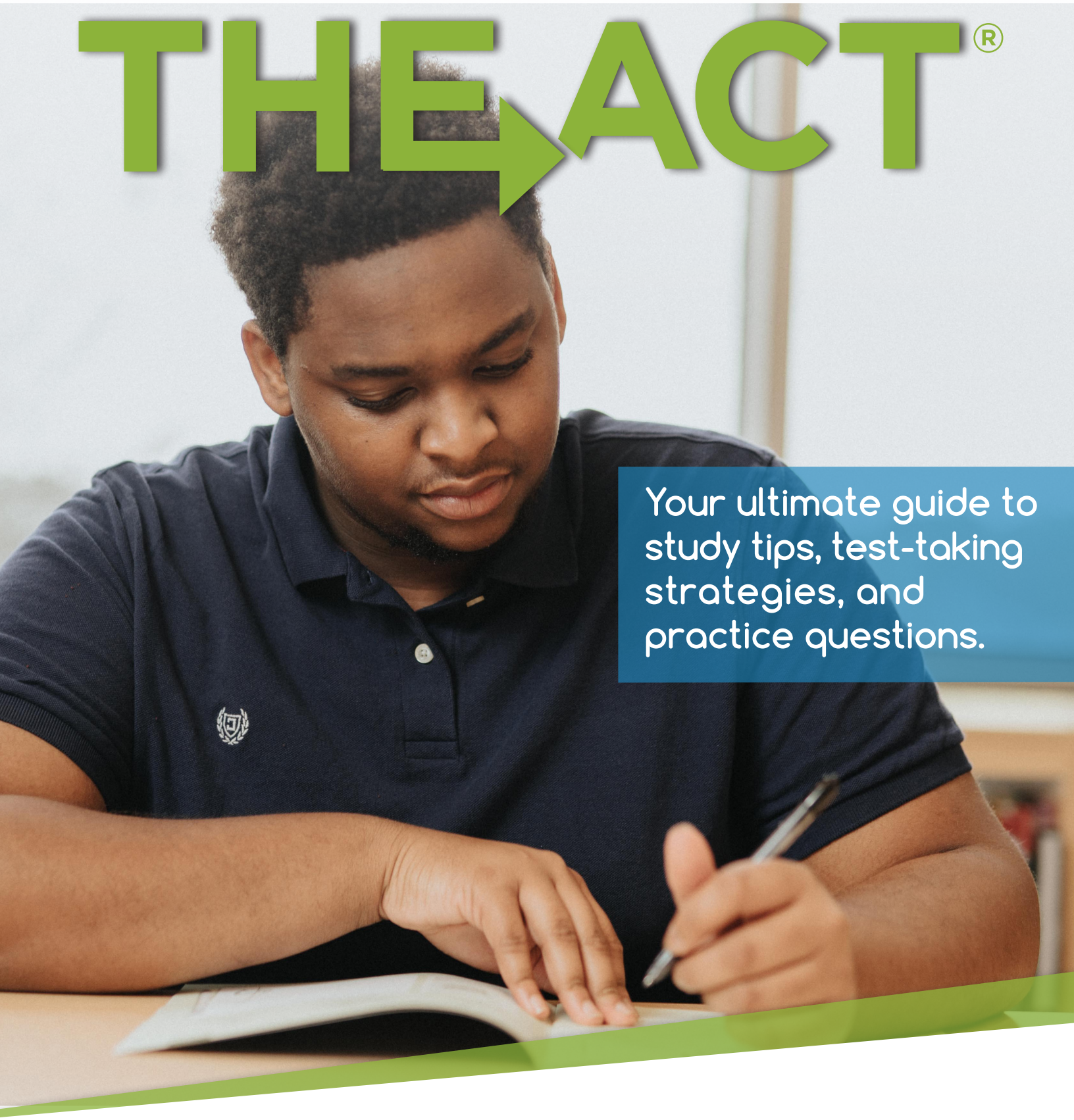
TAKE ACTION ON

THE ACT®



Your ultimate guide to study tips, test-taking strategies, and practice questions.

Additional practice problems at act.org

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get2college
WOODWARD HINES EDUCATION FOUNDATION

ABOUT THE ACT®

Most eleventh graders in public schools take the ACT® at school. Most colleges and universities use ACT® scores as a part of the admission process.

Your results provide one way to measure your potential for:

- ADMISSION
- STATE FINANCIAL AID (MTAG, MESG, AND HELP GRANT)
- CLASS PLACEMENT (DEVELOPMENTAL COURSES)
- SCHOLARSHIP EVALUATION
- ACADEMIC ADVISING

CHECK THE ACT® WEBSITE FOR TEST DATES AND REGISTRATION DEADLINES

ACT.ORG

ACT® Fees*

National ACT® tests require fees unless you qualify for a fee-waiver.

ACT® for Free

Two fee waivers are offered to help lower-income students pay for the ACT®. Ask your high school counselor or Get2College if you qualify!

NEED MORE TEST PREP HELP?

Request your ACT My Answer Key. It shows you exactly what you got right and wrong on the ACT test.

My Answer Key is available during Saturday tests in October 2025, April 2026, and June 2026. It is an additional $34.00 for each test.

