

preparing for the ACT

Grade level: high school students

Format: discussion, lecture, and practice

Class time: 1½ hours

Materials

- packets
- notes
- flipchart and easel, or black/white board
- markers
- copies of the ACT practice test
- refreshments (optional)
- water (if you'll need it)
- handouts

ACT at a Glance (available online from www.actstudent.org/testprep/descriptions/index.html)

ACT practice tests (available at www.actstudent.org)

Essay practice questions, with answer sheets (see www.actstudent.org for an essay practice question and sample answer sheets)

Scoring guidelines for essay (see www.actstudent.org/writing/scores/guidelines.html)

General ACT test strategies

ACT English test – what does it test?

ACT writing prompts for practice

Brainstorm charts

SAT vs. ACT

Score comparison ACT vs. SAT

Writing the 30-minute essay

What does a five-paragraph essay look like?

VSAC event schedule (available from VSAC Resource Center; call 800-642-3177)

Procedure

1. Welcome the attendees and introduce yourself.
2. Begin with the following strategies for the whole test:
 - ACT questions are very straightforward. Either you know the answer or you don't.
 - Review with the students all the information on the ACT tip sheet handout.
 - Explain how the test differs from regular school tests:
 - 1) All questions are worth the same.
 - 2) To get an average score (20), you need to answer only about 53% of the questions correctly.
 - Emphasize the value of practicing (use books, VT Guidance Central, Learning Express) and diagnosing the areas you need to strengthen.

Strategies for the essay

- Review the following handouts with students:
 - Writing the 30-minute essay
 - What does a five-paragraph essay look like?
- Explain that the essay is scored on the ability to take a stand and thoroughly defend it in a logical, easy-to-read way (go beyond superficialities).
- Encourage students to practice, practice, practice in order to become used to writing under pressure. Provide the brainstorm charts to help them develop their ability to organize their thoughts.

Test details

- The test takes approximately 4 hours (+30 minutes for optional writing test)
 - Bring: admission ticket, two #2 pencils, photo ID, calculator
 - Sections: English, math, reading, science, and an optional writing component
 - Composite score = 1–36
 - Individual tests = 1–36
 - Sub-scores = 1–18
 - Writing sub-score = 0–12
4. Allow time for questions if students are concerned about topics not covered already.
 5. Provide practice time using materials from an online ACT test.

Additional notes for presentation

Test corresponds to what you learn in high school.

- The test is designed so that most people have time to finish each individual test.
- The composite score equals the average of four major subject scores.
- A Personal Interest Inventory is completed at the beginning of the test, for career planning and potential occupations that will be listed on your score report.

Test release: On certain test dates, you can pay to get a copy of the following:

- test questions
- your answers
- correct answers
- writing prompt
- scoring rubric
- writing scores

Writing component (optional):

- The essay is scored holistically.
- Get examples before test day and practice!
- If a student elects to take the writing portion, he or she completes it after having finished the rest of the test.
- Each student will receive two additional scores:
 - 1) writing sub-score
 - 2) combined English/writing score

English test

- Scoring will take into account punctuation, grammar/usage, sentence structure, and rhetorical skills.
- Each student will receive the following scores:
 - 1) total English score
 - 2) usage/mechanics sub-score
 - 3) rhetorical skills sub-score

Math test

- The text emphasizes a student's ability to reason mathematically.
- Students will need to understand basic math terms, principles, and formulas.
- Each student will receive the following scores:
 - 1) total math score
 - 2) pre-algebra sub-score
 - 3) algebra/coordinate geometry sub-score
 - 4) plane geometry/trig sub-score

Reading test

- The test has four passages: prose fiction, humanities, social studies, and science.
- There are two types of questions:
 - 1) referring: information is clearly stated in the passage
 - 2) reasoning: students take stated/implied information and answer complex questions
- The test involves the following skills: Identifying and interpreting details, finding main ideas, comparing and contrasting, understanding cause and effect, identifying generalizations, understanding the meaning of words from context, understanding the sequence of events, making conclusions about voice and method
- Each student will receive the following scores:
 - 1) total reading score
 - 2) arts/literature sub-score
 - 3) social studies/science sub-score

Science test

- Students need to know some scientific terms and concepts.
- Students cannot use calculators.
- The test involves biology, chemistry, earth/space science, and physics.
- The questions involve interpreting data representation (graphics and tables), understanding research summaries, and identifying conflicting viewpoints.
- Each student will receive a total science score.



