterproductive and waste time.

- **Messing up numbering on the answer grid:** Suppose that you decide to postpone doing Question 11, hoping that inspiration will strike later. But now you accidentally put the answer to Question 12 in the blank for Question 11 and mess up all the numbers from that point on. After you answer Question 40, you suddenly realize that you just filled in bubble number 39 and have one bubble left! It's easy to say, "Don't panic," but chances are your blood pressure will go sky-high, especially when you eyeball the clock and see that only one minute remains. If you have a good eraser with you (and you should), the wrong answers on the answer grid should take only a few seconds to erase. But how on earth are you going to re-solve all those problems and reread and re-answer all the questions? You're not, because you took the following advice: 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 you a mere nanosecond and helps you not only in this panic situation but also as you go back and double-check your work.
- **Rubbernecking:** *Rubbernecking* is craning your neck around to see how everyone else is doing. Forget those guys. You have too much to do on your own to waste precious seconds checking out anyone else. After you have the exam booklet in front of you, don't look at anything but it and your watch until time is called.
- **Cheating:** Cheating on the ACT is a loser's game — it's just plain stupid. Apart from the legal, moral, and ethical questions, let's talk practicality: You can't predict what types of grammatical mistakes will show up in the questions; what are you going to do, copy a textbook on the palm of your hand? All the math formulas that you need can't fit onto the bottom of your shoe.
- **Worrying about previous sections:** Think of the ACT as five separate lifetimes. You're reborn four times, so you get four 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 can't go back to a previous section and finish work there or change some of your answers. If you try to do so, the proctor will catch you, and you'll be in a world of hurt.
- **Worrying about the hard problems:** The ACT contains some incredibly hard problems and questions. Forget about them. Almost no one gets them right, anyway. A ridiculously few students receive 36s every year, and if you get into the 30s, you're in a super-elite club of only a few percent of the thousands of students who take the ACT annually. Just accept the fact that you either won't get to or can't answer a few of the hard questions and learn to live with your imperfection. If you do go quickly enough to get to the hard questions, don't waste too much time on them. See if you can use common sense to eliminate any answers. Then mark your best guess from the remaining choices. Keep reminding yourself that every question counts the same in a section.
- **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 a question was too hard for you five minutes ago, it's probably still too hard for you. Your brain capacity likely hasn't doubled in the last few minutes. If you made a careless or dumb mistake on an easy question, however, going back over the problem gives you a chance to catch and correct your error. You're more likely to gain points by double-checking easy questions than by staring open-mouthed at the hard ones.

## Translating ACT Math Word Problems

When you see a word problem on the ACT Math Test, you may feel a little lost at first. Straightforward math equations seem so much more, well, straightforward. Even though word problems are written in English, they may seem like they're written in a foreign language. To help you with the translation, the following table provides you with some of the more common words you encounter in word problems and tells you what they mean (and look like!) in math terms.

### Common Words and Their Math Counterparts

<b>Plain English</b>	<b>Math Equivalent</b>
More than, increased by, added to, combined with, total of, sum of	<b>Add (+)</b>
Decreased by, diminished by, reduced by, difference between, taken away from, subtracted from, less than, fewer than	<b>Subtract (-)</b>
Of, times, product of	<b>Multiply</b>
Ratio of, per, out of, quotient	<b>Divide</b>
Percent	<b>Divide by 100</b>
Is, are, was, were, becomes, results in	<b>Equals (=)</b>
How much, how many, what, what number	<b>Variable (x, y)</b>

Subtraction phrases such as “taken away from,” “subtracted from,” “less than,” and “fewer than” require you to switch the order of the quantities you're subtracting.

For example, “Ten decreased by six” means  $10 - 6$  (which equals 4), but “Ten subtracted from six” means  $6 - 10$ , or  $-4$ .

- Created by Lisa Zimmer Hatch & Scott Hatch

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