My Answer Key is $34 before the test and $42 after the test has been administered.

"THE ACT® IS NOT AN IQ TEST!"

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SUPERSCORE?

An ACT® Superscore is the average of a student's best scores from each section from multiple test attempts. The ACT® Superscore is calculated using the English, math, and reading scores. The ACT® science section is no longer required by ACT®.

HOW ARE ACT® SUPERSCORES USED?

Some colleges and universities in Mississippi will use the new ACT® Superscore for college admission and scholarships. In addition, the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid (MOSFA) will accept the ACT® Superscore.

WHO GETS THE ACT® SUPERSCORE INFORMATION?

ACT® provides an automatically calculated ACT® Superscore to all students who have taken the ACT® more than once. ACT® will automatically send your scores to the places requested when you registered for the test. Make sure to include the Mississippi Office of Student Financial Aid (code: 2431). If you need to send the Superscore after the test date, just log in to MyACT® to view and send scores. Sending a Superscore report may have an additional fee.

ACT® Sample Award Packages

Example College #1: 4-YEAR ACT® SCHOLARSHIP									
ACT® SCORE	**25**	**26**	**27**	**28**	**29**	**30**	**31**	**32**	**33+**
SCHOLARSHIP	$1,500	$1,900	$2,250	$3,000	$3,500	$4,500	$5,500	$7,500	$8,190

Example College #2: 4-YEAR ACT® SCHOLARSHIP			
ACT® SCORE	**22-24**	**25-26**	**27+**
SCHOLARSHIP	Tuition	Tuition, room, and board	Tuition, room, board, fees, and books

Example College #3: 2-YEAR ACT® SCHOLARSHIP			
ACT® SCORE	**22-24**	**25-27**	**28+**
SCHOLARSHIP	Half Tuition	Full Tuition	Tuition, room, board, and books

WHAT IS THE FORMAT OF THE ACT®?

The ACT® is divided into three required sections of English, math, and reading. The science and writing sections are optional.

Section	# of Questions	Time (min)	Content
English	50	35	Grammar, usage, mechanics, and rhetorical skills
Mathematics	45	50	Pre-algebra, elementary algebra, intermediate algebra, coordinate geometry, geometry, and elementary trigonometry
Reading	36	40	Reading comprehension
Science (optional for official scoring but may be required by certain colleges or universities.)	40	40	Interpretation, data analysis, evaluation, reasoning, and problem-solving
Some colleges require the writing test - learn more at act.org			

IS THE ACT® AN IQ TEST?

The ACT® is NOT an IQ test! If this is how you've been approaching the ACT®: "I'll just wake up on Saturday, take the test, and do the best I can," you are not giving yourself your best shot.

Questions on the ACT® are directly related to what students have learned in high school courses. There are advantages to beginning testing in your junior year.

- You've probably completed the coursework corresponding to the test material.
- Colleges will receive your scores and may begin recruiting you.
- You'll have the opportunity to practice and retest if you feel your scores don't accurately reflect your abilities in the areas tested.

> **I KEEP GETTING THE SAME SCORE.**
>
> 1. Interpret score report.
> 2. ACT® My Answer Key.
> 3. Study the content for the types of questions that you miss most frequently.

GENERAL TEST-TAKING TIPS

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THE ACT®

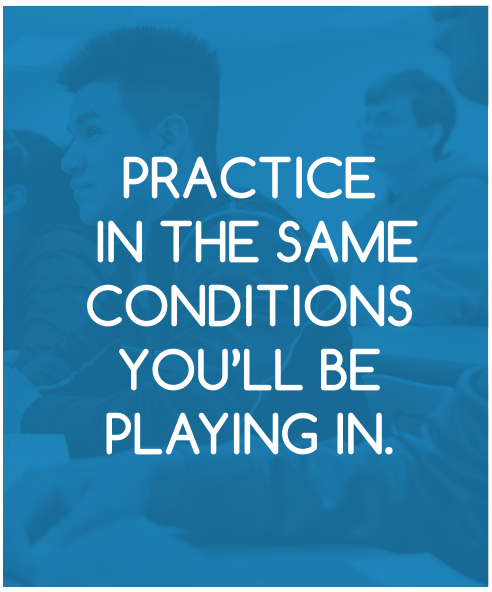
In order to do the best you can, you need to work on four main areas: content, endurance, testing strategies, and time management. If you don't know basic math content, strategies and endurance are not going to matter much. Build your endurance so that you can sit comfortably taking a test for 2+ hours. Know the strategies well enough to use them during the test easily. Finally, pace yourself to make sure that you can complete the entire test.

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE + STRATEGIES + ENDURANCE + ACCURACY / SPEED

= HIGHER ACT® SCORE

These skills can be developed, but that practice is necessary!

Think of the ACT® as a basketball game. It would be absurd for a basketball team to play a game without practicing for it. Usually, teams practice for several weeks before their first game, even if it is a game against an inferior team. For big games, the practice sessions are more frequent and more intense. So before you take the ACT®, you need to practice ACT® strategy fundamentals!