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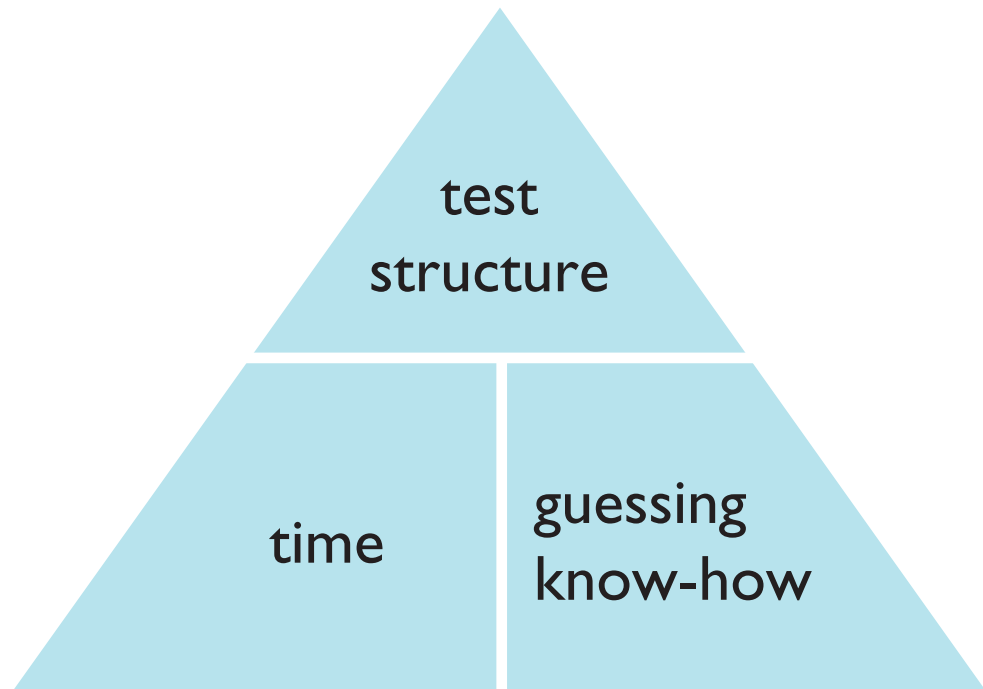
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general ACT test strategies

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- Remember that the ACT is unlike most regular school tests.
 1. Difficult questions are worth the same points as easy questions.
 2. If you answer only 53% of the questions correctly, you get an average score.
- Answer every question; there is no penalty for wrong answers.
- Budget your time — don't spend too much time on any one question.
- Know the directions and question types ahead of time. You'll save time by not having to read the directions during the test.
- Know when the question is asking for the "best" answer or the "correct" answer.
 1. Choose the "best" answer in the writing, reading, and science sections.
 2. Choose the "correct" answer in the math section.
- Carefully read each question to make sure you know what it's asking for. Some questions require more than one step to answer (and some of the answer choices are what you get after doing only one or two of the required steps).
- Eliminate wrong answers through a process of elimination.
- When all else fails, guess.
- When challenged, remember that there's no order of difficulty.
 1. If you're stumped by a difficult question, move on. An easier question may be next.
 2. Quickly determine how long a question will take to answer, and then decide whether to work on it now or return to it later.
- Mark up the test booklet to help you focus, and re-word questions if that helps you.

English test

- Read answer choices carefully to identify subtle differences between them.
- Focus on underlined portions of sentences. Quickly skim through sentences that have no underlined portions.
- “When in doubt, take it out.” Often, the shortest choice is the answer because questions often test for redundancy, verbosity, and irrelevance.
- Trust your ear — if it sounds weird, it’s probably wrong.
- Come up with your own answer before looking at the answer choices.
- Be careful on question stems that say “not” or “except.”
- Look for the “best” answer among the choices offered.
- Re-read each sentence with your answer to see if the sentence makes sense.
- Be aware of connotations.
- Know the types of questions: usage/mechanics and rhetorical skills.

Math test

- Questions tend to get more difficult near the end of the test.
- Look for quick ways to solve problems, not just the way you were taught in class.
- Go through the questions in two passes.
 1. Use the first pass for questions that are easier/faster for you.
 2. During the second pass, tackle questions that will take more time for you to complete.
- When in doubt, try multiple strategies.
 1. Look at the answers and plug them in (start with the middle answer).
 2. Substitute numbers for variables.
 3. Reason out the answer by viewing the question as a logic puzzle rather than a math problem.
- Make sure you understand exactly what each question is asking.
- Round off and “guesstimate” freely to make the numbers easier to use.
- For word problems, build an equation that will yield the answer you want.
- Break down each problem into parts and translate each part into a numerical expression.
- For geometry problems, look at the diagram for clues.
- If there is no diagram, sketch one.
- Avoid lengthy calculations and working with big numbers.
- Use your calculator to perform quick/simple calculations.

Reading test

- Quickly skim the reading to get a general sense of the passage.
- Sometimes you don’t need to read the entire passage to answer the questions.
 1. Answer the questions that refer to specific words or sentences first (make sure to read around the sentences to understand the context)
 2. Move on to the questions that require you actually to read the paragraphs.
- Know which type of passage is easiest for you, and do that one first.
- When reading science and social studies passages, focus on main ideas (usually expressed in the first or last sentences of paragraphs); don’t get bogged down by details.

- For literature and humanities/arts passages, focus on the development/voice of the narrative.
- Mark up the main ideas as you read.
- Look back to the passage for reference as you answer questions.
- Don't pick the first choice that sounds good.
- Don't pick an answer simply because it sounds familiar.

