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Introduction

Many juniors and seniors take the ACT as part of the college admissions process. By taking this test, students give the admissions officers an objective standard that can be used to compare one student to other students. Colleges use these scores, along with the high school transcripts, resumé of extracurricular activities, letters of recommendation, and application essays as a guide to predict how well each individual will do in college-level courses.

Now that you have decided to take this exam, you are ready to begin the preparation process. All you need for success is some time and determination. Whether you have two months, one month, or one week, you can achieve your goals if you are organized, hard-working, and willing to stick to the plan.

This guide introduces you to different sections of the test, gives you a schedule to help you plan your preparation, and presents guided practice to help improve your English, mathematics, science, and reading skills. For those students who are taking the Optional Writing Assessment, Chapter XV, “ACT Writing Assessment,” covers writing strategies.

An Overview of the Cram Plan for the ACT

The ACT is not an intelligence test; it is an achievement test. This means that it tests your ability in four content areas: English, mathematics, science, and reading (and writing if you opt for the Writing Assessment). The best way to get ready for this test is to determine exactly how much time you have to prepare and follow the appropriate plan: the two-month plan, the one-month plan, or the one-week plan.

Each plan has a schedule for you to follow along with the approximate time you will need to allot to each task. In addition, each subject review chapter gives you strategies for that part of the test. Included in each subject review chapter are practice exercises to assist you in the areas in which you are weakest and to help you continue to maximize your strengths.

We suggest you begin by taking the Diagnostic Test. This will help you diagnose your areas of weakness: those parts of the test on which you will need to focus your attention. The answer explanations will guide you to the specific chapters that cover the topics in which you need the most help. After the Diagnostic Test, you will find a scoring guide that will give you an indication of your current score on each section of the ACT. Then you can begin to focus on the subject review chapters. After you have completed the review, you can take the Practice Test, a full-length simulated ACT.

General Test-taking Strategies

- Become familiar with the format of the test. If you know what to expect, you will be less nervous and more confident the day of the test.
- Work at a steady pace. You do not have the time to get bogged down on any one question. If you are having difficulty with a question, take your best educated guess and move on. The Diagnostic Test and the Practice Test will help you learn to pace yourself properly.

- Use this book to familiarize yourself with the directions to each section of the test. Knowing the directions to each section ahead of time will save you precious minutes on the day of the test.
- Read each question very carefully and be sure you know exactly what it asks. Many questions require you to note very specific details. Watch for **signal words** like *most*, *seldom*, *highest*, and *lowest*.
- Always read all the answers carefully, and use **POE** (Process of Elimination) to narrow down the choices.
- Use the answer choices to help you when you are unsure. On any multiple-choice test, the answer is always right there in front of you.
- If you take the Writing Assessment, read the prompt carefully and be sure to address the issue as it is presented.
- Be sure you are bubbling in the answers in the correct circle on your answer sheet. Check yourself every 5 questions.
- Bring everything you will need with you the day of the test: sharpened number 2 pencils with good erasers, calculator, and tissues. It is a good idea to bring your own watch; you cannot be sure you will have a visible clock in the testing room. Don't forget to have your admission ticket and photo ID with you.
- There is no guessing penalty on the ACT. Answer **EVERY** question. Make sure you have filled in only one circle for each question. Carefully erase any changed answers.

Using a Graphing Calculator



All questions in the math portion of the ACT can be solved without a calculator; however, using a calculator, particularly a graphing calculator, can help solve a problem faster and avoid making careless errors. In this book, every question that can be solved with the help of a graphing calculator is indicated by a calculator icon.

However, this icon does not appear on the actual ACT exam. A special section on how to use a graphing calculator to solve some of the ACT math questions is included in Appendix A.

Please note that some calculators are not permitted on the ACT Math Test, for example, TI-89, TI-92, TI-Nspire CAS, HP 48GII, Algebra fx 2.0, and ClassPad 300. To see the latest updated list of calculators permitted on the ACT Math Test, visit www.actstudent.org or call 800-498-6841 for a recorded message.

Format of the ACT Test

The ACT is a multiple-choice test comprised of 4 sections and one optional Writing Assessment (the essay). Section 1, the English Test, contains 75 questions on grammar, usage, and rhetoric. Section 2, the Mathematics Test, is comprised of questions on pre-algebra, elementary algebra, intermediate algebra, coordinate geometry, plane geometry, and trigonometry. Section 3, the Reading Test, is comprised of four passages taken from different content areas including fiction, the social sciences, the humanities, and the natural sciences. Section 4, the Science

Test, covers the application of science reasoning in biology, chemistry, earth/space sciences, and physics. The Writing Assessment, a persuasive essay in response to a specific prompt, is given after the first 4 sections. The multiple-choice test alone takes 2 hours and 55 minutes; the essay takes an additional 30 minutes.

Test	# of Questions	# of Minutes
English	75	45
Mathematics	60	60
Reading	40	35
Science	40	35
Optional Writing Assessment	1	30

Online Extras at CliffsNotes.com

As an added bonus to this *CliffsNotes ACT Cram Plan*, you can get some additional practice by visiting www.cliffsnotes.com/go/ACTCram. There, you'll find:

- Sample ACT English Test Reading Passage
- Suggested ACT Math Approaches with Samples
- Sample ACT Reading Test Passage with Questions and Answer Explanations
- And more!