How much should you study prior to the test? That depends. Some professionals recommend practicing almost every day for several weeks before the test, while others recommend taking a certain number of practice tests. In the end, it is up to you. These two things are clear:

1. Be consistent with your studying and make sure to take practice exams. Then take time analyzing what you missed and why. Visit get2college.org/act-prep to view practice tests!
2. Cramming for the ACT® won't work!
3. Commit to studying for the ACT® 15-20 minutes every day. For example, you can work ten math questions or complete one English passage.

IMPORTANT SMALL THINGS

The ACT® is a long test, which requires stamina on your part. It is important for you to have a game plan.

- **Make sure you are well rested before you take the test.** Most students need more than eight hours of sleep per night in order to be well rested. Several nights prior to your test, make sure you are sleeping well and long enough.
- **Eat a good, well-balanced breakfast.** Give your body some time to digest breakfast before the test. However, make sure your breakfast is filling enough to keep you from being hungry during the test. Also, eat a good snack during your break.
- **Have a stress management plan.** Manage your stress during the test by taking deep breaths often, stretching when needed, and sitting up straight. Do what you need to do in order to remain calm.
- **Don't psych yourself out during the test!** For example, if you have answered "B" four times in a row and you are tempted to do so again, don't think to yourself, "Well, I've answered B four times in a row. This next answer can't be B." It very well might be B.
- **Stay active during the test.** Use the process of elimination, write, underline, circle, and draw on the test. This physical interaction will keep you engaged! Also, be sure not to lay your head down after you finish a section.

> THERE IS NO GUESSING PENALTY ON THE ACT®.
> This means you should answer all 171 questions on the ACT®

PROCESS OF ELIMINATION (POE)

Every multiple choice question on the ACT® has three wrong answers and only one correct answer. By looking for the wrong answers instead of the correct ones, you will often be left with just a few answer choices from which you can make an educated guess. If you can narrow down your choices to two answers by Process of Elimination (POE), you have a 50/50 chance at guessing the right one, even if you don't know what the right answer actually is. You won't know the correct answer on every question, so use your POE skills to make educated guesses.

GUESSING BLINDLY

There are a few questions in each section that many students have no clue how to solve. When this happens, you want to make sure to guess. However, don't just guess in a random way! Pick your "spot of the day"- the second spot (B or G), the third spot (C or H), etc. Picking the same spot each time maximizes your chances of getting some of those questions right.

ORDER OF DIFFICULTY

Manage your time effectively. Determining the order of difficulty on each section helps you. The teacher will not check to make sure you are answering the questions in numerical order, so it is better to skip around and answer the questions from easiest to hardest. Being able to identify easy, medium, and hard questions helps you to use your time better. It also helps you concentrate on the questions you are likely to answer correctly.

TIME MANAGEMENT

Most students can't do well on the ACT® without managing their time properly. You are not allowed to use cell phones during the test, and testing centers might not be well equipped with clocks or timers, so you should wear a watch during the test. It needs to be one that doesn't make any noise. Ideally, you should wear a watch with a stopwatch (no sound) function that allows you to set the timer for each section of the test.

MATH SECTION

ABOUT YOUR CALCULATOR

- Use it as a tool, not a crutch
- Check for fresh batteries
- Practice testing with it
- Don't rely on the memory function

THE BREAKDOWN

# of Questions	Time (mins)	Content
45	50	Pre-algebra, elementary algebra, intermediate algebra, coordinate geometry, plane geometry, and elementary trigonometry

The ACT® math section tests relatively simple math concepts presented in obscure ways. There are no excuses for being surprised by the type of questions asked on the ACT® math section. Below is a sample of questions the ACT® math section may contain. The actual number of questions in each subject may change.

Algebra Questions

- Pre-Algebra questions will be based on basic number theory and manipulation of fractions and decimals.
- Algebra I/Elementary Algebra questions will be based on linear equations, ratios, percentages, etc.
- Algebra II/Intermediate Algebra questions will be based on exponents, roots, quadratics, etc.

Geometry Questions

- Plane Geometry questions will be based on angles, shapes, etc.
- Coordinate Geometry questions will be based on slope, graphing, midpoint, etc.

Trigonometry Questions

- Elementary Trigonometry questions will be based on sine, cosine, tangent, trigonometric identities, trigonometric functions, etc. Note: Although this is a sample of how many questions may be asked in each subject, you can be confident that the majority of questions on the ACT® math test will be from Algebra and Geometry. Focus your time studying these subjects!

GENERAL MATH SECTION QUICK FACTS

In general, the easier questions tend to come at the beginning of the math section, and the difficult questions tend to come at the end.

- An easy math question is one that will likely take you less than a minute to complete.
- A medium math question will take you a little longer, possibly right at a minute.
- A hard math question will likely take you longer than a minute to solve, possibly even several minutes.

Keep in mind that these are general guidelines. That means that you might see a difficult math question in the middle of the section or an easy question towards the end. Sometimes, this can mean there is an additional step such as a conversion to complete before solving the problem.

TIPS ON APPROACHING THE MATH SECTION

The first time you work through the math section, complete all of the easy questions immediately. Be sure to avoid making careless mistakes. Mark the medium questions as you proceed. These will be the questions that you think you can work but may take some extra time. When you see hard questions, ones that you have no idea how to solve, pick your spot of the day and move along. But remember, if you can eliminate one answer choice before picking your spot of the day, you increase your chances of getting the correct answer.

