

ACT Tips for Pacing

The ACT presents you with a ton of questions and, despite its three-hour length, not that much time to answer them. As you take the test, you will probably feel some pressure to answer quickly. Getting bogged down on a single question is not a good thing. But rushing isn't any good either. In the end, there's no real difference between answering very few questions and answering lots of questions incorrectly: both will lead to low scores. What you have to do is find a happy medium, a groove, a speed at which you can be both accurate and efficient, and get the score you want. Finding this pace is a tricky task, but it will come through practice and strategy.

Setting a Target Score

The ACT is your tool to get into college. Therefore, a perfect score on the ACT is not a 36, it's the score that gets you into the colleges of your choice. Once you set a target score, your efforts should be directed toward achieving *that* score and not necessarily a 36.

In setting a target score, the first rule is to be honest and realistic. Base your target score on the schools you want to attend, and use the results from your practice tests to decide what's realistic. If you score a 20 on your first practice test, your target score probably should not be a 30. Instead, aim for a 23 or 24. Your scores will likely increase on your second test simply because you'll be more experienced than you were the first time, and then you can work on getting several extra problems right on each Subject Test.

Your Target Score Determines Your Strategy and Pace

Your target score should affect your overall approach to the test. Cathy, whose target score is 31, is going to use a different strategy and pace from Elvie, whose target score is 20. Cathy must work quickly without becoming careless to get 90 percent of her questions right. Elvie, on the other hand, can afford to work more slowly; to get a 20, she needs to answer approximately half of the questions correctly. Elvie can focus her energy on carefully answering about 60 percent of the questions, allowing for some wrong answers; then she can guess on the remaining questions. Cathy needs to focus on every question to get her 90 percent. Also allowing for some wrong answers, she should aim to answer all the questions correctly.

Of course, this is all a bit like the chicken and the egg conundrum. Cathy's target score is probably higher than Elvie's because she is a faster and better test taker than Elvie. Elvie needs the extra time to spend on each problem because she is a slower worker than Cathy. It's not as though Elvie generates a lot of extra time in which she can doodle or draw elaborate diagrams by concentrating on a smaller number of questions. All of that extra time per question is being put to use by Elvie because she needs it in order to get the right answer.

The point of this anecdote: Adjust your pacing to the score you want, but also be honest with yourself about what pace you can maintain. The following charts will give you an idea of the number of questions you need to get right in order to receive certain scaled scores on the ACT. Use these charts to determine the number of correct answers you need in order to achieve your target score.

The first target score you set doesn't have to be your last. If you reach your initial target score, set a new, higher score and try increasing the pace at which you work. In setting preparatory target scores, focus on improving a couple points at a time. In the end, incremental change will work better than a giant leap.

<http://www.sparknotes.com/testprep/books/act/chapter2.rhtml>

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English		Math	
Target Score	# Right	Target Score	# Right
36	75	36	60
30	69–70	30	53–54
26	60–62	26	44–45
23	52–54	23	38–39
20	44–46	20	32–33
17	36–38	17	23–25
11	19–21	11	7–8
Reading		Science Reasoning	
Target Score	# Right	Target Score	# Right
36	40	36	40
30	35	30	37
26	30–31	26	32–33
23	26–27	23	27–28
20	22	20	22–23
17	18	17	16–17
11	9–10	11	7