

What's a Standardized Test, Anyway?

Have you ever wondered what's so standard about a standardized test? Does it seem like the only standard thing you understand about them is your elevated anxiety level?

Relax! There's no great mystery or conspiracy here. You've probably been taking them since elementary school, though you may not have realized it. Almost every state has a statewide program in which all students in a certain grade take a standardized test. If you think back far enough, you can probably remember filling in circles on an answer sheet somewhere around 3rd grade — and being required to have three sharpened #2 pencils on hand.

The purpose of standardized tests is **to compare** the abilities and skills of students from different schools and backgrounds. Standardized tests give an idea of students' **potential performance**. They supposedly predict how well students will perform. Scores are used in an educational system to determine what level of instruction for which a student is prepared.

Standardized test **results** convey a picture of a student's skills at a particular point in time; they are, in effect, a **snapshot** of a moving target. As a result, they should never be the sole basis for school decisions.

General Test Tips (from www.ACTtest101.com)

- Pace yourself. You have a limited amount of time for each test section. In the English, reading, and science sections, don't spend too much time reading the passages before moving to the questions. Don't dwell for too long on the more difficult questions. Come back to them at the end if time allows.
- Answer the questions you're sure of first. Don't spend too much time on the hard questions. Mark the ones you skip, and then return to them at the end if you have time. You're not penalized for guessing.
- Familiarize yourself with the directions for each test portion beforehand, but still take the time to read all the directions carefully during the test. **The English, reading, and science sections ask for the best answer, while the math test asks for the correct answer.** Look at all the multiple-choice options before selecting one.
- On more difficult questions, use logic to eliminate incorrect answers. Then make an educated guess on the remaining choices.
- Answer every question. The ACT doesn't penalize you for incorrect answers. You're better off guessing at an answer than skipping a question.
- If you have time left over at the end of a section, go back and review your answers.

The ACT English test gives you 45 minutes to answer 75 questions that test two skill sets—your written skills and your rhetorical skills. The 40 questions on written skills test your abilities at punctuation, sentence structure, grammar, and usage. The 35 questions on rhetorical skills test your strategy, organization, and style abilities. You receive an overall English score, as well as two subscores—one for Usage and Mechanics and one for Rhetorical Skills.

The English test includes five passages, each with a set of questions following it. One question type that appears often on this test asks you to replace an underlined phrase with the alternate text that best fits in its place. Many of these questions include a multiple-choice option of “No Change.” Selecting this answer means you believe the underlined text should not be changed. The test also includes questions on each passage as a whole rather than a specific phrase. These questions don’t include underlined phrases. They come at the end of each passage’s section and include their own set of directions.

Some tips will help you score well on the ACT English test:

- Pace yourself. You have 45 minutes to answer 75 questions. If you spend about 90 seconds skimming each passage, you’ll have about 30 seconds to answer each question.
- Read the underlined phrases thoroughly. Avoid making a hasty decision without examining the phrase and each answer choice carefully. Each passage has a different topic and writing style. In addition, some questions ask you to choose the phrase that represents the least likely replacement for the underlined text, so make sure you read each question carefully, as well.
- Pay attention to more than just a single writing element in each underlined phrase and answer choice. Many incorrect multiple-choice answers will correct one aspect of the phrase but will cause another error.

The math portion of the ACT is designed to test the math skills you’ve learned up through the start of your senior year. It includes 60 multiple-choice questions. You have 60 minutes to complete it. The test makes you use reasoning skills to solve practical math problems. It tests your knowledge of basic formulas and computational skills, not complex formulas. You can use a calculator for this portion of the test.

The math test includes six different sections—pre-algebra, elementary algebra, intermediate algebra, coordinate geometry, plane geometry, and trigonometry.

You receive four scores on the math test: one overall score out of 60; a pre-algebra and elementary algebra sub-score out of 24; an intermediate algebra and coordinate geometry sub-score out of 18; and a plane geometry and trigonometry sub-score out of 18.

Several tips will help you through the ACT math test:

- Pace yourself. Try not to spend more than a minute on each question. If you can spend less than a minute per question, you’ll have time to review your work at the end.
- Don’t waste time using your calculator if you don’t need it. You should be able to solve all the calculations without it. Sometimes, using scratch paper is more efficient than using a calculator.
- Try to work forward instead of backward to solve the problem. This will save time. Use scratch paper as needed.
- Find the solution in the multiple-choice answers. If it’s not there, review the question to make sure you didn’t miss any information, and double check your work.
- Make sure you’re answering the right question. Incorrect multiple-choice answers often include the correct answers to a different problem, or an incomplete solution for the right problem.
- Use common sense to make sure your answer is plausible for the problem. Take a moment to think about your answer before going to the next question.
- If you have time remaining at the end, go back and re-read the questions and double check your answers.

The reading section of the ACT tests your reading comprehension. It includes four passages that are written at a college-freshman level of difficulty. You must read each passage and then answer a series of questions on it. You have 35 minutes to answer 40 questions.

