

THE ENGLISH TEST

WHAT TO EXPECT ON THE ENGLISH TEST

75 Questions / 45 Minutes

5 prose passages with portions of the text underlined and numbered.

About ½ of questions test grammar and mechanics – ½ test rhetorical skills

Usage/Mechanics

1. **Punctuation (10 questions):** 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.
2. **Basic Grammar and Usage (12 questions):** Basic Grammar and Usage questions usually target a single incorrect word that violates the conventional rules of English grammar. These questions frequently test your knowledge of agreement issues and pronoun and verb forms and cases.
3. **Sentence Structure (18 questions):** Sentence Structure questions tend to deal with the sentence as a whole. They test you on clause relationships, parallelism, and placement of modifiers.

Rhetorical Skills

1. **Writing Strategy (12 questions):** Writing Strategy questions are concerned with a passage's effectiveness. These questions require that you understand the point, purpose, and tone of a passage. When answering these questions, you must decide the best way to support a point with evidence, to introduce and conclude paragraphs, to make a transition between paragraphs, or to phrase a statement.
2. **Organization (11 questions):** Organization questions can deal with individual sentences, individual paragraphs, or the passage as a whole. They will ask you either to restructure the passage or paragraph or to decide on the best placement of a word or phrase within a sentence.
3. **Style (12 questions):** Style questions focus on effective word choice. They will ask you to eliminate redundancy and to select the most appropriate word or phrase. In order to answer style questions correctly, you need to understand the tone of a passage, and you need to have a good eye for clear written English.

General Strategies

1. Read through the entire passage, stopping at the end of each sentence that contains an underlined word or phrase to answer the question. If the question talks about something you haven't read yet, such as a future paragraph, skip it and come back. This will help you answer questions about the passage as a whole.
2. If you don't immediately spot the correct part of the underlined section, read through the answers for possible clues. See what is different between each answer choice, answering one difference at a time. For example:
 - a. gently, along
 - b. gentle, along
 - c. gently along
 - d. gentle along

Without even reading the passage, you can tell that you are being tested on two things: using "gentle" or "gently" and whether or not you need a comma. First answer "gentle" or "gently", crossing out the incorrect choices, then decide between the remaining choices. Many times it is easier to spot the incorrect answer choice, so cross out those answers in your test booklet to reduce your chances of making a simple mistake. Then guess between the answers that remain.

3. If you notice that one of the answer choices contains one of the three methods of combining a complete sentence—a period and a capital letter, a semicolon, or a comma with a conjunction (FAN BOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)—check the text to see if you are dealing with two complete sentences. Ask yourself if it has a subject, if it has an action, and if it is a complete thought to check for a complete sentence. For example: I like riding my bike it is exhilarating to feel the wind in my hair as I ride down the street. In this case there are two complete sentences.
 - a. I like riding my bike.
 - b. It is exhilarating to feel the wind in my hair as I ride down the street.Since I am dealing with two complete sentences, the correct answer choice MUST contain a period and a capital letter, a semicolon, or a comma with a conjunction.
4. Check the sentence before or after the underlined portion for context clues, especially regarding verb tense and sentence structure. Try to match the underlined part to the existing parts of the passage.
5. When the passage asks you about changing the words to fit a specific purpose or evoke a certain emotion, underline those purpose or feeling words in the question. Then choose the answer choice that best fits the requirements for all purposes/feelings. If the answer choices seem similar, look at the choice that is different from the others. Often it is the right answer, even if it is different than how you would normally say something.
6. If the difference between the answer choices is comma placement, then try taking out the words inside the commas and rereading the sentence to see if it makes sense. For example:
 - a. Marysol, a college, student works at South High School.
 - b. Marysol, a college student works, at South High School.
 - c. Marysol a college student, works at South High School.
 - d. Marysol, a college student, works at South High School.

Which one made the most sense?

Remember that if a descriptive phrase is at the beginning or end of the sentence, there will only be one comma.

For example:

While riding her bicycle, Ms. Bell had a brilliant epiphany.

Ms. Bell had a brilliant epiphany, while riding her bicycle.

In both cases, I can take out “while riding her bicycle” and the sentence will still make sense.

7. Take out unnecessary descriptive words in your head to check for grammatical errors. For example:
The vase filled with carnations, roses, and lilacs are beautiful. To make sure the verb tense is correct, take out the description. The vase are beautiful. That is clearly wrong.
8. Pay close attention to the NOT ACCEPTABLE questions. You are looking for the wrong answers on these questions.
9. “NO CHANGE” turns out to be the correct answer approximately 20% of the time it is offered.
10. When “Delete the underlined portion” is one of the possible answer choices, look at this choice carefully. It is correct about half of the time it is offered. Reread the passage without the underline portion. If it makes sense, then choose that answer.
11. Don’t overthink the ACT. Choose the simplest, most straightforward answer choice. Avoid choices that are repetitive or needlessly wordy (even if it sounds smarter or more sophisticated).