

# A.C.T. Test Preparation – English *Handouts available in the Writing Center*

The English test is a 75-question, 45-minute test, covering

## **Standard Written English**

- punctuation
- grammar and usage
- sentence structure

## **Rhetorical Skills**

- strategy
- organization
- style

The test consists of five prose passages, each one followed by multiple-choice test questions. Different passage types are included to provide variety. Some questions refer to underlined portions of the passage and offer several alternatives to the portion underlined. You must decide which choice is most appropriate in the context of the passage. Some questions ask about an underlined portion, a section of the passage, or the passage as a whole. You must decide which choice best answers the question posed. Many questions include **"NO CHANGE"** to the passage as one of the choices. The questions are numbered consecutively. Each question number corresponds to an underlined portion in the passage or to a box located in the passage.

## **Content Covered by the ACT English Test**

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Six elements of effective writing are included in the English Test: punctuation, grammar, sentence structure, strategy, organization, and style. The questions covering punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure make up the Usage/Mechanics subscore. The questions covering strategy, organization, and style make up the Rhetorical Skills subscore.

### **Usage/Mechanics**

- **Punctuation (13%).** Questions in this category test your knowledge of the conventions of internal and end-of-sentence punctuation, with emphasis on the relationship of punctuation to meaning (for example, avoiding ambiguity, indicating appositives).
- **Grammar and Usage (16%).** Questions in this category test your understanding of agreement between subject and verb, between pronoun and antecedent, and between modifiers and the word modified; verb formation; pronoun case; formation of comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs; and idiomatic usage.
- **Sentence Structure (24%).** Questions in this category test your understanding of relationships between and among clauses, placement of modifiers, and shifts in construction.

### **Rhetorical Skills**

- **Strategy (16%).** Questions in this category test how well you develop a given topic by choosing expressions appropriate to an essay's audience and purpose; judging the effect of adding, revising, or deleting supporting material; and choosing effective opening, transitional, and closing sentences.
- **Organization (15%).** Questions in this category test how well you organize ideas and judge the relevance of statements in context (making decisions about order, coherence, and unity).
- **Style (16%).** Questions in this category test how well you select precise and appropriate words and images, maintain the level of style and tone in an essay, manage sentence elements for rhetorical effectiveness, and avoid ambiguous pronoun references, wordiness, and redundancy.

For sample questions, see: <http://www.actstudent.org/sampletest/test1/engl/englishtest.html>

For tips and strategies on the English multiple-choice test, see: <http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/tips/subtests.html>

*See other side for Writing Test information* →

# English writing test

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The Writing Test is a 30-minute essay test that measures your writing skills—specifically those writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses. The test consists of one writing prompt that will define an issue and describe two points of view on that issue. You are asked to respond to a question about your position on the issue described in the writing prompt. In doing so, you may adopt one or the other of the perspectives described in the prompt, or you may present a different point of view on the issue. Your essay score will not be affected by the point of view you take on the issue.

## Tips for the Writing Test

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You'll have 30 minutes to read and think about the issue in the prompt, and to plan and write your essay. Here are some quick tips to help you use your time effectively.

- Carefully read the instructions on the cover of the test booklet.
- Do some planning before writing the essay—You will be instructed to do your prewriting in your Writing Test booklet. You can refer to these notes as you write the essay on the lined pages in your answer folder.
  - **Carefully consider the prompt** and make sure you understand it—reread it if you aren't sure.
  - **Decide how you want to answer** the question in the prompt.
  - **Then jot down your ideas** on the topic: this might simply be a list of ideas, reasons, and examples that you will use to explain your point of view on the issue.
  - **Write down what you think** others might say in opposition to your point of view and think about how you would refute their arguments.
  - **Think of how best to organize** the ideas in your essay.
- At the beginning of your essay, make sure readers will see that you understand the issue.
- Explain your point of view in a clear and logical way.
- If possible, discuss the issue in a broader context or evaluate the implications or complications of the issue.
- Address what others might say to refute your point of view and present a counter-argument.
- Use specific examples.
- Vary the structure of your sentences, and use varied and precise word choices.
- Make logical relationships clear by using transitional words and phrases.
- Do not wander off the topic.
- End with a strong conclusion that summarizes or reinforces your position.
- If there is time, do a final check of the essay when it is finished.
  - Correct any mistakes in grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling.
  - If you find any words that are hard to read, recopy them so your readers can read them easily.
  - Make any corrections and revisions neatly, between the lines (but not in the margins).

## Practicing for the Writing Test

There are many ways to prepare for the ACT Writing Test. You may be surprised that these include reading newspapers and magazines, listening to news analyses on television or radio, and participating in discussions and debates about issues and problems. These activities help you become more familiar with current issues, with different perspectives on those issues, and with strategies that skilled writers and speakers use to present their points of view.

Of course, one of the best ways to prepare for the ACT Writing Test is to practice writing. Practice writing different kinds of texts, for different purposes, with different audiences in mind. The writing you do in your English classes will help you. So will practice in writing essays, stories, poems, plays, editorials, reports, letters to the editor, a personal journal, or other kinds of writing that you do on your own. Because the ACT Writing Test asks you to explain your perspective on an issue in a convincing way, writing opportunities like editorials or letters to the editor of a newspaper are especially helpful. Practicing a variety of different kinds of writing will help make you a versatile writer able to adjust to different writing assignments.

It's also a good idea to get some practice writing within a time limit. This will help build skills that are important in college-level learning and in the world of work.

For more ways to build your writing skills see: <http://www.actstudent.org/writing/prepare/build.html>

For sample essays in the Writing Test, see: <http://www.actstudent.org/writing/sample/index.html>