

We covered much more than this in our session, of course, but these are the most important basics.

Overall:

- There is no replacing practice. You will be much better on your second practice test, and even better on your third. My students take about 10-15 ACTs before they take the real thing.
 - o There are 4 ACTs available in pdf form, which I will send to your administrators to distribute
 - o You'll find 5 more in the *Real ACT Prep Guide* (available in your library and for purchase online)
 - o Remember that very few people go up with each practice test. Expect setbacks along the way.
- You should *always* put an answer down on a problem. If time is about to be called, randomly fill in bubbles to complete the section.
- There are no "easier" test dates.
- Your average student gets half right on their ACT. Don't go in with expectations of getting everything 100%, as that will sap your confidence
- All four sections (English, Math, Reading, Science) are weighted equally in college admissions.
- Be very alert to words like NOT or EXCEPT in the questions.

English:

- This is always the first section. You must get used to working at a pace that will allow you to finish.
- Because it tests a small subset of grammar rules repeatedly, this is the most reliable section for increasing your score. Learn the grammar, and this section gets much easier.
- Make yourself aware of proper comma usage. Same goes for colons and semi-colons.
- Be sure to understand prepositional phrases (i.e. know why "Each of the calculators is broken" is correct instead of "Each of the calculators are broken.")
- If a question is testing verb tense, read the whole paragraph, not just the surrounding sentence.
- In a question asking you to choose an answer that does something specific (i.e. "Which of the following additions would provide a concrete example" worry about satisfying that condition more than which answer choice has the best grammar/style.

Math:

- It is *not* essential to get to the last question. These questions go from easy to hard, so unless you're a top scorer it's better to get the early and middle questions right and guess on the remaining.
- If you start to panic on a problem, write as much as you can down on the page to get your bearings. Let yourself skip a problem that's scaring you and come back to it later, or not at all.
- Know basic right triangle trigonometry (SohCahToa)
- Be very comfortable with lines and slopes.
- To avoid careless errors (especially important on this exam, as there is no such thing as partial credit on an ACT):
 - o Underline key words in the question (eg. "prime, even, integer")
 - o Write down all your steps as you solve
 - o (most importantly) re-read the question before you bubble in your answer. They will often ask for something unexpected (i.e. "What is $x + 4$?" instead of "What is x ?")
- Two standardized-test-specific strategies you must have in your arsenal (that we'll discuss in our session):
 - o Plugging in numbers (i.e. assigning values to variables)
 - o Trying your answer choices (i.e. working backwards)

Reading:

- Getting control of your timing is ESSENTIAL to this section. It is a very difficult section to finish on time.
 - o You have four passages to do in 35 minutes. To that end, allot yourself only 8.5 minutes per passage.
 - o After you take a couple of practices, you'll know what the difficult timing means for your test-taking. If you can work quickly, you can afford to read the passages. If you can't, you have to skip to the questions and read only as you're answering them.
- Don't do the questions in order. Start with:

- The questions with line numbers (“In lines 15-18, the author most nearly means...”), THEN
- The questions that mention a specific paragraph (“What is the author’s intent in the third paragraph?”), THEN
- The questions that give you something specific to search for and read. (“The author’s reason for introducing the Hadron Collider into his argument is to...”), THEN
- Only lastly will you answer the general questions. (“What is the author’s primary purpose?”)
- Move forward as recklessly as you need to in order to get to all of the questions. This might feel uncomfortable at first. (And is a strategy specific to the ACT, not your tests in classes!)
- To have the best chance of answering a question correctly, you must:
 - Read the pertinent part of the passage, then
 - Formulate your *own* answer in your head, and ONLY THEN
 - Find the answer choice that most closely matches what you came up with.
- When you’re down to two answers and can’t decide between them, choose the one that makes the weaker claim. (“The 1920s were generally considered a more or less tolerant period” is a much better answer choice than “The 1920s was a progressive era filled only with tolerance.”)
- If one answer choice contains another, pick the umbrella answer. (“Washington supported feminist issues” is more likely correct than the more specific option “Washington supported the right of women to vote.”)
- I repeat: It’s imperative that you get to answer all questions. Move through as quickly as you need to in order to get through, guessing where necessary to keep yourself moving forward.

Science:

- Timing is even MORE TRICKY here. You have 35 minutes to do 7 passages. That means you must get comfortable with spending only 5 minutes per passage.
- Unless you’re very advanced, do not spend time reading the passage. Instead refer back to the figures and charts only as needed to answer questions. Each question will point you where to look (“According to Figure 1, what is the percent of calcium in crab shells?”). Use the figure to answer the question, and move on.
 - This will feel uncomfortable at first, as you might not have a handle on the passage as a whole. That’s why you’re practicing. Most of you can’t afford the time to analyze the data and only then start answering questions.
- Be aware that the last question of each passage will require slightly more reasoning/extrapolation than the previous questions. Be ready to push deeper.
- It’s crucial that you answer all questions. Move through as quickly as you need to in order to get through, guessing where necessary to keep yourself moving forward through your 5-minute increments.
- One passage will compare/contrast the points of view of multiple scientists or students. It’s generally harder than the rest of the section—you might want to skip it when you first get to it, and do it at the end.

Essay:

- The essay is optional, and if taken won’t factor into your main score out of 36. If you’re not sure where you’re applying to college, you should do the essay in case you apply somewhere that requires it.
- Have a structure in your mind ahead of time. This will free you up to use your allotted time (30 minutes) to worry about your ideas and sentences.
- Consider “flattering the premise” in your intro. (i.e. talk about the larger issues at stake, and why this question is an important one to consider.)
- Consider, as a structure:
 - Introduction
 - Thesis (one side of the issue at stake)
 - Antithesis (investigating the other side, while making it clear that you haven’t changed your mind. Begin this paragraph with language like “Some might argue, however, that...”)
 - Synthesis/Conclusion (bring the two previous paragraphs together to create a new, nuanced meaning)