TIP 1

Avoid doing math when you can.
This means knowing how to use your calculator wisely, applying the strategies, and using logic instead of formulas whenever possible. Remember this distinction: there is a difference between getting the mathematically correct answer and figuring out enough about the problem to estimate the correct answer. You only have to do enough math to eliminate the wrong answers!

TIP 2

Break down word problems.
Ask yourself what the answers represent. Usually, the question at the end of the word problem will help. Break the problem into sections, using only the information you need in order to solve the problem. Writing down the different sections helps you organize the problem in your mind.

Remember: a word problem is just a regular math problem with more words. Here is the same problem presented in two different ways:

A. 160 students went on a trip to Washington, D.C. If there were 28 more girls than boys on the trip, how many boys went on the trip?

B. $X + X + 28 = 160$

TIP 3

Answers on the ACT® math section are usually ordered (from least to greatest or greatest to least).
This means you should always start with answer choice B or C. If it isn't the right answer, you can eliminate other answers as well. For example, if B or C is too small a number, and the order of answers is least to greatest, you know that D has to be the right answer.

TIP 4

Pace yourself.
Math is the longest section in regard to how much time you have. Pace yourself accordingly. Most students do NOT finish the math portion, and it is purposefully designed that way. If you can get half of the problems right, you are hitting the national average.

TIP 5

Wear a watch.
Track the amount of time spent on each problem. Make sure you are not wasting too much time working on one problem.

MATH TERMS AND FUNDAMENTALS

You cannot use the math strategies effectively if you do not know mathematics fundamentals, such as definitions, order of operations, etc. Below are some math fundamentals you will find helpful on the ACT® math section. If you are unfamiliar with the terminology or concepts and you realize that you need remedial work, seek additional help as soon as possible.

Key Term	Definition
Integer	Any number that is not a fraction
Real Number	Any rational or irrational number
Rational Number	Any integer or fraction
Prime Number	Any number divisible by only one and itself
Remainder	The number left over when one integer is divided by another
Absolute Value	The distance a number is from zero
Product	The solution to a multiplication problem
Quotient	The solution to a division problem
Sum	The solution to an addition problem
Difference	The solution to a subtraction problem
Consecutive	Integers in a sequence
Distinct	Non-repeats
Union	The collection of elements that lie in sets A, B, or both
Intersection	The point where two lines meet
Ratio	A comparison between two amounts. Ratios can be written in a few different ways: **A/B** **"The ratio of A to B"** **A:B**
Fraction	A fraction is the relation between a part to its whole
Proportion	A proportion is the relation between two quantities. Direct variation is simply another term for a proportion. As one quantity goes up, so does the other. Indirect variation is the exact opposite, when one quantity goes up as the other goes down.
Diameter	A straight line going through the middle of a circle connecting two points on a circumference
Radius	Half of the diameter; A straight line from one point on the circumference of a circle to the center point
Pi	The ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter; it is approximately 3.14
Hypotenuse	The side opposite of the right angle in a right triangle

Plugging in comes in handy often during the second half of the math section!

ALGEBRA TACTICS

Now that you have been reminded about the kinds of basic math operations you need to know, it's time for some specific math strategies. There are two main tactics that help you avoid doing complicated algebra: Plugging In and Using the Answer. These two strategies will help you solve many of the ACT® math problems. Avoiding algebra helps you turn complex algebra problems into problems that your calculator can solve. Because the ACT® doesn't require you to solve problems the "right" way, your goal should simply be to solve problems as quickly as possible. Less algebra = less time and fewer mistakes!

TACTIC 1: PLUGGING IN

Plugging in your own number allows you to avoid using algebra to solve ACT® math problems. Algebra works great when you are in math class and you have to solve each problem by showing work for each step in order to get full credit. In many cases, using algebraic formulas on the ACT® can cost you time. Remember, you don't get extra points on the ACT® for working the problem out the "right way." **Use this tactic whenever you see a variable in the problem and the answer choices.** Look for key words such as "in terms of." Here are the steps you should take to use this tactic:

1. **Set up the problem** and choose different numbers to represent each variable. Assign each variable a different number. Do not use 1 or 0 for your numbers. These numbers cause you to calculate the same answer for multiple answer choices. Pick numbers that make sense. For example, if you are working a problem about percentages, use numbers that are multiples of 10.

2. **Solve** the problem using the answers you chose.

3. **Write down the answer** you find and circle it. This is your target number.

4. **Plug in** your numbers into the variables in the answer choices and perform the calculations. Remember to begin with a middle answer choice. When your target matches one of the answers, that's the answer you should select.

EXAMPLE 1

Which of the following is an equivalent simplified expression for $2(4x + 7) - 3(2x - 4)$?

F. $x + 2$

G. $2x + 2$

H. $2x + 26$

J. $3x + 10$

Solve the answer choice using a number you choose. Do not pick 1 or 0.

Let's say that x=3.

