

The ACT[®]

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Research &
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Readiness

Question
of the Day

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Description of the ACT

The ACT consists of four multiple-choice tests: English, mathematics, reading, and science. The ACT with writing includes the four multiple-choice tests and a [writing test](#).

Test			Content
English	75 questions	45 minutes	Measures standard written English and rhetorical skills.
Mathematics	60 questions	60 minutes	Measures mathematical skills students have typically acquired in courses taken up to the beginning of grade 12.
Reading	40 questions	35 minutes	Measures reading comprehension.
Science	40 questions	35 minutes	Measures the interpretation, analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving skills required in the natural sciences.
Optional Writing Test	1 prompt	40 minutes	Measures writing skills emphasized in high school English classes and in entry-level college composition courses.

Colleges

Colleges use ACT results in a variety of ways:

- **Admissions decisions**
ACT test results, high school grades, academic preparation, out-of-class accomplishments, and future plans—these and other kinds of information help admissions officials identify applicants who can benefit most from their programs.
- **Course placement**
Colleges usually try to take into account individual strengths and weaknesses as they place students in first-year courses. For example, a college may offer three sections of a subject—developmental, regular, and advanced. A student's ACT test results, academic background, and high school grades might be used to determine which section would be most appropriate.
- **Academic advising**
College academic advisors may consider ACT results, high school academic program, high school grades, planned extracurricular activities, areas in which there is a need for assistance, and part-time employment plans to tailor an appropriate program of study to a student.
- **Scholarships and loans**
Some scholarship and loan agencies may use ACT test results with other information such as high school grades to identify qualified candidates. However, the agencies may not look at academic potential alone. The ACT score report provides information about a student's educational needs, extracurricular achievements, and educational plans. This information, along with high school grades and test scores, helps the agencies evaluate applications for scholarships, loans, and other financial assistance.

ACT College Readiness Benchmarks

The Benchmarks are scores on the ACT subject-area tests that represent the level of achievement required for students to have a 50% chance of obtaining a B or higher or about a 75% chance of obtaining a C or higher in corresponding credit-bearing first-year college courses. These college courses include English composition, college algebra, introductory social science courses, and biology. Based on a sample of 214 institutions and more than 230,000 students from across the United States, the Benchmarks are median course placement values for these institutions and as such represent a *typical* set of expectations. The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are:

College Course	ACT Subject-Area Test	ACT Explore®	ACT Plan®	The ACT®
English Composition	English	13	15	18
College Algebra	Mathematics	17	19	22
Social Sciences	Reading	16	18	22
Biology	Science	18	20	23

Recommended College Prep Courses

English	Four years of English
Mathematics	Three years of mathematics, including rigorous courses in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II (TN requires 4 years of mathematics)
Natural Sciences	Three years of science, including rigorous courses in Biology, Chemistry, and Physics
Social Studies	Three years of social studies
Additional Courses	Some colleges and universities require other classes as prerequisites for admission, such as two or more years of the same foreign language or courses in the visual arts, music, theater, drama, dance, computer science, etc.

The GPA Myth

"It doesn't matter which classes I take in high school, as long as my grade point average is high."

If you're playing the GPA game and taking a light schedule that isn't challenging, it will catch up with you at the college level very quickly. One of the things admissions officers pay attention to, besides GPA, is course selection throughout high school and especially senior year. They like to see students have momentum going into the freshman year. If you sit back your senior year, it's hard to recapture that momentum.

Course selection can also affect admissions test scores. If you just go for a good GPA, you'll be less prepared for college and will score lower on entrance exams.

Plan Your High School Course Selections

Colleges care about which courses you're taking in high school.

The courses you take in high school show colleges what kind of goals you set for yourself. Are you signing up for advanced classes, honors sections, or accelerated sequences? Are you choosing **electives** that really stretch your mind and help you develop new abilities? Or are you doing just enough to get by?

Electives are courses students may select to meet total graduation requirements.

Colleges will be more impressed by respectable grades in challenging courses than by outstanding grades in easy ones.

Do your high school course selections match what most colleges expect you to know? For example, many colleges require two to four years of foreign language study.

