

STANDARDIZED TEST PREPARATION

Tips for Test Preparation

There is some important information you should know before you take any multiple-choice test, whether it is a nationally standardized test like the ACT or SAT, or simply an in-house test. Sometimes it is hard to get this information about school tests, but you can certainly obtain it before taking any college entrance examination.

It is extremely helpful to know the following:

1. The format of the test--the types of questions, etc.
2. The directions for each type of question--for example, are you supposed to pick the one answer that is right or the one answer that is wrong?
3. The scoring procedure for the test--is there a penalty for an incorrect answer? If so, the guessing strategy differs from the one you would use for a test in which there is no penalty.
4. The number of questions and the time allowed. You should know in advance, whether or not you will be able to finish the test. If you know beforehand that you will not finish, you will not be so anxious about it, and you will be able to prepare a proper guessing strategy. Also, be aware that even though some tests, such as the SAT, provide you with some basic facts such as a few geometric formulas, you will waste a great deal of time and lose continuity if you keep turning back to refer to them. You should have all basic information, such as those formulas, memorized so that you can concentrate on answering the questions as quickly as possible.

The first step on any multiple-choice test is to do only the questions you can do right away. You will find that on the SAT and PSAT the level of difficulty increases as you go along, so the first few questions will be relatively easy, the middle questions more challenging and the last few extremely difficult. You should know through practice exactly which questions you are likely to get wrong, and not spend much time, if any, working on those items.

On the ACT, the level of difficulty does not rise very much in the mathematics and science sections, and practically not at all in the English and reading sections. However, the first step here is exactly the same as on the SAT.

The best test preparation includes.....

- Pacing
- Proper timing
- Extensive subject review
- Score selection
- Guessing strategy
- Long-term preparation
- Short-term preparation
- Subject specific strategy
- Process of elimination
- Prioritization
- Practice

ACT QUICK PREPARATION FACTS

ACT English: consists of mechanics/usage (grammar, punctuation and sentence structure) and rhetorical skills questions (logic, organization, diction and style). You have roughly 36 seconds per question: every answer must be accurate, concise (not too wordy and usually does not repeat words), and short. If you can narrow it down to two responses, always go for the shortest one.

Punctuation questions are easy to identify since most of the answers are usually the same length. The word punctuation comes from the Latin word “punctus” meaning a point (a mark), indicating a long or short pause. Once you identify this type of question, you must ask yourself four specific questions: (1) Is there a pause? No pause, no punctuation. (2) Is there a list? If so, use a colon. (3) Are there two complete sentences? If so, the answer should be a semicolon or a period. (4) Or is one side of the pause an incomplete sentence? If so, your answer should be a comma or a dash.

Rhetorical skill questions deal with logic, organization, diction and style. They can usually be answered by using common sense and require very little reading, if any. They usually do not have a no-change response. Many times this type of question can be answered by simply using keywords in the question.

ACT Math: consists basically of arithmetic, algebra I, algebra II, coordinate geometry, plain geometry, and trigonometry.

All geometric shapes are drawn to scale. Arithmetic answers can be derived by rounding up, rounding down, and estimating. Information should be drawn in and added to each geometric shape when given. Work should always be added to the test booklet when necessary. It is important to do all the easy questions first, and then go back to the hardest questions, if you have time. An excellent math review can be found on the ACT.org website. Also, although it might sound strange, another great math review can be found in the front of the “SAT Preparation Booklet” produced by CollegeBoard.

Algebra I and II: these questions can be answered by simply plugging in the answer choices, beginning with those in the middle (i.e. c, d, b, etc.).

Coordinate geometry: review carefully all formulas related to the mid point, slope, circles, parabolas and ellipses.

Plain geometry: study areas, circumferences and triangle formulas.

Always estimate when necessary. Also, memorize the Pythagorean theorem.

Trigonometry: there are usually 3-7 trig questions. You can miss every one of them and

still score extremely well.

ACT Reading: there is approximately eight minutes and 45 seconds for each passage. It's all about comprehension, not speed. Do your easiest passages first, but never save the fiction passage for last. It's best to read the first and last sentence of each paragraph and then go to the questions where you can select keywords to help you scan for the answers in the text.

ACT Science: students have approximately five minutes per passage. Do the three data representation passages first; the charts, graphs and tables will identify them. Next, do the three experimental report passages; they are the passages listing experiments one, two and three. Always do the alternative viewpoints passage last; it has roughly 5 to 7 questions and requires some in-depth reading, unlike the others.

Optional Essay: students have 30 minutes to complete the essay. Begin by taking a couple minutes to create an outline in response to the prompt. Consider writing either a 4 or 5 paragraph response. One option is to respond with an introduction, a second paragraph in favor of the position, a third paragraph opposed to the position, and a conclusion. The second option should include an introduction, three paragraphs exploring three different elements or aspects of the statement, and a conclusion. ACT will supply you with four lined sheets of paper; please try to fill them both up.

