



# NO-STRESS

Guide to the ACT & PLAN



800-2Review (800-273-8439) • [PrincetonReview.com](http://PrincetonReview.com)



## What Is the ACT?

The ACT is a standardized test used to evaluate your candidacy for admission to most colleges and universities. While some schools have laudatory opinions about the ACT and therefore place more emphasis on your scores, others view them as a mere formality in the admissions process. Your scores also may be used to evaluate eligibility for scholarship awards and financial grants.

The ACT is comprised of four major content tests—English, Math, Reading, and Science Reasoning (and an optional Writing test, but we'll get to that later). Each portion is scored on a scale of 1–36 and these four subscores are then averaged for a maximum total score of 36.

So, what does ACT stand for anyway? Nothing! The company that creates the test (ACT—yes, pretty innovative, we know) has officially declared that the letters A-C-T have no meaning. That wasn't always the case. Previously, ACT stood for American College Test. Today, its official name is ACT Assessment.

TEST	SCORE	TIME	CONTENT
English 75 questions	1–36	45 minutes	Usage/Mechanics Rhetorical Skills
Math 60 questions	1–36	60 minutes	Pre-Algebra Algebra I & II Geometry Trigonometry
Reading 40 questions	1–36	35 minutes	Fiction Social Sciences Humanities Natural Sciences
Science Reasoning 40 questions	1–36	35 minutes	Data Representation Research Summaries Conflicting Viewpoints
Writing (optional) 1 essay	2–12	30 minutes	Persuasive Essay

# THE TEST

02



## Inside English

### Content Tested

- Usage/Mechanics
- Punctuation
- Grammar
- Sentence Structure
- Rhetorical Skills
- Strategy
- Organization
- Style

### What Does the English Test Measure?

ACT says: “Elements of effective writing.”

We say: It’s a test of your editing skills.

### Random Stuff

**ACTTalk Good**—While you may not follow the rules of Standard Written English when you text, you probably know more grammar than you think. Your ear will catch a lot of the errors on the ACT, but to improve your score substantially, you need to know the core grammatical terms and rules.

**Punctuation**—Do you throw commas in a sentence just because it’s gotten a little long? Do you use the colon only to make eyes for an emoticon? You need to brush up on the rules because the ACT tests punctuation heavily.

**Make It Better** —Not all of the questions involve fixing errors. In fact, a significant number involve decisions on adding or cutting information, moving it around, and passing judgment on how well the author did his job.

### 📌 DID YOU KNOW?

Seventy-five questions in 45 minutes breaks down to about a half-minute per question.

Translation: Don’t spend too much time on one question. If you struggle with a question, then you’re better off guessing and moving on because all of the questions are weighted equally.

# Inside Math

## Content Tested

- Pre-Algebra
- Algebra I & II
- Geometry
- Trigonometry

## What Does the Math Test Measure?

ACT says: “Reasoning skills [for solving] practical problems in mathematics.”

We say: Reasoning plus math skills ranging from basic formulas to advanced concepts.

## Random Stuff

**Rules and Formulas**—The ACT doesn’t provide a list of formulas and rules, so you need to review and memorize the basics that are always on the test, like area and circumference of circles for example. While the most difficult questions do involve harder concepts like matrices and trigonometric identities, good reading and reasoning skills are more important than memorizing an advanced concept or formula.

**Slow down!**—The 60 questions on the Math test are arranged in a rough order of difficulty. You don’t have to work every question to get a great score. If you slow down and concentrate on the easy and medium questions, you avoid careless errors and give yourself a better chance of getting a long or tricky question right. For instance, if you got all of the easy and medium questions right and only a handful of the difficult questions, you could be in the top 10-20% of test-takers.

**Calculators welcome**—The Math test allows you to use a calculator, which is definitely a good thing. Check [ACT.org](http://ACT.org) to make sure your calculator is permitted—this is a great tool for tougher computation and helps you avoid the careless errors that stem from doing math in your head.

## 📌 DID YOU KNOW?

Although the math on the ACT may seem tricky (which it often is), you’ve definitely learned it before. ACT Math doesn’t go beyond typical junior-year content. Topics like calculus are nowhere to be found.

