

ACT English

The ACT English exam is based on the rules of grammar that were popular in the middle of the 20th century. The score you want to earn will dictate how to approach the test.

The Big Secret

- the ACT English section is NOT about which phrase sounds best to you – it's about which follows the standard rules
- the ACT English section does NOT require you to know the name of grammatical concepts

How To Read Passages on the ACT English Section

- Read the passage from the very beginning (including the title).
- When you encounter an underlined, numbered portion of the text or a number within a square, finish the sentence and then look to the right of the text to find the question based on the text you've read so far.

You should be able to answer most questions at this point. In a few cases, you'll have to continue reading (parallelism, placing sentences in the right order, redundancy, option to eliminate a phrase or sentence, introducing a paragraph or transitioning).

How To Answer ACT English Questions

1. Read the passage until you come to a question.
2. Carefully read the prompt (if there is one) and the answer choices, and determine which type of question it is.
3. For grammar/style/punctuation questions, look for any of the relevant issues we discussed in the section of ACT English question types.
4. For a reading comprehension question, look for any of the relevant issues we discussed in the section on ACT English question types.
5. Find the right answer, or eliminate three wrong answers.
6. Take a second look to reconsider the question, the answer choices and the passage.
7. Mark your answer choices and move on.

Commas on the ACT

- majority of ACT questions aren't about commas, but comma-related issues tend to cause problems for test-takers

Two Common Myth-Conceptions

MYTH: Commas should be used to show that a person would take a breath if the sentence were read out loud.

FACT: The ACT doesn't reward comma placement based on breathing.

MYTH: When a sentence contains too many words in a row with no punctuation, you should put a comma in there to break up the sentence.

FACT: The ACT doesn't care how many words appear in a row without punctuation.

The ACT English section rewards comma usage that correctly demonstrates the relationships among concepts in a sentence.

- it is better to avoid commas unless we have an actual, concrete reason to put one in a particular part of a sentence.

ACT English Answer-Choice Patterns and Issues

Most Like the Others

The correct answer has the most similarities with the other answers.

Functionally Identical Answer Choices

If several answers are the same/very similar, they're probably wrong.

No Special Consideration for "No Change"

Don't worry about picking "no change" if you think that's the correct answer. They're not any more or any less likely to be right than any other answer choice.

When To "OMIT The Underlined Portion"

If the option to omit is given, take it UNLESS the phrase or sentence must restate a concept from the surrounding text and contribute a new concept not found in the surrounding text.

ACT English Question Types

Training yourself to recognize the broad question types (Reading Comprehension, Grammar/Style/Punctuation, Combo) will make it easier for you to focus on the concepts that might be tested in a particular question.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Prompt involves reading comprehension – take a literal approach to the text.

Most Relevant Information

Look for the choice that only talks about what the question asks about.

Best Conclusion

The answer is the one that focuses on the main topic of the passage – often the one that's mentioned in the title of passage.

Most Effective Introduction

The answer will be the sentence that discusses the same topics that are discussed in the other sentences in that paragraph.

Most Effective Transition

Find the answer choice that mentions or refers to something from each of two paragraphs.

Sentence or Paragraph Placement

The answer will have the sentences/paragraphs appear in a sequence that makes them refer to each other in a logical order.

Precision Vocabulary

These are essentially reading comprehension questions. Find the answer with the most accurate term.

Adding or Deleting a Phrase or Sentence

Pick the answer that plainly describes what the sentence or phrase is doing.

Would This Essay Fulfill the Writing's Goal?

Tend to have the “yes yes no no” pattern – the correct answer will be the one that directly describes the passage and is relevant to the goal in the prompt.

Grammar/Style/Punctuation Questions

These test your ability to identify the form of a phrase or sentence that sounds the most pleasing (per ACT rules). Should be easy to identify because the questions won't have a separate prompt – just answer choices and the first answer choice will be “no change.”

<i>Sentence Fragments</i>	<i>Would Of</i>	<i>Irrelevant Information</i>
<i>Run-On Sentences</i>	<i>Comparatives And Superlatives</i>	<i>Proximity</i>
<i>Verb Conjugation</i>	<i>Comma Sandwich</i>	<i>Relationship Words</i>
<i>Possessives</i>	<i>List of Two Things</i>	<i>Shorter Is Better</i>
<i>Who Versus Whom</i>	<i>Idioms</i>	<i>Which Would Be Least Acceptable</i>
<i>Much Versus Many</i>	<i>Redundancy</i>	<i>Parallelism</i>

Combo Questions

Questions will mix elements from both grammar/style/punctuation questions and reading comprehension questions.