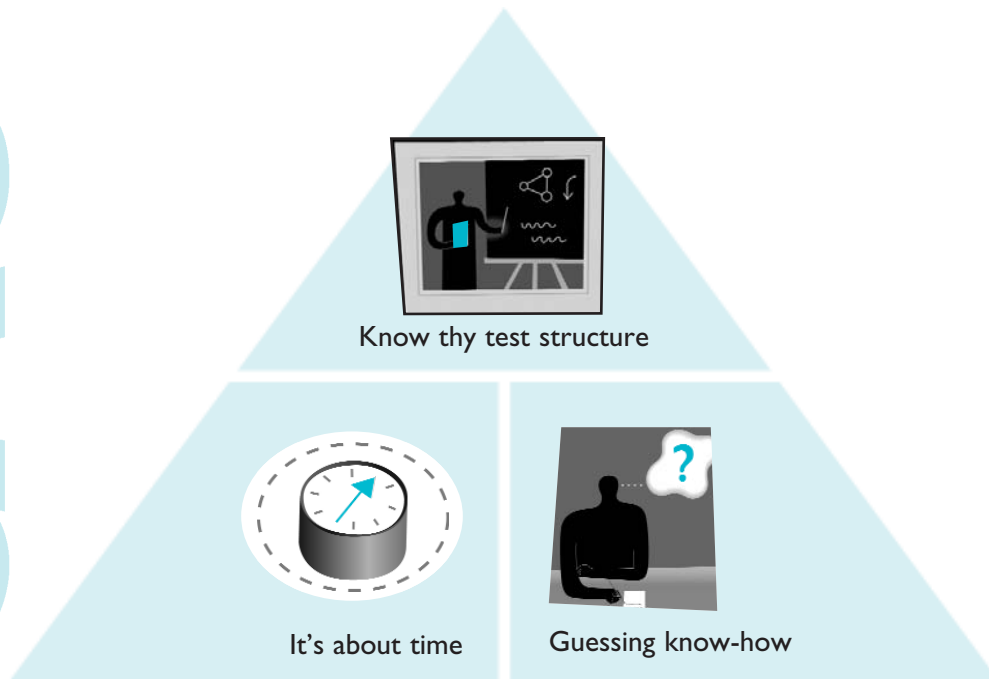


ACT general test strategies

VSAC



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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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