# THE TEST

04

## Inside Reading

### Content Tested

Reading Comprehension (4 passages)

- Fiction
- Social Sciences
- Humanities
- Natural Sciences

### What Does the Reading Test Measure?

ACT says: “Understanding of what is directly stated and statements with implied meanings.”

We say: Your ability to read and efficiently find information in the passages.

### Random Stuff

**Read more**—No matter how many techniques you may learn, the best way to improve your reading is simply by reading! Magazines (more like *Time*, less like *People*), newspapers, and books all can help you improve your performance on the Reading portion.

**No help from ACT**—Unlike the Math questions, the Reading questions do not follow a definitive order of difficulty, nor do the questions follow a chronological order of the passage.

**It’s up to you**—Just because the ACT doesn’t present the passages and the questions in a detectable order of difficulty doesn’t mean you can’t work on the passages and questions in whatever order you choose. If you find the Natural Sciences passage less accessible than the Prose Fiction passage, then answer the questions to the latter passage first and return to the former passage later.

### ◀ DID YOU KNOW?

The Reading passages always appear in the same order, and each passage always has 10 questions.



# Inside Science Reasoning

## Content Tested

- Data Representation
- Research Summaries
- Conflicting Viewpoints

## What Does the Science Reasoning Test Measure?

ACT says: “Skills required in the natural sciences: interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem solving.”

We say: How to spot trends and relationships.

## Random Stuff

**Scientific method**—Yes, that’s why you learned about hypothesis, procedure, and the rest of the whole shebang. Okay, maybe not. But the truth of the matter is that you absolutely need to know the fundamental components of a well-formed experiment to answer a decent chunk of the questions in this portion.

While the subject matter in Science Reasoning may come from biology, chemistry, physics, and physical sciences, you need to know how to work with the information presented, rather than know rote facts. Don’t let the scary words and terms intimidate you—success on this test comes down to smart use of the information provided.

**Question types**—This section is comprised of three major question types: Data Representation (15 passage types), Research Summaries (18 passage types), and Conflicting Viewpoints (7 passage types).

## ► DID YOU KNOW?

The Science Reasoning section doesn’t test much else besides the basic scientific method and simple math skills, so come prepared to read multiple charts and evaluate different sets of data. Practice interpreting graphs, tables, and charts (hard to believe, but yes, they are all different representations of data).



# Inside Writing

## Content Tested

- Persuasive Essay

## What Does the Writing Test Measure?

ACT says: “Those writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses.”

We say: Your ability to whip up an essay in 30 minutes.

## Random Stuff

**More is more**—There are a few simple rules to follow to improve your essay score. Be organized, fill up all of the lines, cite good reasons to back up your position, and use a few “big” vocabulary words.

**Decidedly undecided**—Are you the student who always sees the third side of the argument? Or, maybe you can never bring yourself to like either of the two sides of an issue. Whatever your deal might be, the ACT allows you to stake any relevant perspective on the Writing prompt, as long as you buttress your position well.

**What optional really means**—Some schools say yea and some say nay, so the bottom line is: check with the college in which you’re interested to determine if you need to take the Writing test.

# THE PLAN

## What Is the PLAN?

The PLAN is basically a practice ACT, with some minor differences. There's no essay on the PLAN and the test is more than an hour shorter. Also, and probably most importantly, PLAN scores don't count in college admissions.

The PLAN is given each October to high school students. Most take the PLAN to gain experience in taking standardized tests. The PLAN is different from its better-known counterpart, the PSAT, in that school districts use PLAN results to evaluate academic priorities for the community and to help narrow career choices for students.

### Scoring

Each section is scored on a scale of 1–32. The four section scores are then averaged to yield a possible maximum score of 32. You'll also get a projected ACT score on the 1–36 scale.

#### PLAN STRUCTURE

SECTION TYPE	TIME/SECTION	TYPES OF QUESTIONS	QUESTIONS
English	30 minutes	Usage/Mechanics Rhetorical Skills	50
Math	40 minutes	Pre-Algebra/Algebra I Geometry	40
Reading	20 minutes	Reading Comprehension	25
Science Reasoning	25 minutes	Data Representation Research Summaries Conflicting Viewpoints	30

#### 📌 DID YOU KNOW?

ACT (the organization, not the test) offers EXPLORE to 8<sup>th</sup>- and 9<sup>th</sup>-graders who want to be extra-prepared for the PLAN and the ACT.