$2(4(3) + 7) - 3(2(3) - 4)$

$2(12+7) - 3(6 - 4)$

$2(19) - 3(2)$

$38 - 6 = 32$

Then

$2(3) + 26$

$6 + 26 = 32$

MATH

TACTIC 2: USING THE ANSWER

This tactic allows you to work the problem backwards to solve questions quickly and turn difficult questions into easy ones. Use this tactic when there are numbers in the answer choices or you feel the urge to write out a long algebraic expression. Here are the steps to using this tactic:

EXAMPLE 2

What is the value of the expression $(x - y)^2$ when $x = 5$ and $y = -1$?

F. 4
G. 6
H. 16
J. 36

Step 1: What is represented in the answer choices? Label the answer choices.

Step 2: Solve the problem using the answer choices, beginning with B or C.

$(5 - -1)^2$

$(5 + 1)^2$

$(6)^2$

36

REMEMBER

Find sample questions and a full practice test at act.org.

GEOMETRY TACTICS

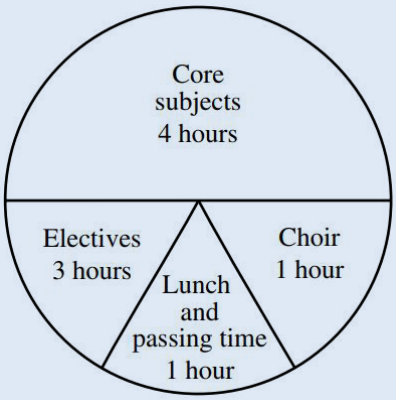
Many of the geometry problems are not difficult to solve. The trick is figuring out how to solve them without spending too much time doing so. For any geometry problem, make sure to do the following:

- If a figure is given, label it with all the information that is given in the problem.
- If there is no picture, draw your own.
- Remember to study your formulas!
- Solve the problem using logic and critical thinking whenever possible. Use your eyes to eliminate illogical answers.

REMEMBER

Find sample questions and a full ACT® practice test at Preparing for the ACT 2025–2026

EXAMPLE 3



Antwan drew the circle graph below describing his time spent at school in 1 day. His teacher said that the number of hours listed was correct, but that the central angle measures for the subjects were not correct. What should be the central angle measure for the Core subjects sector?

F. 72°
G. 80°
H. 160°
J. 200°

The Core subjects sector takes up the top half of the circle graph within 4 hours. The bottom half of the graph contains 5 hours. They should not occupy the same amount of space. The top (4 hours) should take up slightly less space than the bottom half (5 hours). Straight lines consist of 180°. The Core subjects sector should be a little bit less than 180°. The answer choice closest to but less than 180° is option H, 160°.

FORMULAS

Formulas are rarely provided on the ACT®. That means you need to memorize the formulas that are most helpful. The following formulas and properties are typically tested on the ACT®:

$r^2 = (x - h)^2 + (y - k)^2$

*Equation of a Circle***

$= \frac{1}{2}(\text{base})(\text{height})$

Area of a Triangle

$= (\text{base})(\text{height})$

Area of a Square/Rectangle

$= (\text{length})(\text{width})(\text{height})$

Volume of a Rectangular Solid

$= \pi r^2$

Area of a Circle

$= 2\pi r$ *or* πd

Circumference of a Circle

$A^2 + B^2 = C^2$

*Pythagorean Theorem**

$$\frac{y_2 - y_1}{x_2 - x_1}$$

Slope Formula

$$= \sqrt{(x_2 - x_1)^2 + (y_2 - y_1)^2}$$

Distance Formula

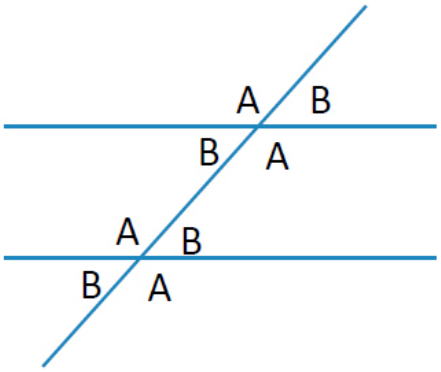
$$\left(\frac{x_1 + x_2}{2}, \frac{y_1 + y_2}{2}\right)$$

Midpoint Formula

$$\text{sine} = \frac{\text{opposite}}{\text{hypotenuse}} \qquad \text{cosine} = \frac{\text{adjacent}}{\text{hypotenuse}} \qquad \text{tangent} = \frac{\text{opposite}}{\text{adjacent}}$$

Trigonometric Functions

When a third line cuts across two parallel lines, the small angles are all equal and the large angles are all equal. The sum of a small angle and a large angle is equal to 180°.



A + B = 180

Perimeter = sum of all sides

A line is a 180° degree angle

The sum of the interior angles of a triangle is 180°. The sum of the interior angles of a four-sided polygon is 360°. Add 180° to the sum of the interior angles for each additional side added to a polygon.

The **slope-intercept** equation of a line is y=mx+b where m is the slope and b is the y-intercept.

Parallel lines always have the same slope. Perpendicular lines always have opposite reciprocal slopes.

** Used only with right triangles, where a and b are legs, and c is the hypotenuse.*
*** (h,k) represents the center point of the circle*

READING SECTION

THE BREAKDOWN

# of Questions	Time (mins)	Content
36	40	Reading comprehension

The ACT® reading passages will be from four fields. The prose fiction or literary narrative passage is often the most time-consuming, and for that reason, we recommend saving it for last. Remember, every question is worth the same amount. Focus your time first on the more straightforward passages. Then, if time permits, work on the prose fiction or literary narrative passage. If you run out of time, use your spot of the day.