Science test

- Look at the questions before you read the experiment summaries or graphs/charts.
- Most questions require you to interpret a graph or chart.
- Don't get lost in numbers, jargon, or details. Focus on the main ideas first, and see how many questions you can answer by looking at graphs/charts.
- Look at graphs and tables carefully to identify the following:
 1. what labels mean
 2. what the table shows
 3. trends
 4. units of measurement
- Answers might not be in the same measurement units used in the graphs and tables.
- Look for patterns:
 1. extremes
 2. critical points (points of change)
 3. variation (the way two things change in relation to each other)
- Know the types of passages and develop strategies for each.
 1. data representation
 2. research summaries
 3. conflicting viewpoints

Writing test

- Look at the tip sheet "writing the 30-minute essay."
- On test day, bring several possible examples (literary, historical, political, and cultural); often (but not always), your examples can work for several possible essay questions.
- Know that you are scored on your ability to:
 1. formulate an opinion
 2. maintain focus on your topic
 3. thoroughly defend your opinion using reason and supporting ideas
 4. organize your ideas in a logical way
 5. use language clearly & effectively
- Make sure to acknowledge and address counter-arguments.
- Make sure to provide a context for your essay (give background in the introduction and for each supporting argument).



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ACT English test — What does it test?

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Question type	Ineffective writing	Corrected sentences
<p>Sentence construction</p> <p>Sentence fragments</p> <p>The bride and groom drove away in their car. As the children ran behind, shouting and laughing.</p> <p>Although it will always be associated with Shakespeare’s famous literary character. The castle at Elsinore was never home to Hamlet.</p> <p>Comma splices and run-ons</p> <p>There is not much difference between the decision to enter politics and the decision to jump into a pit full of rattlesnakes, in fact, you might find a friendlier environment in the snake pit.</p> <p>Misplaced modifiers</p> <p>Walking to the pawnshop, Bob’s watch dropped into the sewer.</p> <p>Construction shifts</p> <p>Stepping to avoid the large puddle, I carefully tripped and fell.</p> <p>Parallel construction</p> <p>When Tom finally came home, Aunt Sally kissed him, hugged him, and gives him his favorite dessert after dinner.</p>	<p>The bride and groom drove away in their car. As the children ran behind, shouting and laughing.</p> <p>Although it will always be associated with Shakespeare’s famous literary character. The castle at Elsinore was never home to Hamlet.</p> <p>There is not much difference between the decision to enter politics and the decision to jump into a pit full of rattlesnakes, in fact, you might find a friendlier environment in the snake pit.</p> <p>Walking to the pawnshop, Bob’s watch dropped into the sewer.</p> <p>Stepping to avoid the large puddle, I carefully tripped and fell.</p> <p>When Tom finally came home, Aunt Sally kissed him, hugged him, and gives him his favorite dessert after dinner.</p>	<p>The bride and groom drove away in their car. The children ran behind, shouting and laughing.</p> <p>Although it will always be associated with Shakespeare’s famous literary character, the castle at Elsinore was never home to Hamlet.</p> <p>There is not much difference between the decision to enter politics and the decision to jump into a pit full of rattlesnakes. In fact, you might find a friendlier environment in the snake pit.</p> <p>Walking to the pawnshop, Bob dropped his watch into the sewer.</p> <p>Carefully stepping to avoid the large puddle, I tripped and fell.</p> <p>When Tom finally came home, Aunt Sally kissed him, hugged him, and gave him his favorite dessert after dinner.</p>
<p>Grammar & usage</p> <p>Pronoun agreement</p> <p>Although the American bald eagle has been on the endangered species list for years, they have been sighted in wildlife preserves much more frequently during the past two years.</p> <p>Pronoun case</p> <p>Before the moon landing, the TV announcer gave some additional background on the astronauts, about who we were all quite interested.</p> <p>Subject-verb agreement</p> <p>The best moment during a broadcast filled with many great moments were when the astronaut stepped out of the lunar lander and bounced on the moon.</p> <p>Verb tense</p> <p>Sam is walking down the street when he found a large suitcase.</p> <p>Idioms</p> <p>My sculpture is based after Rodin’s Thinker.</p>	<p>Although the American bald eagle has been on the endangered species list for years, they have been sighted in wildlife preserves much more frequently during the past two years.</p> <p>Before the moon landing, the TV announcer gave some additional background on the astronauts, about who we were all quite interested.</p> <p>The best moment during a broadcast filled with many great moments were when the astronaut stepped out of the lunar lander and bounced on the moon.</p> <p>Sam is walking down the street when he found a large suitcase.</p> <p>My sculpture is based after Rodin’s Thinker.</p>	<p>Although the American bald eagle has been on the endangered species list for years, it has been sighted in wildlife preserves much more frequently during the past two years.</p> <p>Before the moon landing, the TV announcer gave some additional background on the astronauts, about whom we were all quite interested.</p> <p>The best moment during a broadcast filled with many great moments was when the astronaut stepped out of the lunar lander and bounced on the moon.</p> <p>Sam was walking down the street when he found a large suitcase.</p> <p>My sculpture is based on Rodin’s Thinker.</p>

