

# 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](http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/descriptions/index.html))

ACT practice tests (available at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org))

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

Scoring guidelines for essay (see [www.actstudent.org/writing/scores/guidelines.html](http://www.actstudent.org/writing/scores/guidelines.html))

ACT general test strategies

ACT English test – what does it test?

ACT writing prompts for practice

Brainstorm charts

SAT vs. ACT

Score comparison SAT vs. ACT

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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