> **TAKE 10 MINUTES FOR EACH PASSAGE.**
> Both during practice and on test day, wear a watch to make sure you are pacing yourself effectively.

You will have four types of reading passages, and they will always come in this order:

- Prose Fiction or Literary Narrative
- Social Science
- Humanities
- Natural Science

Passages are drawn from books and periodicals such as The New York Times, Scientific American, and The Atlantic Monthly. One of the most effective ways to prepare is by practcing reading the type of material you'll be reading on the test.

Open Book Test

The ACT® reading section tests a different skill set than the reading comprehension skills in your high school English class. In school, you may be assigned a book to read and then be tested on details. Approaching the ACT® reading section in this way, **reading every word and trying to retain all of the information, is not the best use of your time.** Instead, think of the ACT® reading section as an open book test, where you have all the information you need right in front of you.

Interacting with ACT® Reading Passages

Remember, the ACT® is designed to predict how well you will perform academically in college. College level writing will require that you interact with the assigned text by underlining important words or characters, making notes in the margins, and interpreting the author's main points on your own. In college courses, students will also have a lot more to read in a short amount of time. Thus, they will have to learn to read quickly and skim to find main points. The ACT® tests students to see if they actively read and interact with the passages, instead of passively reading without searching for main ideas.

READ THE BLURB

Each passage will be preceded by a blurb giving you details on what you are about to read. The blurb consists of a few short lines right before the passage begins. Many students skip reading this, but don't! The blurb can also help you identify the main idea.

SEARCH FOR THE MAIN IDEA

Actively look to identify the passage's main idea. For humanities and social science passages, the main point is generally a straightforward explanation of an event, project, or individual's importance. For natural science passages, the main idea typically relates to a new discovery or the ways in which new research challenges a previously held theory. Literary narrative and prose fiction passages tend to be less straightforward in presenting the main idea; however, the main idea could relate to an insight or goal the narrative drew from a given experience. When the main idea is directly stated, it tends to appear most frequently at the end of the introduction or the end of the conclusion. Review these first. Typically, the correct answers for main idea questions tend to be more general rather than specific. They also won't have extreme language such as "always" or "never."

CIRCLE KEY WORDS

To avoid letting the ACT® lead you to the wrong answer, go back into the passage before you answer a question. Circle key words in the question and skim the passage looking for those same words, guiding you to the information you need to know. When answering questions that ask you to identify factual information without giving line references, identify a key word or phrase that you can locate. Then, think logically about where it would be located in the passage. Finally, read the corresponding information to find the correct answer.

COVER AND PREDICT

Another strategy for actively searching for the correct answer is to physically cover up the answer choices when you read the question. Answer on your own before reviewing the answer choices. When you uncover the choices and find your answer in the choices, you'll be confident in your selection.

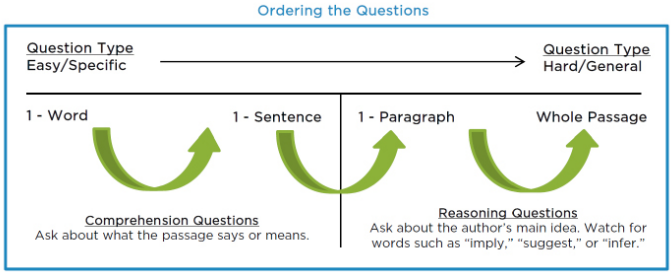
The majority of vocabulary tested within this section will not be used in their most common definition. Instead, pay attention to how the word is used within context.

SPEED READING STEPS

Use the method that's best for you; while some students prefer to read the questions first, speed reading is a great way to get the facts if you find that you often run out of time to adequately answer the question.

1. **Read the *First* Paragraph**
   After reading the blurb, read the first paragraph in full. The first paragraph usually gives readers a description of what the passage will be about.
2. **Read the *Last* Paragraph**
   The last paragraph typically sums up all of the preceding information in the passage. Again, you get a good idea of what the passage covered.
3. **Read the first sentence of each of the middle paragraphs.**
   The topic sentences of the middle paragraphs give the reader an idea of supporting details to back up the main idea. Additionally, they give you a good idea of where to find certain information that the questions may ask.

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS



Once you take one or two minutes to speed read and find the author's main idea, jump straight into the questions. Resist, however, answering the questions as they are presented. As always, answer as many questions as possible in the given amount of time by answering easy questions first and hard questions last, remembering that they are all worth the same amount of points.

Easy Questions: Fetch the Answer

EXAMPLE: "As it is used in line 13, the word *popular* most nearly means:"

- Do these first! These questions ask about the passage, usually one word or phrase.
- They often contain line numbers that tell you exactly where in the passage you need to look to find the answer.
- Do not rush through these and make careless mistakes.

Medium Questions: Read and Reason

EXAMPLE: "The main purpose of the fourth paragraph (lines 34-47) is to describe the:"

- These questions ask about the author. Do these second!
- They might ask you to find information in the passage and then figure out how or why the author uses that information.
- When using process of elimination, look out for trap answer choices.