Question type	Ineffective writing	Corrected sentences
Punctuation		
Serial comma	When Mary walked into the classroom she saw a school teacher, a doctor, a woman eating a bagel and a bird.	When Mary walked into the classroom she saw a school teacher, a doctor, a woman eating a bagel, and a bird.
Comma separating clauses and phrases	Before Mary could reach the teacher she saw the woman offer the bird part of the bagel.	Before Mary could reach the teacher, she saw the woman offer the bird part of the bagel.
Comma separating restrictive and non-restrictive clauses	Mary who was very confused stopped in front of the woman.	Mary, who was very confused, stopped in front of the woman.
Semicolons	Just then, the woman screamed the bird jumped up and perched on her head.	Just then, the woman screamed; the bird jumped up and perched on her head.
Colons	Maria just purchased all the camping supplies for our trip, a backpack, a sleeping bag, and a pair of hiking boots.	Maria just purchased all the camping supplies for our trip: a backpack, a sleeping bag, and a pair of hiking boots.
Dashes	I tried to express my gratitude not that any words could be adequate but she just nodded and walked away.	I tried to express my gratitude--not that any words could be adequate--but she just nodded and walked away.
Its/it's	The baby bear could not find it's mother.	The baby bear could not find its mother.

Rhetorical skills — types of questions

1. **Strategy:** Questions “focus on the choices made and strategies used by a writer in the act of composing or revising an essay.” *The Real ACT Prep Guide*
2. **Organization:** Questions “deal with the order and coherence of ideas in an essay and the effective choice of opening, transitional, and closing statements.” *The Real ACT Prep Guide*
3. **Style:** Questions “involve effective word choices in terms of writing style, tone, clarity, and economy.” *The Real ACT Prep Guide*



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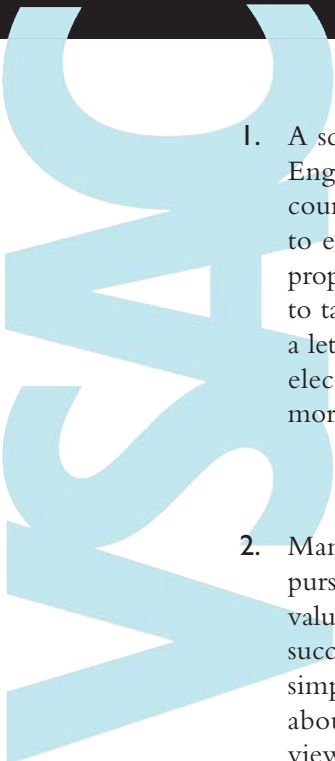
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ACT writing prompts for practice

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1. A school board is concerned that the state's requirements for core courses in mathematics, English, science, and social studies may prevent students from taking important elective courses like music, other languages, and vocational education. The school board would like to encourage more high school students to take elective courses and is considering two proposals. One proposal is to lengthen the school day to provide students with the opportunity to take elective courses. The other proposal is to offer elective courses in the summer. Write a letter to the school board in which you argue for lengthening the school day or for offering elective courses during the summer. Explain why you think your choice will encourage more students to take elective courses. Begin your letter: "Dear School Board:"

Source: www.act.org

2. Many successful adults recall a time in life when they were considered a failure at one pursuit or another. Some of these people feel strongly that their previous failures taught them valuable lessons and led to their later successes. Others maintain that they went on to achieve success for entirely different reasons. In your opinion, can failure lead to success? Or is failure simply its own experience? In your essay, take a position on this question. You may write about either one of the two points of view given, or you may present a different point of view on this question. Use specific reasons and examples to support your position.

Source: www.sparknotes.com

3. Educators debate extending high school to five years because of increasing demands on students from employers and colleges to participate in extracurricular activities and community service in addition to having high grades. Some educators support extending high school to five years because they think students need more time to achieve all that is expected of them. Other educators do not support extending high school to five years; they think that students would lose interest in school and that attendance would drop in the fifth year. In your opinion, should high school be extended to five years?

Source: www.actstudent.org

4. In some high schools, many teachers and parents have encouraged the administration to adopt a dress code that sets guidelines for what students can wear in the school building. Some teachers and parents support a dress code because they think it will improve the learning environment in the school. Other teachers and parents do not support a dress code; they think it restricts an individual student's freedom of expression. In your opinion, should high schools adopt dress codes for students?

Source: The Real ACT Prep Guide

5. The Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires all school libraries receiving certain federal funds to install and use blocking software to prevent students from viewing material considered "harmful to minors." However, some studies conclude that blocking software in schools damages educational opportunities for students, both by blocking access to Web pages

that are directly related to the state-mandated curriculums and by restricting broader inquiries of both students and teachers. In your view, should the schools block access to certain Internet Web sites?

Source: The Princeton Review's Cracking the ACT

6. New laws are being proposed that would require schools to accommodate students who wish to transfer to a different school if the school falls below a certain level on statewide standardized tests. Supporters of this law believe that it is a student's right to transfer to a new school if his or her current school is not fulfilling its duties. Opponents argue that this law is impractical — what would happen if all the students requested transfers? — and unfairly weighs test scores without considering other factors at a school. In your opinion, should students be allowed to transfer if schools score below a certain level on standardized tests?

