# The Top 10, Top 10 ACT Test -Taking Tips (plus some!)

Hey, college-bound high school student!  Congratulations on your decision to further your education!

Your teachers and counselors have probably coached you in preparing for the ACT.  Maybe NOW you're wondering "Are there any shortcuts or tricks that will help me during the actual 'test?  What are some 'gotcha's' I should know about?"

Absolutely! Test strategies and some awareness of the traps will help you approach the test with greater confidence for a higher score. Some tips apply to the test as a whole; some are more specific to the subject being tested. Read on for some of the best of the best tips!

**GENERAL TIPS AND TRICKS THAT APPLY TO ALL ACT TEST SECTIONS**

**TIP #1: Practice, practice, practice.**

Practice is the highest, most unbeatable (yes that's redundant), supreme-est strategy for ACT test-taking --found on most every Top 10 ACT prep list (and there's a lot of them!)



No, this isn't an ACT prep list, but rather an **ACT Top 10 Test-taking Tip** list.

**But a list of test-taking strategies is useless, if you don't practice them first.**

As in football, basketball, baseball, choir, drama, or cheerleading (or whatever skill you're in to)—if you don't intensely practice running the plays or shooting the hoops or rehearsing the scripts or choreography, (unless you are a rare prodigy) you'll perform way below your potential!  Without habits engrained in your psyche, you'll add stress and waste time and energy during the test trying to recall the strategies.

What do you gain from practice?

- You gain familiarity with the instructions for each section (which ACT recommends that you "Carefully read" prior to each test).  So instead of reading instructions, you can jump right into the questions to make the best use of your test time. That's a no-brainer!
- You gain awareness of your strengths and weaknesses. More practice can help you improve areas of weakness, be that time-management weakness, or a content-area weakness.
- You gain experience with how ACT approaches their test design to form your own unique test-taking tactics to be most efficient and effective.

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How to practice:

- Use <u>authentic ACT test prep material</u>, whether free or paid. Other practice materials are available free online, but they may or may not contain the various types of practice that will benefit you.
- Rehearse **TIPS 2-10** on your practice tests, so that you can execute them well on Test Day!

**TIP #2: Make a solid time management plan BEFORE your test.**

Some things to consider in your time management plan are:

- How much time will you spend on each question?
- How will you handle answering harder questions, or remaining questions as time runs short?
- How will you know you're staying on track time-wise?
- And how will you quickly make the best choice when unsure of an answer?

**How much time will you spend on each question by test?** Each of the subject area tests will be timed, and even the most academically inclined student can run out of time on the ACT. Your personal score goals, which should be based on the admission requirements at your colleges of choice, will help you determine your _personal_ time management plan. The following table shows the GENERAL time constraints of completing the entire ACT _(and as a bonus, the last column shows the most challenging content areas based on the percent of 2016 testers scoring at or above minimum college level.)_

| SUBJECT | Total # of questions | Total Time allowed | Average Time Per Question | Percent of 2016 Testers Scoring College Level |
|---------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| **English** | 75 | 45 minutes | 36 seconds | 61% |
| **Math** | 60 | 60 minutes | 1 minute | 31% |
| **Reading** | 40 | 35 minutes | 52 seconds | 44% |
| **Science** | 40 | 35minutes | 52 seconds | 36% |
| **Writing (OPTIONAL ESSAY)** | 1 | 40 minutes | 40 minutes to develop a complete essay from a writing prompt | About 40% will score an 8 or above on the 2-12 scale. (Since writing is optional, schools requiring it will have their own benchmarks) |

NOTE: Unless otherwise linked, all data above can be found on ACT.org. Specific page links by subject area are provided throughout this post.

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**How will you know you're staying on track time-wise?**

**(Quick answer: bring a digital watch with a silent timer!)**

Each testing center will provide a clock helpful for checking how much time you have left to complete a section of the test.  When five minutes remain for the test, you will hear a verbal warning from the test proctor.  BUT, a non-disruptive digital watch with timer capability can help you see at-a-glance if you are keeping up with the required pace.

**How will you handle questions you can't answer?**

Part of your time management plan should include how you will handle the hardest questions—the stumpers.  And how will you deal with unanswered questions if time is running out?

Since incorrect answers do not count against you, it is VERY IMPORTANT to answer every question.
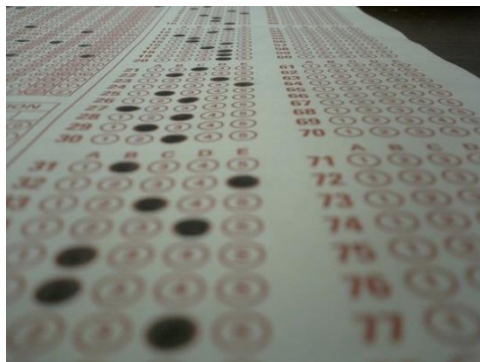


- One often recommended strategy: Choose a standard answer for those questions you know you can't answer, or that you are running out of time to answer.  For example, when the 5-minute warning is announced, answer all unanswered questions with the same letter (i.e. all C's, or whatever. Just be consistent). Odds are, some will be correct answers.  <u>Also</u> mark a quick symbol in your test booklet on questions you <u>had</u> to guess to move on.  Then, if time allows, return to those questions and review the answers.

**A final time saving strategy for all sections**: Work out questions first in your test booklet, then bubble in answers all at one time when you have 5-10 minutes left.  You are then able to remain focused on problem solving, rather than having to switch focus from problem solving to bubbling the bubbles!  Just <u>be sure to leave plenty of time</u> to *carefully* record your answers on the Scantron sheet.

**TIP #3: Eliminate obviously wrong answers**

Make sure you understand the question being asked—read it carefully and underline key reference information. Always make sure you're using the correct diagram to answer a question. For example, if a Science question says, "Based on graph #2. . ." but you assume incorrectly that your answer should be based on graph #1, you will not answer correctly!

After <u>carefully </u>reading the question and reading any associated passages, scan the answers provided. If any are obviously wrong, cross them out in your test booklet. If you can cross out even one answer, your odds of answering correctly are improved, even if you must guess among the remaining answers.

So, test-taking tips that apply to the <u>entire</u> ACT test are:

- TIP #1: Practice, practice, practice
- TIP #2: Make (and practice) your time management plan before your test (then stick to your plan during the actual test)*

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- TIP #3: Cross out the obviously incorrect answers in your test booklet, then select your answer from those that remain.

*More detailed *TIME MANAGEMENT* strategies for each section will be covered later. But hopefully you recognize the benefits of developing (and rehearsing) your time management plan BEFORE your actual test!

SO, onto subject area testing tips!