Hard Questions: Big Picture

EXAMPLE: "One of the main ideas established by the passage is that"

- Do these last! These questions ask about the passage as a whole.
- By the time you answer these questions, you will have a strong understanding about the passage.

REMEMBER

Find sample questions and a full ACT® practice test at Preparing for the ACT 2025–2026

ENGLISH SECTION

THE BREAKDOWN

# of Questions	Time (mins)	Content
50	35	Grammar, usage, mechanics and rhetorical skills

Skipping around strategically will not help you in English as it does in other sections. Practice pacing yourself and answering questions as you go. Timing yourself is one way to practice effectively. Give yourself 9 minutes to read one passage and answer all associated questions.

Usage/Mechanics

Punctuation
Grammar and Usage
Sentence Construction

Rhetorical Skills

Writing Strategy
Organization
Style

In order to do well on this section, you'll have to know the formal rules of the English language. You'll need to practice your grammar, punctuation, and usage rules.

> The shortest answer choice that makes sense is going to be the correct answer.

ENGLISH STRATEGIES

1. **Assume everything that is not underlined is correct.** You will want to read the entire sentence instead of just skipping to the underlined section. This is different than the ACT® reading section, where you can jump around. If a sentence or a paragraph does not have a corresponding question, then that may mean the next question will ask about what came before. When answering questions, assume that everything not underlined is correct. Pick out context clues to make the underlined portion match the rest of the passage.

2. **Trust your ear, but verify.** The ACT® may try to trick you by giving you answers that sound right, but aren't. Review your grammar rules to help select the best answer choice.

3. **Use Process of Elimination (POE).** Just as you would in any other section, use the process of elimination to rule out illogical answers. This will increase your chances of answering the question correctly.

USAGE/MECHANICS

Questions are broken into three categories:

Punctuation questions ask you to identify and correct any misplaced, misused, or missing punctuation marks. The punctuation marks most commonly tested on the ACT® are, in order of decreasing frequency: commas, apostrophes, colons, and semicolons.

Basic Grammar and Usage questions usually target a single incorrect word that violates the conventional rules of English grammar. These questions frequently test knowledge of agreement and pronoun and verb forms and cases.

Sentence Structure questions tend to deal with the sentence as a whole. They test on clause relationships, parallelism, and placement of modifiers.

PUNCTUATION REVIEW

Commas

Used in four ways on the ACT®:

Around unnecessary information:

"My father, an English professor, likes to read nonfiction books."

Between items in a list:

"I bought milk, eggs, and bread at the grocery store."

Between a complete and incomplete clause:

"Since it was raining, we could not go for a swim."

Before FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so):

"John wanted tea to drink, but the store did not have any."

Apostrophes

Used to indicate possession or to mark the missing letters in a contraction.

Possession:

"Nancy borrowed Jennifer's shirt."

Contraction (should not):

"You shouldn't forget to study."

Colons

Introduces an element or series of elements that illustrate or amplify the information that preceded the colon.

"You would've gotten a perfect score on the ACT® if it weren't for one subject: math."

Semicolons

Used to relate independent clauses that are not joined by a conjunction.

Relate clauses:

"She calls it pop; I call it soda."

Dashes

Used to indicate an abrupt break in thought or to introduce an explanation.

Abrupt break in thought:

"For our vacation–which was way too short–we went to the beach.

SENTENCE STRUCTURE REVIEW

Sentence Structure questions test your knowledge of how sentences and ideas should be joined or separated. These errors will typically be tested through clauses.

> Don't be afraid to select "Delete the Underlined Portion" or "No Change" as the answer. They are correct just as often as the other choices. Don't avoid selecting these answers!

There are two types of clauses that will be tested:

Independent Clauses (Main)
A group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought. An independent clause makes a complete sentence.

Dependent Clauses (Subordinate)
A group of words that contains a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. A dependent clause cannot be a sentence and must be joined to an independent clause.

Run-on Sentences can be easy to spot because they tend to be long and confusing. A run-on sentence occurs when independent clauses are joined together without any punctuation.

Incorrect: My friend went to Paris she saw the Eiffel Tower.

Correct: My friend went to Paris. She saw the Eiffel Tower.

Comma Splice is an error in which two independent clauses are separated only by a comma.

Incorrect: Paul wanted to go to the mall, he wanted to see a movie.

Correct: Paul wanted to go to the mall, and he wanted to see a movie.

Fragments are incomplete sentences. Usually, fragments are pieces of sentences that have become disconnected from the main clause.

Incorrect: When you get back from shopping.

Correct: We will cook dinner when you get back from shopping.

Modifiers are descriptive words or phrases used to add depth or dimension to the phrase that they modify. Modifiers are misplaced if they do not actually refer to what they are modifying.

Incorrect: I was walking down the street and I saw a gold man's watch.

Correct: I was walking down the street and I saw a man's gold watch.

Parallelism refers to the structure of a sentence in which all verbs are in the same form.

Incorrect: Chris will attend college, major in biology, and maintaining good grades.

Correct: Chris will attend college, major in biology, and maintain good grades.

