

Quick tips for taking the ACT

ENGLISH SECTION

In this section, rely heavily on your grammar skills. Read the entire passage and not just the underlined section. Learn to “cut out the fat” in this section by eliminating information that isn’t needed.

Additional rules you might have forgotten:

Who vs Whom:

Who refers to the subject of a sentence or clause. It can be replaced with he, she, or they. **Whom** refers to the object of a sentence or clause. It can be replaced with him, her, or them.

“To whom should I give my ticket?”

“Who can tell me the name of the second president?”

It’s vs Its:

It’s is a contraction for it is. **Its** indicates possession.

“It’s going to be a beautiful day.”

“The milk has passed its expiration date.”

Your vs You’re:

Your is a possessive pronoun. **You’re** is a contraction for you are.

“Your umbrella is next to the door.”

“You’re going to enjoy the zoo.”

Their vs There vs They’re:

Their shows possession among a group. **There** refers to a place or idea. **They’re** is a contraction for they are.

“The students are going on their trip today.”

“There is the bakery that I love.”

“They’re going to have a great time.”

Who’s vs Whose:

Who’s is a contraction for who is. **Whose** is the possessive form of who.

“Who’s ready to help me?”

“Whose dog is barking?”

EXAMPLE

These untruths – whether deliberate exaggerations or slips of the memory – ultimately matters very little, for the autobiography isn’t about the life of Mary Harris Jones.

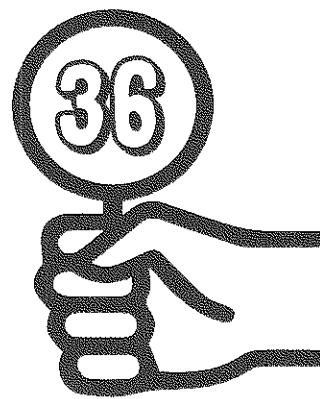
- A. NO CHANGE
- B. has mattered
- C. had mattered
- D. matter

Cut the Fat

Strip the sentence to just the subject (untruths) and the verb (matters) to cut the fat to see whether or not they agree.

Answer: D

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Punctuation Review

Commas

Used in four ways on the ACT:

Around unnecessary information:

“My father, an English professor, likes to read nonfiction books.”

Between items in a list:

“I bought milk, eggs, and bread at the grocery store.”

Between a complete and incomplete clause:

“Since it was raining, we could not go for a swim.”

Before FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

“John wanted tea to drink, but the store did not have any.”

Apostrophes

Used to indicate possession or to mark the missing letters in a contraction.

Possession:

“Nancy borrowed Jennifer’s shirt.”

Contraction (should not):

“You shouldn’t forget to study.”

Semicolons

Used to relate independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction.

Relate clauses:

“She calls it pop; I call it soda.”

Colons

Introduces an element or series of elements that illustrate or amplify the information that preceded the colon.

“You would’ve gotten a perfect score on the ACT if it weren’t for one subject: math.”

Dashes

Used to indicate an abrupt break in thought or to introduce an explanation.

Abrupt break in thought:

“For our vacation—which was way too short—we went to the beach.”

WRITING SECTION (optional)

The writing section is optional, but there are a select number of colleges throughout the U.S. that require or recommend the writing section for admissions. **None of the colleges or universities in Mississippi require the writing section.** If you do take the writing section, state your position clearly. The ACT prefers direct, concise writing, so limit unnecessary prose.

200+
COLLEGES

require the writing section on the ACT. Mississippi colleges do not!

MATH SECTION

The math section is typically organized in easy to hard order. Use the “Plug-In” method when you are given variables in the question and answers. The “Use the Answer” method is helpful when you are given numbers in the answers. Use logic when you can instead of using math to solve a problem. Lastly, there are approximately 4-7 trigonometry questions on the ACT.

$$x = y^2$$

EXAMPLE

Plug-In Method

If the sum of three consecutive odd integers is p , then in terms of p , what is the greatest of these three integers?

