

# Tips for taking the ACT English test

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- 1) The English portion of the ACT contains 75 questions to answer in 45 minutes. There are five passages.
- 2) The English test assesses knowledge of English grammar and writing. Questions cover usage/mechanics or rhetorical skills. Vocabulary is not tested specifically.
- 3) Learn the instructions in advance so that you do not waste time reading them on test day.
- 4) There are two question types: underlines and boxes. The underlined words and boxes are numbered within the passages to correspond with the appropriate question.
  - Underline questions deal with a specific word change or decision. These are mostly usage/mechanics questions.
  - Boxes indicate that the question will deal with a large section of the passage. These are mostly rhetorical skills questions.

## Usage/Mechanics Questions

The 40 Usage/Mechanics questions on the test deal with the proper use of standard written English. Usage/Mechanics questions test your understanding of the following categories:

- **Punctuation (10 questions):** Punctuation questions ask you to identify and correct any misplaced, misused, or missing punctuation marks. The punctuation marks most commonly tested on the ACT are, in order of decreasing frequency, commas, apostrophes, colons, and semicolons.
- **Basic Grammar and Usage (12 questions):** Basic Grammar and Usage questions usually target a single incorrect word that violates the conventional rules of English grammar. These questions frequently test your knowledge of agreement issues and pronoun and verb forms and cases.
- **Sentence Structure (18 questions):** Sentence Structure questions tend to deal with the sentence as a whole. They test you on clause relationships, parallelism, and placement of modifiers.

## Rhetorical Skills Questions

The 35 Rhetorical Skills questions test your ability to refine written English. Rhetorical Skills questions break down into the following categories:

- **Writing Strategy (12 questions):** Writing Strategy questions are concerned with a passage's effectiveness. These questions require that you understand the point, purpose, and tone of a passage. When answering these questions, you must decide the best way to support a point with evidence, to introduce and conclude paragraphs, to make a transition between paragraphs, or to phrase a statement.
- **Organization (11 questions):** Organization questions can deal with individual sentences, individual paragraphs, or the passage as a whole. They will ask you either to restructure the passage or paragraph or to decide on the best placement of a word or phrase within a sentence.
- **Style (12 questions):** Style questions focus on effective word choice. They will ask you to eliminate redundancy and to select the most appropriate word or phrase. In order to answer style questions correctly, you need to understand the tone of a passage, and you need to have a good eye for clear written English.

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- 5) Skim the entire passage before answering the questions
- 6) Answer the questions in the order they appear. The questions follow the order of the passage. Take a minute to identify the different paragraphs of the passage – draw a line between paragraphs.
- 7) Questions are not organized in order of difficulty. Mechanics questions are typically easier than rhetoric questions.
- 8) If you do not know the answer, guess and move on. Mark the question so that you can come back if you have time.
- 9) Answer all questions on one passage before moving on to the next. You are likely to forget details from the first passage and will have to read it over again.
- 10) Eliminate as many answers as possible before guessing. Some questions have multiple errors to correct. Focusing on one error at a time allows you to eliminate an answer or two, limiting your choices.
- 11) Don't be afraid to choose "NO CHANGE". It is the correct answer about 20% of the time.
- 12) Don't be afraid to choose "OMIT the underlined portion". It is the correct answer about 25% of the time. It often helps to clarify and to reduce redundancy. Read the passage without the phrase – if no important information is lost, OMIT is probably the best answer.
- 13) The ACT English Test requires that you know the rules for the following types of punctuation:
  - Commas
  - Apostrophes
  - Semicolons
  - Colons
  - Parentheses and Dashes
  - Periods, Question Marks, and Exclamation Points
- 14) The ACT English Test requires you to identify and fix errors in the following grammatical categories:
  - Subject-Verb Agreement
  - Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement
  - Pronoun Cases
  - Verb Tenses
  - Adverbs and Adjectives
  - Idioms
  - Comparative and Superlative Modifiers
- 15) Rhetorical Skill questions ask you to make decisions about:
  - Transitions and Topic Sentences
  - Additional Detail and Evidence
  - Big Picture Purpose

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