Closing Notes: Please remember to take hard candy with you to the test. Students should unwrap several pieces the night before and put them in a sandwich bag. Simple sugar will actually speed up the firing of the brain neurons thus enhancing your reaction time and fighting fatigue as well. Remember, never leave anything blank and, when guessing at the end of a section, always look over the spread of your previous answers first, before guessing. You should always choose the answers that you are lacking. Adequate preparation must also include plenty of rest the night before the test and repetition utilizing the various strategies outlined in this handout. The best way to practice is by utilizing real sample tests such as the free publication, "Preparing for the ACT", found at the following URL address: <http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/>.

The night before a standardized test make sure.....

- That you go to bed at a decent hour, not too early, not too late.
- Make sure there is plenty of gas in the car: also, set aside your driver's license and car keys.
- Unwrap a bunch of Jolly Ranchers and place them in a sandwich bag.
- Set aside your calculator, three sharpened No. 2 pencils, and a rubber eraser.

Source: CollegeMasters, LLC, Rusty Haynes, CEO

- Relax and take it easy.

SAT REASONING TEST QUICK PREPARATION FACTS

Math Section

Please make sure that all appropriate formulas are entered into your calculator and that you are familiar with each and every one of them. Also, when taking the SAT always remember to feel free to write all over your test booklet.

Arithmetic: The SAT I math sections deals primarily with arithmetic, algebra and geometry.

- Always do the easy questions first.
- Eliminate all silly answers first.
- Estimate, round up, round down, etc.
- Arithmetic:
- Memorize PEMDAS (the order of operations).
- Review all the basics.

Algebra:

- Work backwards from the answers.
- Eliminate common elements.
- When in doubt, try C first, then B or D, etc.

Geometry:

- Draw new diagrams to scale based on the supplied information.
- Memorize these formulas and program them into your calculator:

Parabola	Circles
Ellipses	Triangles

- Add extra features and pertinent information to all geometric shapes.

Critical Reading Section

This section is made up of both reading passages and sentence completions.

Sentence Completions:

- Use your own words on the first third.
- Focus on transition words (i.e. however, but, furthermore, etc.) and punctuation.
- Determine whether the word pairs you need are alike or opposite.
- Determine whether you need a word that is positive, negative or neutral.
- Work backwards from the word pairs using one column first.
- It is okay to guess if you can eliminate at least one of the five responses.
- Do not be afraid to skip the question and come back to it later.
- Always eliminate silly answers first, but be very hesitant to eliminate words that you cannot identify on the last third.

Critical Reading:

- Read the initial blurb.
- Read the first and last sentence in the passage to establish a consistent theme.
- Read the first and last sentence in each paragraph, especially the first one, to establish the consistent theme for that paragraph.
- Identify key words in the questions and in the answers, and then scan for them in the paragraphs.
- Don't be afraid to skip a question and look ahead for clues to the answer.
- Always eliminate poor answers first and guess if you can eliminate at least one silly answer.

Writing Skills Section

This section is usually comprised of both multiple-choice questions and a reading passage.

Multiple-Choice Questions: In the very first multiple-choice section, you are asked to identify the errors in each sentence. There should be a good number of questions that can be resolved by simple identifying subject/verb agreement, subject/subject agreement, and by employing the concept of parallelism. In the next section, where you are asked to rewrite the underlined portion, please keep in mind that it is usually the shortest or rather the most concise answer roughly half the time. A number of the answers may also be the next shortest. When in doubt, it is prudent to plug in the shortest answer first and then if it works go on to next question. However, if the shortest answer does not work, plug in the next shortest. The next section deals with reading passages, but the questions are usually fairly easy to address; furthermore, several of them reflect a format similar to those found in earlier questions. The last section reflects the same format as the first one.

Essay: Students have 25 minutes to complete the essay. Begin by taking a couple minutes to create an outline in response to the prompt. Consider writing either a 4 or 5 paragraph response. One option is to respond with an introduction, a second paragraph in favor of the position, a third paragraph opposed to the position, and a conclusion. The second option should include an introduction, three paragraphs exploring three different elements or aspects of the statement, and a conclusion. College Board will supply you with two lined sheets of paper; please try to fill them both up.

Closing Notes: Please remember to take hard candy with you to the test. Students should unwrap several pieces the night before and put them in a sandwich bag. Simple sugar will actually speed up the firing of the brain neurons thus enhancing your reaction time and fighting fatigue as well. Remember, never leave anything blank and, when guessing at the end of a section, always look over the spread of your previous answers first, before guessing. You should always choose the answers that you are lacking. Adequate preparation must also include plenty of rest the night before the test and repetition utilizing the various strategies outlined in this handout. The best way to practice is by utilizing real sample tests such as the free publication, "SAT Preparation Booklet" found at the following URL address: <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/k-12/prepare/srp/free>

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