- A. $(p-6)/3$
- B. $(p-3)/3$
- C. $p/3$
- D. $(p+3)/3$
- E. $(p+6)/3$

Step 1: Pick three consecutive odd integers. Do not use 1 or 0.

Step 2: Solve the problem using your numbers. What is the sum of the 3 consecutive odd integers you chose? This answer will represent p in the answer choices.

Step 3: What is the question asking? It's asking for the greatest of the three integers. What is the greatest of the three integers you chose? That's your target.

Step 4: Solve the answer choices using the numbers you chose. Plug in your answer for p to find the correct target.

Answer: E

Formulas and terms to know!

You will have to study your math formulas, because they will not be provided on the ACT. The following formulas and terms are typically tested on the ACT:

Integer Any number that is not a fraction.

Product Another term meaning to multiply.

Absolute Value The distance a number is from zero.

$$= \frac{1}{2}(\text{base})(\text{height})$$

Area of a triangle

$$r^2 = (x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2$$

Equation of a Circle**

$$A^2 + B^2 = C^2$$

Pythagorean Theorem*

$$= (\text{length})(\text{width})(\text{height})$$

Volume of a Rectangular Solid

$$= \sqrt{(x_2 - x_1)^2 + (y_2 - y_1)^2}$$

Distance Formula

$$\left(\frac{x_1 + x_2}{2}, \frac{y_1 + y_2}{2} \right)$$

Midpoint Formula:

* Used only with right triangles, where a and b are legs, and c is the hypotenuse
 ** (h,k) represents the center point of the circle

Answer: C

EXAMPLE

Use the Answer Method

Marc is half as old as Tony and three times as old as Ben. If the sum of their ages is 40, how old is Marc?

- A. 3
- B. 16
- C. 12
- D. 18
- E. 24

Step 1: Whose ages are represented in the answer choices? Label the answer choices.

Step 2: Solve the problem using the answer choices, beginning with C. How do we get from Marc's age to Tony's age? How do we get from Marc's age to Ben's age?

READING SECTION

There are four types of reading passages: Literary Narrative, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Humanities. Practice each of these, and determine which are easiest for you. Answer those first!!

Speed Reading Steps

1. Read the *First Paragraph*

After reading the blurb, read the first paragraph in full. The first paragraph usually gives readers a description of what the passage will be about.

2. Read the *Last Paragraph*

The last paragraph typically sums up all of the preceding information in the passage. Again, you get a good idea of what the passage covered.

3. Read the *first sentence of each of the Middle Paragraphs*.

The topic sentences of the middle paragraphs give the reader an idea of supporting details to back up the main idea. Additionally, they give you a good idea of where to find certain information that the questions may ask.

Another strategy you can use is the “Cover and Predict” strategy. Practice covering the answers and answering for yourself. Seeing the answer choices may cause you to second-guess yourself.

SCIENCE SECTION

The ACT Science test isn't a science test at all. It's more of a reading test. You do not have to know any scientific facts to do well on the science test. There are three types of science passages: Charts and Graphs, Experiments, and Conflicting Scientists. Practice with these types and determine which ones are easiest. Answer those first!

EXAMPLE

Passage I

Finch beak depth (see Figure 1) is an *inheritable* trait (it can be passed from parents to offspring).



Researchers studied the beak depth of 2 species of finches, *Geospiza fortis* and *Geospiza fuliginosa*. Both species live on Island A. *G. fortis* alone lives on Island B, and *G. fuliginosa* alone lives on Island C. For both species, the primary food is seeds. Birds with shallower beaks can efficiently crush and eat only small seeds. Birds with deeper beaks can crush and eat both large and small seeds, but they prefer small seeds.

Substitute to Simplify

If a Latin word is used to name something, replace it with a more familiar word to make it easier to understand. For example, use “Cat” in the place of *Geospiza fortis* and “Dog” in the place of *Geospiza fuliginosa* when preparing to answer this question.