

## The ACT: Strategies for Maximizing Student Performance

- **Scoring**
  - A 20 is approximately 50-51% of the test correct.
- **Managing Time**
  - English: A student with a goal of 20 should plan to finish 4 passages
  - Math: A 20 is approximately 30 questions correct. Students should NEVER rush through the math problems. Rushing leads to careless mistakes and missed problems. Finishing does not help if questions are missed.
  - Reading: A student with a goal of 20 should plan to finish 3 passages.
  - Science: A student with a goal of 20 should plan to finish 5 passages.
- **Act Prep- Areas of Focus**
  - English: Spelling, vocabulary, and rote recall of rules of grammar aren't tested. Vocabulary words of the day are not going to increase ACT scores. Grammar practice needs to focus on writing and revision
  - Math: There are 9 Intermediate Algebra and 4 Trigonometry questions on the test. Focusing on advanced concepts (Quadratic Formula, Trig Identities) is not the best use of time. There are 14 Pre-Algebra and 10 Elementary Algebra questions on the test. Don't forget that if a student has an ACT goal of 20, they need approximately 30 questions. 24 of these questions come from material that they learned in 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics.
  - Reading: The Reading test requires students to read text and answer questions. Sitting down and reading a novel is not enough to prepare students. Students need regular practice reading pieces of text and answering questions based on that text.
  - Science: The ACT Science section does not test *knowledge* of science. It tests ability *to deal with* science. Students have to interpret charts, understand the design of experiments, and resolve disputes between competing theories. Students need practice reading and answering questions about scientific articles/passages.

- **Approaches to Test Taking**

- English: Examine each answer choice and determine how it differs from the others. Many of the questions in the test will involve more than one aspect of writing. Then, reread the sentence, using your selected answer.
- Math:
  - Back solve- Take advantage of the multiple-choice format. Sometimes it helps to try out each answer choice until you find one that works.
  - Pick numbers- Some problems are hard because they are general or abstract. Replace variables with specific numbers.
  - Guesstimate- Even if you cannot figure out an answer, figure out a ballpark estimate. Estimating can help you eliminate at least one or two answer choices.
- Reading:
  - Students should NOT read the questions before reading the passage. The ACT is a timed test. Although it is often a good idea to read questions before reading a passage, there is simply not enough time to do this on the ACT.
  - The passages do not have to be answered in order. Read and answer the questions for the easy passages first. Be sure to leave the most difficult passage for last. If you are aiming to finish 3 passages, this is the passage that you may not get to read.
  - When time is short, skim each passage by reading the first and last sentence of each paragraph. Also glance at highlighted words.
- Science: The Science test is not a Reading test. Do not read the passage carefully at first! Skim; read only the first and last sentences of each paragraph. Look over any charts and diagrams just enough to get an idea of what they are about.

- **ACT Prep Materials**

- Test Information Release (TIR): Available in December, April, and June. List of your answers, a copy of the multiple-choice test questions used to determine your score, the answer key, and scoring instructions. Encourage students to test on these test dates
- The Real ACT Prep Guide: This is the prep book sold by ACT. This is prep book contains actual retired tests.
- Websites:
  - [www.number2.com](http://www.number2.com)
  - <http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/>