Source: The Princeton Review's Cracking the ACT

7. College professors who have significant research and teaching experience are often rewarded with “tenure.” Once tenured, a professor holds his or her job without review and with little danger of being fired or replaced. Some people believe that high school teachers should be tenured as a reward for dedicated service. These people argue that tenure will attract highly qualified candidates to the profession and also allow teachers to do their jobs without fear of losing them. Opponents of this plan believe that tenure only leads to poor teaching. Without any fear of losing their jobs, teachers will not care as much about their students. In your opinion, should high school teachers receive tenure?

Source: The Princeton Review's Cracking the ACT

8. Many communities are considering adopting curfews for high school students. Some educators and parents favor curfews because they believe it will encourage students to focus more on their homework and make them more responsible. Others feel curfews are up to families, not the community, and that students today need freedom to work and participate in social activities in order to mature properly. Do you think that communities should impose curfews on high school students?

Source: The Princeton Review's Cracking the ACT

9. In response to articles examining sensitive topics such as dating and partying, many schools are considering censoring their newspapers. Some schools believe that these topics are not appropriate for student-run papers, while others believe that, as long as what is printed is true, student papers should have the same freedoms as regular newspapers do. What is your opinion on this topic?

Source: The Princeton Review's Cracking the ACT

10. In some states, legislators have debated whether teenagers should be required to maintain a “C” grade average in school before receiving a driver's license. Some people think this would be a good policy because having passing grades shows that students are responsible enough to be good drivers. Other people think such a policy would not be appropriate because they see no relationship between grades in school and driving skills. In your opinion, should teenagers be required to maintain a “C” average in school before receiving a driver's license?

Source: The Real ACT Prep Guide

11. In some high schools, students are required to complete a certain number of community service hours prior to graduation. Some people think community service is a good requirement because they think students will benefit from this experience. Other people think schools should not require community service because students will resent the requirement and, as a result, will not benefit from the experience. In your opinion, should high schools require students to complete a certain number of hours of community service?

Source: The Real ACT Prep Guide

12. Some high schools in the United States have considered creating separate classrooms for male and female students in subjects such as mathematics and science. Some educators think separate classes will be beneficial because students will be less distracted from learning. Other educators think having separate classes for females and males will not be beneficial because it will seem to support stereotypes about differences in ability between males and females. In your opinion, should high schools create separate classes for male and female students?

Source: The Real ACT Prep Guide

13. In recent years, many schools have adopted a curriculum based on “great books.” These schools require students to study certain classic books of Western civilization, arguing that familiarity with these “great books” is essential to education. However, opponents of this curriculum argue that forcing teachers and students to use only the “great books,” most of which are written by white, European authors, results in a biased view of the world. In your opinion, should schools adopt a curriculum based on “great books”?

Source: The Princeton Review’s Cracking the ACT

14. Schools in some states have changed their school calendars so that they are now year-round schools. Advocates of year-round schooling argue that the traditional summer break is a waste of students’ time that could otherwise be spent learning. Opponents charge that today’s students are already overburdened with the stresses of school, and need the summer to get a much-needed break. In your view, should the traditional three-month summer vacation from school be maintained?

Source: The Princeton Review’s Cracking the ACT

15. Most schools have established honor codes or other rules to prevent students from cheating on exams and other school assignments. Many students admit to cheating, arguing that the practice has become so common — and is so rarely penalized — that it is the only way to survive in today’s competitive academic world. Educators, however, feel that such behaviors only hurt the students, and that cheating in school is just the first step to more academic dishonesty, professional misconduct, and unethical business practices in the future. In your view, should high schools become more tolerant of cheating?

Source: The Princeton Review’s Cracking the ACT

16. Fast-food franchises are installing outlets in some high schools, selling hamburgers, fried chicken, tacos, fries, and sodas. Many soda companies already pay a great deal of money to be allowed to install soda machines in high schools. The money from these commercial ventures helps pay for athletic equipment, field trips, and audio-visual equipment. On the other hand, fast food is greatly contributing to the epidemic of obesity among America's youth. Placing fast-food outlets in schools encourages students to eat food that is high in salt, fat, and empty calories. In your opinion, should fast-food franchises be allowed in high schools?

Source: Peterson's Master the ACT Assessment

17. In this country, most people see and hear advertising for many different products every day. Some people think advertising is useful because it provides important information about many different products. Other people think advertising is not useful because it tries to persuade people to buy products they do not really need. In your opinion, does advertising serve a useful purpose in our society?