ADDITIONAL RULES YOU MIGHT HAVE FORGOTTEN

Who vs Whom:

Who refers to the subject of a sentence or clause. It can be replaced with he, she, or they. **Whom** refers to the object of a sentence or clause. It can be replaced with him, her, or them.

"To whom should I give my ticket?"

"Who can tell me the name of the second president?"

It's vs Its:

It's is a contraction for it is. **Its** indicates possession.

"It's going to be a beautiful day."

"The milk has passed its expiration date."

Your vs You're:

Your is a possessive pronoun. **You're** is a contraction for you are.

"Your umbrella is next to the door."

"You're going to enjoy the zoo."

Their vs There vs They're:

Their shows possession among a group. **There** refers to a place or idea. **They're** is a contraction for they are.

"The students are going on their trip today."

"There is the bakery that I love."

"They're going to have a great time."

Who's vs Whose:

Who's is a contraction for who is. **Whose** is the possessive form of who.

"Who's ready to help me?"

"Whose dog is barking?"

Collective nouns represent something plural but they're treated as if they were singular (ex. team, class, equipment, everyone, each).

> **Incorrect:** Each one of my family members **are** coming to Thanksgiving.
>
> **Correct:** Each one of my family members **is** coming to Thanksgiving.

Cut the fat. All of the extra information that separates the subject from the verb is called the fat. When you cut the fat and put the subject and verb together, it's easier to see whether or not they agree.

> **Incorrect:** The pack of dogs **are** running through the yard.
>
> **Correct:** The pack of dogs **is** running through the yard.

Ambiguity You cannot use a pronoun in the place of a subject if it's not clear what/whom you're referring to.

> **Incorrect:** The county cleared this path and paved it with packed gravel so **they** would have a peaceful place to hike and bike.
>
> **Correct:** The county cleared this path and paved it with packed gravel so **people** would have a peaceful place to hike and bike.

Redundancy is when you're repeating yourself unnecessarily.

> **Incorrect:** My legs are sore because I've been jumping up and down.
>
> **Correct:** My legs are sore because I've been jumping.

TEST TAKING STRATEGIES

Pace yourself and answer EVERY question

Concentrate on the easy/medium questions to gain the most points. There is no penalty for guessing on the ACT®, so guess on the hard questions if you are uncertain of the correct answer or you run out of time. The ACT® booklet won't be graded, so mark it up as you narrow down your answers, show your work on math problems, and underline key information in passages.

Practice makes perfect

The ACT® is a standardized test, so you can learn what you will be tested on and how the questions will be asked. Practice as if you are taking the real ACT®, so get up early to practice while you are TIRED! Practicing will help you become more accustomed to taking the ACT®.

Process of elimination

Narrow down your choices before taking a guess. A 50% chance of getting it correct is better than a 25% chance.

Spot of the day

Pick a spot of your choice before starting the test. Use that spot every time you need to guess or when you're running out of time. It will increase your odds of getting questions correct compared to randomly guessing.

ACCOMMODATIONS ON YOUR TEST DATE

If you receive accommodations for a professionally diagnosed and documented disability, visit act.org for a list of accommodations you can receive on the ACT® as well as the policy for submitting documentation for the accommodations.

PREPARING FOR THE ACT®

Websites

Get2College ACT® resources Scan QR Code

Khan Academy
khanacademy.org

Books

The Official ACT® Prep Guide (The Red Book)

ACT® Prep Black Book: The Most Effective ACT® Strategies Ever Published

Mobile Apps

ACT® Pocket Prep *by Pocket Prep, Inc.*

ACT® Prep Coach & Practice Test *by Magoosh*

OPTIONAL ACT® SECTIONS

Whether you're aiming for a faster finish, more time to think, or a format that fits your strengths, the ACT® is built to meet you where you are. You can create a smarter, more personalized testing path with optional sections.

Science Section
The science section is optional, but there are good reasons to keep it on your test.

- **Boost your STEM path:** A strong science score can make your application stand out for competitive STEM majors.
- **Balance your profile:** If your science grades aren't your strongest, a great ACT® science score can show your potential.
- **Stay flexible:** Some colleges may require or prefer a science cscore — even if it's not listed upfront. Check your colleges list to make sure you meet specific requirements.

Writing Section
The writing section may be optional, but if writing is a strength or you're still exploring college options, it's worth considering.

- **Stand out:** A strong writing score showcases your reasoning and communication skills.
- **Support your app:** It can strengthen your college application, especially if your grades in English classes aren't as strong.
- **Keep doors open:** Some schools still require or recommend the ACT® writing test.

The ACT® superscore is calculated using only English, math, and reading even if you take the optional science and/or writing section.

REMEMBER

Find sample questions and a full ACT® practice test at Preparing for the ACT 2025–2026

Gulf Coast Get2College Center
715 Cox Avenue, Ocean Springs, MS
228.875.4441 | gulfcoast@get2college.org

Jackson Get2College Center
2616 Lakeward Drive, Jackson, MS
601.321.5533 | jackson@get2college.org

North MS Get2College Center
5699 Getwell Road, Bldg H, Ste 3
Southaven, MS
662.349.2789 | nms@get2college.org

Whether it's a 4-year university or technical program at a community college, we're here to help. For free resources or to schedule an appointment, please visit us at get2college.org