

ACT Science

The majority of ACT Science questions require no scientific knowledge at all – they're just reading comprehension questions that have graphs, charts, and diagrams.

All of the information you need to answer the questions is on the page. The ACT Gods try to freak you out by having passages on sciences you would *never* study in high school with lots of terminology. Don't freak out. The test just wants you to match terms in the question with terms in the passage or graph.

Why People Struggle and How to Avoid It: Strange terms and units

Any new concept you see on the ACT Science section will fall into one of these categories:

1. It won't be explained in the text.
2. It won't be explained and it won't be relevant to answering any of the questions.
3. It won't be explained but you'll be able to match a concept in a question with the same concept somewhere in the passage (example: chart or graph).

ACT Science Rules

1 – Every part of the answer is almost always on the page in front of you

The ACT will have three questions (or fewer) that tests your actual science knowledge. The remaining questions (and that's most of them) will have their answers embedded in the information in the test (text, chart, diagram or question itself).

2 – Labels are important

Start identifying labels on graphs, charts, diagrams, tables, etc. Answers will be found because you're paying attention to the axis on graphs.

3 – Be sure to use the right data

Most questions will ask you to look in the passage for information – be sure you're looking in the right place. Passages will often have multiple experiments, graphs, tables that look similar.

4 – Don't get intimidated by vocabulary

There will be terms that you don't know. That doesn't matter. The information you need is on the page.

5 – You'll need to know basic science a few times per test

Any science you're asked to know is going to be basic but they may not sound basic...don't let that bring you down. Even if you miss every question that requires actual science knowledge, you can still score above a 30 on the science section.

Reading Passages on the ACT Science Section

Method 1: Read the whole passage first before looking at any questions. When you get to tables or figures, take note of labels on axes, headings on columns, etc. This should help you know which parts of the passage mention specific ideas.

Method 2: Skip the passage and go immediately to the questions. *This is easier to do in the science section because the questions tend to refer to specific parts of the passage more often.*

Method 3: Skim the passage, then read the questions. Start by quickly skimming the passage and take note of unusual terms, formulas or italicized phrases. *Do not spend more than one minute skimming the passage.*

ACT Science Question Types

Pure Data: The question asks you relatively simple, straightforward questions about the data. You'll need to read the data accurately and choose the best answer.

Pure Paragraph: The question is based on what you read in a paragraph in the passage. They are reading comprehension questions. They tend to be Scientist A vs. Scientist B style questions. Pick the answer that restates the part of the text without contradicting it.

Data Plus Paragraph: The question combines information from a paragraph in the passage with a data found in a chart, graph, diagram, etc. Find the relevant information and select the best answer.

Data Plus Data: The question requires us to use two different data sources from the passage. These tend to be more challenging because they require a little more processing than other question types.

The Minor Question Type (aka Science Knowledge Questions): These should be easy to spot because they'll use terms that don't show up anywhere else in the passage. These require a basic understanding of science but you don't have to come up with the answer all by yourself – you just have to pick the best answer.

ACT Science Answer-Choice Patterns

Pattern 1: All of One Type

The information in the passage matches the answer choices.

These can help you identify where to find the correct answer.

Pattern 2: Exact Opposite

The answer choice is the exact opposite from what is presented in the text.

Answer choices that directly contradict the text are wrong.

Pattern 3: Completely Irrelevant

The answer choice doesn't apply to the given/stated facts in the passage.

Answer choices that are not found in the text are wrong.

Pattern 4: Yes Yes No No

Two answers that support and two that don't all with different reasons.

Is the reasoning supported by the passage?

How to Answer (Most) ACT Science Questions

1. Read, skim, or skip the passage – *your preference*
2. Read the questions carefully, noting key terms – *if you don't understand a term, don't worry – either the passage will explain it or you won't need to know it.*
3. Read the answer choices carefully – *answer choices tell you where to look in the passages or which options to consider while you look for the answer*
4. Find the relevant part of the passage – *use citations provided in the question or specific terms*
5. Find the correct answer, or eliminate three wrong answers – *find the passage, find the answer*
6. Double-check your answer – *take a second look, did you pull information from the right place?*