Source: ACT Educator Workshops



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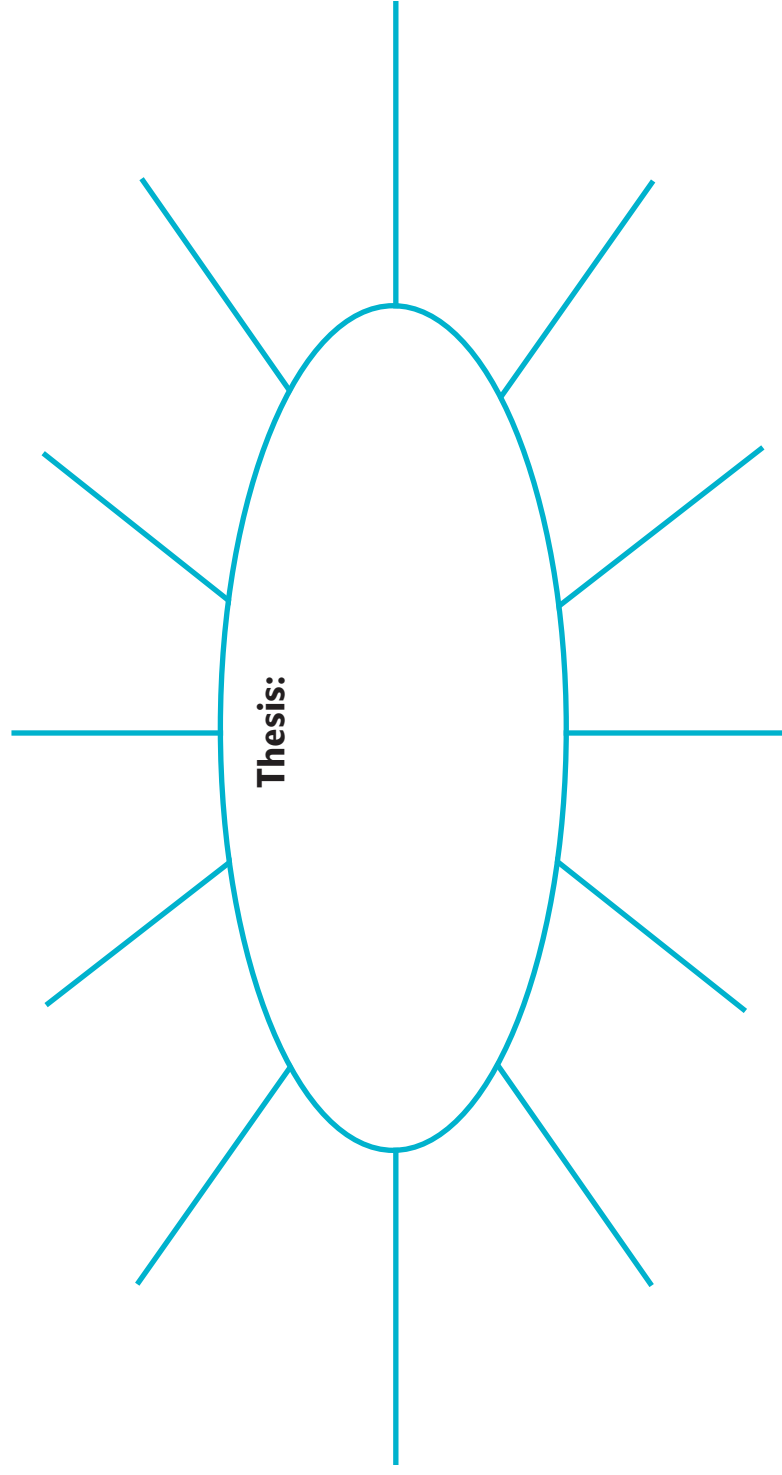
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web brainstorm



1. Jot your ideas down.
2. Draw connections between ideas (organize).
3. Add quick explanations/connect them to thesis.
4. Finalize thesis.



column organizer



1. List each main argument, with one example for each column (organize).
2. Provide supporting explanations.
3. Add quick connections to thesis.
4. Finalize thesis.

Thesis:

argument/example #1:

explanation/connection:

argument/example #2:

explanation/connection:

argument/example #3:

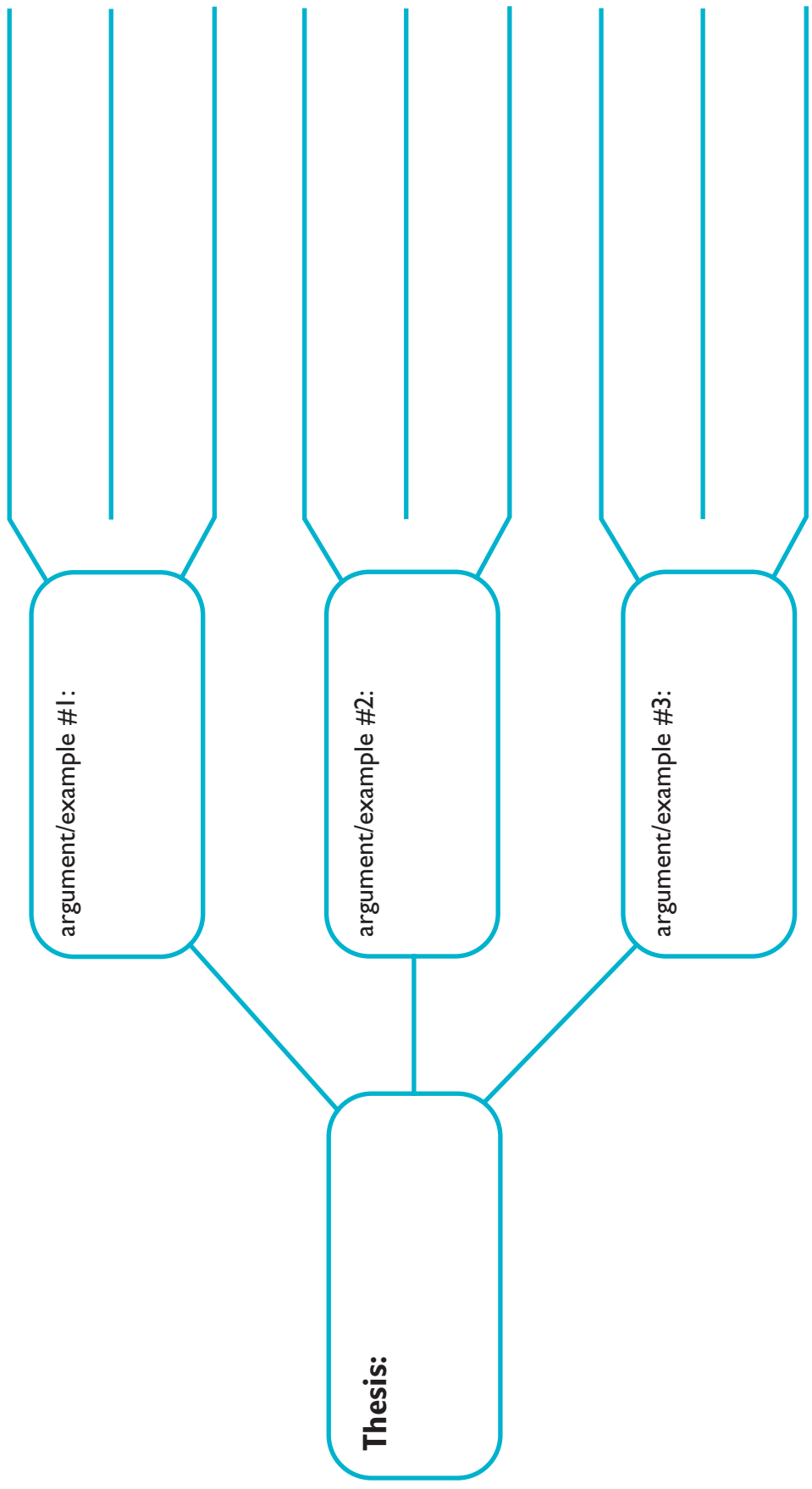
explanation/connection:

chart organizer



1. List each main argument, with one example for each box (organize).
2. Provide supporting explanations.
3. Add quick connections to thesis.
4. Finalize thesis.

explanation/connection:



SAT vs ACT

VSAC

	SAT	vs.	ACT
When students typically take it	Spring of junior year and/or fall of senior year		Junior year and/or fall of senior year
Type of test	Designed to assess a student's ability to handle college-level material; important to know and practice test strategies and reasoning skills in order to score well		Designed to test knowledge and mastery of high school subject material; important to use knowledge and reasoning skills to score well
When it is administered	Seven times per year		Six times per year
Test structure	Ten sections: three critical reading, three math, three writing, and one experimental (masked to look like a regular section)		Four sections: English, math, reading, and science reasoning; experimental section is added to tests on certain dates only and is clearly experimental; optional fifth section on writing
Test content	Math: up to ninth grade geometry and Algebra II No science section Reading: sentence completions; short and long critical reading passages; reading comprehension with a stress on vocabulary; questions testing grammar, usage, and word choice		Math: up to trigonometry Science section Reading: four passages — one each on prose fiction, social science, natural science, and humanities; English section stresses grammar
Penalty for wrong answers	Yes		No
Scoring	200–800 per section, combined for a single total score Highest possible combined score: 2400		1–36 for each subject, averaged for a composite score Highest possible composite score: 36
Scores sent to schools	If a student requests that a score report be sent to specific colleges, the report will include scores received on every test taken.		A score-choice option allows students to choose which schools will receive their scores and which scores the schools will see.
Other uses	Scholarship purposes		Scholarship purposes Certain statewide testing programs
When to register	At least five weeks before the test date		At least five weeks before the test date
Test dates and more information	The College Board www.collegeboard.com		ACT, Inc. www.act.org

score comparison: ACT vs. SAT

Source: www.act.org/aap/concordance/estimate.html

ACT composite score	Estimated SAT CR+M+W	Estimated SAT CR+M+W (score range)	ACT composite score
36	2390	2380–2400	36
35	2330	2290–2370	35
34	2250	2220–2280	34
33	2180	2140–2210	33
32	2120	2080–2130	32
31	2060	2020–2070	31
30	2000	1980–2010	30
29	1940	1920–1970	29
28	1880	1860–1910	28
27	1820	1800–1850	27
26	1770	1740–1790	26
25	1710	1680–1730	25
24	1650	1620–1670	24
23	1590	1560–1610	23
22	1530	1510–1550	22
21	1470	1450–1500	21
20	1410	1390–1440	20
19	1350	1330–1380	19
18	1290	1270–1320	18
17	1230	1210–1260	17
16	1170	1140–1200	16
15	1100	1060–1130	15
14	1020	990–1050	14
13	950	910–980	13
12	870	820–900	12
11	780	750–810	11



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CR = critical reading

M = math

W = writing

writing the 30-minute essay

COACH yourself.

