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## Part 1 About the ACT

The ACT measures your achievement in core academic areas important for success in college. There are four multiple-choice tests—English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science—and an optional Writing Test. Topics covered on these five tests correspond very closely to topics covered in typical high school classes. Each test is described in detail in chapter 3.

The ACT isn't an IQ test—it doesn't measure your basic intelligence. It's an achievement test that's been carefully designed—using surveys of classroom teachers, reviews of curriculum guides for schools all over the country, and advice from curriculum specialists and college faculty—to be one of several effective tools for evaluating your readiness for college work.

The individual tests that make up the ACT consist of questions that measure your skills and knowledge. You're not required to memorize facts or vocabulary to do well on the ACT. Of course, all the terms, formulas, and other information you have learned in your classes will be useful to you when you take the ACT. However, last-minute cramming (like memorizing 5,000 vocabulary words or the entire periodic table of elements) won't directly improve your performance on the ACT.

What you can do to improve your performance on the ACT is to find out ahead of time what you'll be expected to know or do, and then to think about and use that information to your best advantage.

## Registering for the ACT

### *Selecting a Test Date*

One of the first decisions you'll need to make is when to take the ACT. There are several factors to consider:

- When is the ACT being offered near your home?
- When does each college or scholarship agency you're interested in need to have your ACT scores?
- Where do you stand in your high school coursework?
- Are you planning to take the ACT more than once?

Let's look in turn at each of these considerations.

The ACT is offered nationally several times a year, between September and June. However, it's not offered at every test center on each test date. If you need to take the ACT on a day other than Saturday because of religious reasons, you'll want to be especially attentive in selecting a test date when a test center near you is open on a non-Saturday date.

One of the first things you should find out, then, is where and when the ACT is being offered in your area. A quick and easy way to get that information is by accessing ACT's website at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org). Select a test date and location that is convenient for you. Often, your own or a neighboring school will serve as a test center.

One important decision you need to make is how early in your junior year to take the ACT. A number of factors will affect this decision. First, you should find out when colleges you're interested in need to have your test scores. Is there a particular program or scholarship for which you want to apply? If so, is there a deadline by which you need to have test scores submitted to the college or agency? Score reports are normally ready about 3–8 weeks after the test date. If you take the ACT Plus Writing, your reports will be ready only after all your scores are available, normally 5–8 weeks after the test date. So be sure to allow enough time. You may not be certain yet which school or program you'll decide on. That's okay. Just be sure you're doing everything, including taking the ACT, early enough to keep all your options open.

Another consideration in deciding when to take the ACT is where you stand in your high school coursework. If you're in a college-prep program and taking a lot of courses in English, mathematics, and science in your sophomore and junior years, it would be best for you to take the ACT in

your junior year, while those subjects are still fresh in your memory. Perhaps you'll decide to take the ACT more than once, in hopes of improving your score. In that case, it's better to take the exam early in the spring of your junior year to allow time for a second try. If you find you're studying a significant amount of material covered on the ACT during your senior year, it's reasonable to assume that your performance on the ACT might be better and you may want to consider retaking the ACT in your senior year.

There are several advantages to taking the ACT in your junior year:

- You probably will have completed much of the coursework corresponding to the material covered on the ACT.
- You'll have your ACT scores and other information in time to help make decisions about your final year of high school coursework. (For example, you may decide to take additional classes in an area in which your test score was lower than you wanted it to be.)
- Colleges will know of your interest and have your scores in time to contact you during the summer before your senior year, when many of them like to send information about such things as admissions, scholarships, advanced placement, and special programs to prospective students.
- You'll have your ACT scores and information from colleges in time to make decisions about visiting campuses or contacting schools.
- You'll have the opportunity to take the ACT again if you feel your scores don't accurately reflect your achievement.

### ***Test Information Release***

On certain test dates, you may request and pay for a copy of the test questions used to determine your score, a copy of your answers, a list of the correct answers to the multiple-choice questions, and a copy of the table used to convert raw scores (the number of questions you answered correctly on each multiple-choice test) to reported scores (the scores that appear on your score report). If you take the Writing Test, you will also receive a copy of the prompt, the scoring rubric, and the scores assigned by the two raters. You'll also get information about requesting an actual copy of your answer document for an additional fee. The service isn't offered for all test dates, so if you're interested in receiving this information, you'll need to check the dates on ACT's website ([www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)) to be sure you're choosing a test date on which the service is available.

