

Resource Manual

Expert Tips for ACT English



WINWARD
ACADEMY



Before reviewing specific tips for the ACT English section, let's ensure you know the rules that apply to the entire test.

Never leave an answer choice blank. There is no penalty for a wrong answer, so you should always provide an answer, even if it's a guess.

When practicing, never leave a mistake behind. You'll repeat errors if you don't identify and learn from them, so you must understand the answer to every question you ever practice. The best way to make sure you actually know a concept is to teach it to someone else.

Never do a timed practice without a scantron. Yes, you have to practice bubbling. Many students make mistakes by filling in a different bubble than they intended or by skipping a line. Don't be one of them.



10 Tips for the ACT English



Questions: 75 Total



Time: 45 Minutes

(5 passages with 15 questions each, so 9 minutes, on average, per passage)

Now for the specific tips:

1. Be pithy

You want to choose answers that are short, sweet, and to the point, but you also want to make sure you keep enough detail so the reader will understand the context. Be specific and use as few words as possible to communicate the intended message.

2. Read carefully

Sneaky questions like "all of the following EXCEPT" or "which one is the LEAST acceptable?" can trip up students. Don't go on autopilot looking for the right answer. Read carefully, and don't get tricked by these EXCEPT, NOT, and LEAST questions.

3. Don't stop until you get to their period (AKA - read carefully and completely)

Often when revising a sentence, you're changing a verb, pronoun, or punctuation mark in the middle of the sentence. Many students only read to where they make the revision and then move on to the next question without reading all the way to the period. That's a problematic approach and can lead to preventable mistakes. You must read the entire sentence before you revise it.

4. Learn homophones

The ACT loves to test its vs. it's and your vs. you're and their vs. there vs. they're. Revisit your grammar and grade school lessons and become an expert in homophones (words like "its" and "it's" that are pronounced the same way but have a different meaning and spelling).

5. Follow instructions

"Follow instructions" probably sounds like a very weird thing to suggest as a tip, but it's actually incredibly important. There will be questions that say, "which of the following ____." Examples include, "Which of the following is colorful," "Which of the following is the most specific," or "Which of the following allows you to visualize the scene?" The answer is the one that's colorful; it's the one that's specific; it's the one that allows you to visualize. Do exactly what the questions say.

6. Be specific & formal

Think of how to speak in a proper, sophisticated way by avoiding slang and casual language. It's imperative to be specific and formal.

7. Form a bridge with transitions

Transitions form a bridge between what comes before and what comes after. They're only one word – but that one word is powerful. If someone says, "I really like you, and" versus "I really like you, but" just the word "and" or "but" signals an entirely different meaning to what's coming next. When choosing a transition, consider carefully what comes before and what comes after.

8. Never put a comma between two complete sentences

This is number one, number one, number one. Never put a comma between two complete sentences. This mistake is referred to as a comma splice, and the ACT loves testing them. Consider the following: "I see two complete sentences, they're separated by a comma." It's not immediately obvious, but that comma should not be there. Because the sentence "sounds" right, students don't always notice that the comma should be a period or a semi-colon.

9. Never repeat yourself

Avoid redundancy on these exams. If you see a sentence that reads, "I played soccer on artificial turf that was not real grass," that phrase is redundant. Artificial means it's fake, so you don't need to say it's not real. Correct any redundant information on the ACT.

10. Be consistent

When thinking about being consistent, think about tense. If you're writing in past tense, stay in past tense, and if you're writing in present tense, you will want to continue in present tense.

Overall, the ACT English section will test you on (1) conventions of English (grammar, punctuation, and usage) and (2) expression of ideas (development of ideas, organization, and effective use of language). The ACT English questions are not arranged in order of difficulty. Most students end up working through and finishing this section of the ACT with fewer pacing challenges than in the Math, Reading, and Science sections.

The English language can feel like an overwhelming number of rules. Fortunately, the ACT English section tests a finite set of defined conventions. Students who focus on mastering the most frequently tested rules can easily master this section.