- C** — **Carefully read** Make sure you understand the question.
- O** — **Opinion** Form an opinion (your thesis) on the question.
- A** — **Arguments/examples** Decide what arguments/examples you'll use to support your opinion. Also, decide how to address any counter-arguments to your examples.
- C** — **Connections** Carefully explain the connections between your arguments/examples and your opinion in more than a superficial way.
- H** — **Hierarchy** (also known as **helping** the reader) Arrange your arguments in a logical order so your essay is organized and easy to follow.

Write a five-paragraph essay, using the preparation process above.

Practice, Practice, Practice!

The more you practice writing timed essays, the easier it will be to write an organized, competent essay in 30 minutes on test day.

Practice with several different types of essay prompts so you can develop a list of potential examples to use on test day.

Use your time wisely.

1. Prep work (5–10 minutes): Don't start writing your essay until you've brainstormed your ideas, organized them, and written your thesis statement.
2. Essay writing (15–20 minutes)
3. Editing (1–5 minutes) if you have time.



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What does the five-paragraph essay look like?

Opening paragraph

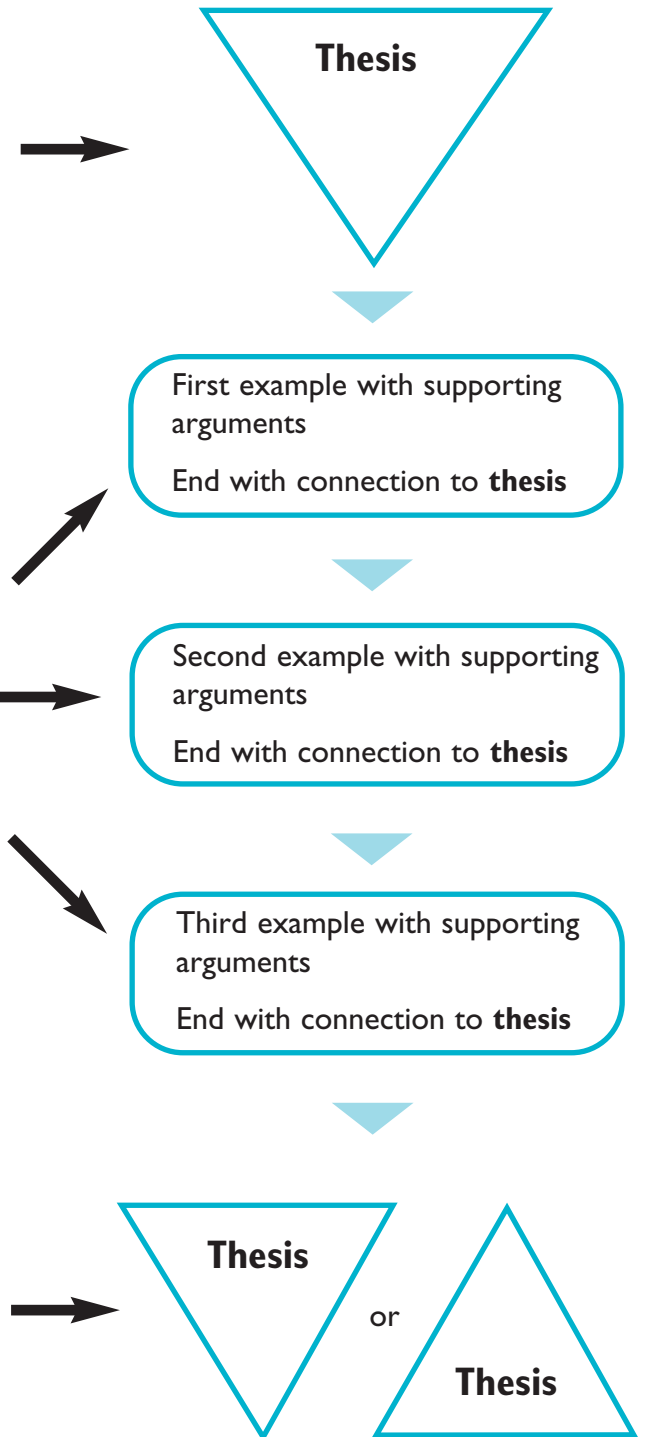
- 3–5 sentences
- Starts broad and then gradually narrows to the thesis. In other words:
 1. Begin with a general statement about the subject (you can restate the question in your own words, showing your understanding of the topic).
 2. Then start discussing your position.
 3. End the opening paragraph with your thesis statement.

Three supporting paragraphs

- 5–8 sentences each
- Discuss one example in each supporting paragraph.
- Make sure to explain how each example supports your argument.
- Go beyond superficial statements.
- End each supporting paragraph with a statement directly explaining how this example supports your thesis.

Closing paragraph

- 3–5 sentences
- Your closing paragraph can either start with a restatement of your thesis and then broaden, or begin with a broad summary and end with a restatement of your thesis.
- Summarize your arguments.
- Feel free to include one last thought-provoking comment to show that you understand the topic.



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