## **Selecting a Test Option**

When you register, you must choose one of two test options—the ACT (No Writing) (which includes the four multiple-choice tests: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science), or the ACT Plus Writing (which includes the four multiple-choice tests plus a 30-minute Writing Test). Taking the ACT Plus Writing will provide you with two additional scores: a Writing Test subscore and a Combined English/Writing score. Taking the Writing Test does not affect your subject area scores on the ACT or your Composite score.

Not all institutions require or recommend taking the ACT Writing Test. You should check directly with the institutions you are considering to find out their requirements, or ask your high school counselor which test option you should take. You can also use the search tool on ACT's website ([www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)) for a list of institutions that have provided information to ACT about their policies—whether they require, recommend, or do not need results from the ACT Writing Test.

## **Registering**

The fastest and easiest way to register for the ACT is online at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org). When you register on the Web, you will know immediately if your preferred test center has space for you and you can print your admission ticket. Read all the information on your admission ticket carefully to make sure all the information is correct.

You are guaranteed a seat and test booklet at a test center **only** if you register by the deadline for a test date. If you miss the late registration deadline but need to test on the next test date, you can try to test as a “standby” examinee. Testing as a standby is more costly, and you are **not** guaranteed a seat or test booklet. If you decide to take your chance as a standby, be sure to follow the instructions for standby testing on the website. You must bring a completed standby request with you to the test center, along with acceptable identification. Standby examinees will be admitted only after all registered students have been seated for their test option.

*Creating Your ACT Web Account.* No matter how you register, you are encouraged to create your free ACT Web account. You can use your ACT Web account to:

- view your scores and score report on the Web at no charge
- send your scores to additional colleges
- receive e-mail updates from ACT about changes to your registration
- make changes to your student profile
- print your admission ticket

## **Registering Under Special Circumstances**

See the website or our online registration brochure for instructions if special circumstances apply to you—for example, if your religious beliefs prevent you from taking the exam on Saturday and there are no non-Saturday test centers in your area or if you have a diagnosed disability and require test accommodations.

If you have a diagnosed disability and documentation of extended time accommodations in school, you *may* be eligible to test on national test dates with extended time. Details about the procedures for applying to test with extended time and the amount of time provided are on the website. To test with extended time, you **must** register by the deadline for the desired test date so your documentation may be reviewed and arrangements made. (Extended time is **not** available for standby examinees.)

## **At the Test Center**

### **Arriving at the Test Center**

You'll be asked to report to the test center by 8:00 a.m. on your test date. Under no circumstances will you be admitted after the test booklets have been distributed so be sure to arrive on time.

You may need to walk a few blocks to get to the test center, or you may need to drive several hours, perhaps to an unfamiliar city. Whatever your situation, be certain to allow plenty of time. If the test is being administered in a place that's new to you, you might consider finding the location the night before the test or even a few days in advance.

Test centers vary considerably. You may be taking the ACT in your own high school, at a local community college, or in a large building on a nearby university campus. Your surroundings may be quite familiar, or they may be uncomfortably new. If they're new, allow yourself a few extra minutes to get used to the place. Then try to forget about your surroundings so that you can concentrate on the test.

It's best to bring with you **only** the things you'll need that morning, because other materials will just be in your way and you may not be allowed to have them in the test room. Be sure to bring:

- several sharpened **No. 2 pencils** with good erasers (test the erasers to make sure they erase cleanly and leave no residue),
- your admission ticket (you will need it to complete your answer document),
- acceptable photo identification (see [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) for details), and
- a permitted calculator if you wish to use one on the Mathematics Test (permitted calculators are described in detail at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)).

Because you will probably want to pace yourself, bring a watch with the alarm function turned off. Although the test supervisor will announce when there are 5 minutes remaining on each test, not all test rooms have wall clocks.