Aim to spend two to three minutes reading each passage and about 25 to 35 seconds answering each question. The questions test your ability to derive meaning from what each passage states explicitly and to use reasoning to determine what is implied through the text. You will need to make inferences to determine main ideas, understand sequences of events, make comparisons, understand cause-and-effect relationships, draw generalizations, and more.

The ACT reading test covers four main sections—social studies, which include subjects such as history, psychology, and business; natural sciences, which include topics such as anatomy, physics, and chemistry; prose fiction, which includes excerpts from short stories and novels; and humanities, which includes passages from personal memoirs and essays on art, film, music, and more.

Each section comprises 25 percent of your total score. You'll receive two sub-scores for the reading test—one for your social studies and sciences reading comprehension and one for your arts and literature reading skills.

Several tips will help improve your score for the reading test:

- Pace yourself. If you spend two to three minutes reading each passage, you'll have about 35 seconds for each question. If possible, try to leave time at the end to review your answers.
- Read each passage carefully. You should have enough time to read the entire text instead of skimming. As you read, try to make connections between various ideas in the text. Make notes as needed.
- Refer back to the passage as you answer the questions. Don't answer them based solely on what you remember from one reading. Some questions will come from what the text states directly. Others will ask you to make inferences based on what you read.

The ACT science test presents you with seven sets of information on the natural sciences, followed by multiple-choice questions on each information section. It tests how well you can interpret, analyze, evaluate, reason, and solve problems based on scientific information. The questions are designed to determine your ability to understand the basic concepts and meanings of the information. You have 35 minutes to answer 40 questions. You may not use a calculator.

The idea of the science section is to test your scientific reasoning ability, rather than specific scientific knowledge or your reading or math skills. The information sections present the scientific data in three different formats. The data representation sections comprise 38 percent of the test. These questions test your skills in analyzing information in graphs, tables, and other similar formats as they might appear in scientific journals or texts. The research summaries—45 percent of the test—give you descriptions of several related experiments. The questions examine your ability to understand experiment design and interpret experiment results. The conflicting viewpoints sections make up 17 percent of the test. These questions present alternate, inconsistent viewpoints on a topic and test your ability to understand, analyze, and compare differing hypotheses.

Some tips will help you perform well on the ACT science test:

- Pace yourself. You have 35 minutes to answer 40 questions. If you spend about 30 seconds on each question, you'll have plenty of time left at the end to review your answers and go back to the more difficult questions.
- Read the scientific information carefully before reading the questions. Make notes as needed in the test booklet or on scratch paper.
- In the opposing viewpoints sections, make notes as you read each alternate viewpoint. This makes comparing them easier when you have to answer the questions that present you with differing hypothesis and want you to distinguish between them.

The ACT includes a 30-minute writing test that measures your writing skills. The writing test is entirely optional and does not affect your score for the rest of the test. You must sign up for the ACT Plus Writing to be able to take it. It comes at the end of the four multiple-choice sections.

The writing test presents a prompt, followed by two opposing viewpoints. You must select one of these viewpoints or come up with one of your own and write an essay supporting it. The essay tests your ability to make a judgment on the prompt and express your viewpoint; focus on a topic throughout the essay; support your viewpoint with logical reasoning; organize your thoughts logically; and express yourself clearly and effectively in writing. You'll receive two scores on the writing test—a combined English/writing score on a scale of one to 36 and a writing subscore on a scale of two to 12. You'll also receive comments on your essay with your scores.

Some tips will help you score well on the writing test. First, pace yourself, and use your 30 minutes wisely. Spend the first five minutes organizing your thoughts and planning what you want to write. Spend 20 to 25 minutes writing the essay, and save a few minutes at the end to review what you've written. Before you dive into the writing, think about the issue and what you want to say. Jot down a rough outline for an interesting introduction, a few paragraphs that support your viewpoint, and a conclusion that ties all your ideas together. This will help you use your writing time more efficiently and will actually save you time. Finally, after you're done writing, review your essay for any grammatical, punctuation, or spelling mistakes. Make sure your supporting ideas relate directly to your thesis and your conclusion connects your supporting paragraphs to your introduction.

Standardized tests are intended to give parents information about their children, teachers information about their students, and school districts information about the effectiveness of their programs. They're developed so a student's test scores can be compared with the scores of others in the same grade. They provide precise information about students' basic academic skills, telling us whether they're above, at, or below grade level.

At the same time, be cautious in drawing conclusions from test scores alone. Teacher and parent judgments, grades, and classroom performance are important, too.

(njfamily.com)

An **achievement test** is a [test](#) of developed skill or knowledge. The most common type of achievement test is a [standardized test](#) developed to measure skills and knowledge learned in a given grade level, usually through planned instruction, such as training or classroom instruction.^{[1][2]} Achievement tests are often contrasted with tests that measure [aptitude](#), a more general and stable [cognitive](#) trait.

Achievement [test scores](#) are often High achievement scores usually indicate a mastery of grade-level material, and the readiness for advanced instruction. Low achievement scores can indicate the need for remediation or repeating a course grade.

(en.wikipedia.org)