5 Reading Passages to Edit – 15 Questions Each Passage

# Questions	Percentage	Category	Explanation
Usage/Mechanics			
10	13%	Punctuation	<i>Conventions of internal and end punctuation, emphasizing relationship of punctuation to meaning and clarity</i>
12	16%	Grammar and Usage	<i>Agreement: subject/verb, pronoun/antecedent, modifiers/word modified; verb formation; pronoun case; formation of comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs; and idiomatic usage</i>
18	24%	Sentence Structure	<i>Relationships between and among clauses, placement of modifiers, and shifts in construction</i>
Rhetorical Skills			
12	16%	Strategy	<i>Developing 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 judging the relevancy of statements in context</i>
11	15%	Organization	<i>Organizing ideas and choosing effective opening, transitional, and closing sentences</i>
12	16%	Style	<i>Choosing precise and appropriate words and images, maintaining the level of style and tone in an essay, managing sentence elements for rhetorical effectiveness, and avoiding ambiguous pronoun references, wordiness, and redundancy</i>

Reading Test – 40 Questions – 35 Minutes

4 Readings – 10 Questions Each Reading

# Questions	Percentage	Category	Explanation
10	25%	Prose Fiction	<i>Intact short stories or excerpts from short stories or novels</i>
10	25%	Humanities	<i>Passages from memoirs and personal essays and in the content areas of architecture, art, dance, ethics, film, language, literary criticism, music, philosophy, radio, television, and theater</i>
10	25%	Social Studies	<i>Passages in the content areas of anthropology, archaeology, biography, business, economics, education, geography, history, political science, psychology, and sociology</i>
10	25%	Natural Sciences	<i>Passages in the content areas of anatomy, astronomy, biology, botany, chemistry, ecology, geology, medicine, meteorology, microbiology, natural history, physiology, physics, technology, and zoology</i>

Math Test – 60 Questions – 60 Minutes

# Questions	Percentage	Category	Explanation
14	23%	Pre-Algebra	<i>Basic operations using whole numbers, decimals, fractions, and integers; place value; square roots and approximations; the concept of exponents; scientific notation; factors; ratio, proportion, and percent; linear equations in one variable; absolute value and ordering numbers by value; elementary counting techniques and simple probability; data collection, representation, and interpretation; and understanding simple descriptive statistics</i>
10	17%	Elementary Algebra	<i>Properties of exponents and square roots, evaluation of algebraic expressions through substitution, using variables to express functional relationships, understanding algebraic operations, and the solution of quadratic equations by factoring</i>
9	15%	Intermediate Algebra	<i>Understanding of the quadratic formula, rational and radical expressions, absolute value equations and inequalities, sequences and patterns, systems of equations, quadratic inequalities, functions, modeling, matrices, roots of polynomials, and complex numbers</i>

9	15%	Coordinate Geometry	<i>Graphing and the relations between equations and graphs, including points, lines, polynomials, circles, and other curves; graphing inequalities; slope; parallel and perpendicular lines; distance; midpoints; and conics</i>
14	23%	Plane Geometry	<i>Properties and relations of plane figures, including angles and relations among perpendicular and parallel lines; properties of circles, triangles, rectangles, parallelograms, and trapezoids; transformations; the concept of proof and proof techniques; volume; and applications of geometry to three dimensions</i>
4	7%	Trigonometry	<i>Understanding trigonometric relations in right triangles; values and properties of trigonometric functions; graphing trigonometric functions; modeling using trigonometric functions; use of trigonometric identities; and solving trigonometric equations</i>

Science and Reasoning Test – 40 Questions – 35 Minutes

7 Reading Passages with Graphs, Images, and Tables – 5/6 Questions Each Passage

# Questions	Percentage	Category	Explanation
15	38%	Data Representation	<i>This format presents graphic and tabular material similar to that found in science journals and texts. The questions associated with this format measure skills such as graph reading, interpretation of scatter plots, and interpretation of information presented in tables.</i>
18	45%	Research Summaries	<i>This format provides descriptions of one or more related experiments. The questions focus upon the design of experiments and the interpretation of experimental results.</i>
7	17%	Conflicting Viewpoints	<i>This format presents expressions of several hypotheses or views that, being based on differing premises or on incomplete data, are inconsistent with one another. The questions focus upon the understanding, analysis, and comparison of alternative viewpoints or hypotheses.</i>

ACT Test Question Breakdown