## Is It True That...

### ...the ACT Is Easier Than Is the SAT?

No. Some students may find the ACT to be easier; others may find the SAT to be less difficult. Perceived difficulty of each test varies from person to person. Take a practice ACT and SAT to see which test seems better suited for you.

### ...You Don't Get Penalized for Incorrect Answers?

Yes. Unlike SAT scores, ACT scores are calculated by adding up the number of questions you correctly answered. Without penalizing test-takers for incorrect responses this raw score is then converted to a scaled score. What's the bottom line? Never leave an answer blank.

### ...Some Test Administrations Are Easier Than Are Others?

No. The scaling of scores evens out any potential difference, and the “easiness” of a given test all comes down to perception and a bit of luck. Take the Writing test, for instance. On one version of the test, you just may know more examples for the essay than you can fit in 30 minutes, while on another version you could be given an entire lifetime and still come up short on examples. The same topic that may seem foreign to you may be totally painless to someone else.

#### ► DID YOU KNOW?

The ACT has been around since 1959. That's the same year your English teacher's favorite book, *The Elements of Style*, was published. (Hint: getting a copy of this will make your life easier on the English test.)

## What about the Other Tests?

### SAT

Don't want to take the ACT? You have an alternative: the SAT. Just like the ACT, the SAT is a standardized test (its letters stand for absolutely nothing, too) used to evaluate an applicant's candidacy for admission to college. The SAT is not easier or more difficult than the ACT; it is a different test with different content. SAT and ACT scores hold equal weight with admissions committees, so it's in your best interest to research and perhaps take both tests. Some students clearly do better on one exam than on the other and that's why some students take both tests

### SAT Subject Tests

The SAT Subject Tests are a series of 1-hour exams designed to measure knowledge in particular academic areas like Biology or World History. Usually only highly selective schools require Subject Test scores. You may have heard of these tests referred to as SAT IIs. The "II" is gone, but the tests remain the same.

### How Can The Princeton Review Help?

Getting into college can be tough, but it doesn't need to be stressful. How you prepare for college admissions tests can make a big difference to your overall stress level. When you work with The Princeton Review, we guarantee your test-prep program will be better than any course you've ever taken and will result in a higher score.\*

We're pretty proud of what we do. We spend thousands of hours and make a substantial financial commitment to studying standardized tests. Slight adjustments and trends are rapidly incorporated into our course methodology, giving our students a unique advantage over those who prepare elsewhere.

\*For details on our guarantee, visit [PrincetonReview.com](http://PrincetonReview.com).



# OPTIONS

10

## You Have Options

### Private Tutoring

This is the ultimate in convenient and customizable prep. If you want the most exclusive and convenient prep tailored to you, then this is your preferred option.

Private Tutoring is best if you:

- Learn better with personal instruction
- Need flexibility with dates and locations (even available online!)
- Need to focus only on specific areas of the test or specific academic areas

### Small Group Tutoring

Small Group Tutoring provides the superior customized prep we're known for, but at a more economical price. You'll get all the private, individualized attention you need with the added benefit of learning and interacting with your peers. You can create your own group with friends and classmates or we can team you up with 2-4 other students who share your testing goals.

Small Group Tutoring is best if you need:

- Personalized instruction
- A more economical option
- Flexibility with dates and locations

### Classroom Courses

The most popular way to prepare for the ACT is in a dynamic, interactive environment.

Classroom courses are best if you:

- Have at least 5 weeks to prepare
- Thrive in a small group of students who have similar strengths and weaknesses

### Online Courses

If you prefer to work independently, then our online courses are right for you.

Online courses are best if you:

- Are highly motivated and self-disciplined
- Are busy and need a flexible class schedule
- Don't live close to a tutor or course location

► Call us at **800-2Review** (800-273-8439) or visit [PrincetonReview.com](https://www.PrincetonReview.com) to learn more about all of our preparation options.

