

ACT ENGLISH STRATEGY SESSION

English Section Overview

- The English section is 45 minutes long and consists of 75 questions.
- There are 5 passages per section with 15 questions per passage.
- Questions are not ordered according to difficulty.

Big Picture Strategy

- On the English test, you are editing writing for grammar and style. When you edit, you need to make sure you make the writing fulfill the 4 C's: concise, complete, consistent, and clear.
- STEP 1: Read the sentence
 - Context matters. You cannot determine whether an answer is right just by looking at the underlined portion.
- STEP 2: Decide what the question is testing
 - Scan the answer choices. Look at what is changing in the answers. Whatever is changing is what the test wants you to prove that you know.
- STEP 3: Start with the most likely answer.
 - When reading answers, start with the shortest answer. If the answer has proper punctuation and all the information, then it's right. Don't talk yourself into other answers.
 - For punctuation questions, start with the answer choice that has the least punctuation. If you don't have a rule to add any punctuation, then that answer is right. If you think it needs punctuation, then just go to the answer choice that has the punctuation you need.
- STEP 4: Trust your inner reader
 - You know what proper English sounds like. Hear the words in your head. Whisper them to yourself. You know what sounds right. You don't need to know a single rule of grammar to get most of the questions right.

Grammar

- Concise: the ACT wants writing that is efficient, so choose answers that communicate clearly with as few words as possible.
- Complete: the ACT wants complete ideas expressed with subject, verb, and predicate and proper punctuation.
 - On punctuation questions, look at the question and ask whether the clauses are complete or incomplete ideas.
 - C/C - **STOP**: period, semicolon, comma + FANBOYS
 - F: What's FANBOYS?
 - C/C or C/I - **HALF-STOP**: colon, dash
 - Anything but C/C - **GO**: nothing, comma (if you need one)
 - When to use a comma:

- After an introductory idea.
 - After every item on a list.
 - Before and after unnecessary information.
 - With FANBOYS
 - IMPORTANT: only use a comma if you have a reason from this list!
- Consistent:
 - Verb tense must be the same as other verbs in the paragraph.
 - If everything else is present, keep it present. Past -> past.
 - Verb tense must match the subject.
 - Cut out all the words in between the subject and the verb and then conjugate.
 - ex. Someone who only eats at fast food restaurants (is/are) lazy.
- Clear:
 - Active v. passive: Sentences are clearer in the active voice (they are also more concise). Passive voice is where the noun doing the action comes after the verb.
 - ex. Mr. Murphy took his daughter on a bike ride. vs. His daughter was taken on a bike ride by Mr. Murphy.
 - Hint: Passive voice usually has the word "by".
 - Ambiguity: make sure you know what pronouns are referring to and that they refer to the right noun.
 - What's wrong with the "his" in the passive voice sentence?

Style

- Choose the word/sentence questions: Give the test what it wants.
 - If a question asks for the word that will communicate sensory experience, choose the answer that refers to sight, smell, touch, taste, or sound.
 - If the question asks for the most detail or conveys the greatest sense of excitement, choose the answer with the most detail or exciting words.
 - Don't choose what sounds best. Just answer the question.
 - These are the only question types where you don't need to read the sentence to answer them correctly. Just give the test what it wants.
- For transition word questions (ex. however, consequently, for example), read the sentence before and the sentence after and ask yourself what the relationship between the two is.
- For paragraph transition questions, find the main idea of the paragraph before and after and ask yourself what the relationship between the two is.
- For main idea questions, go to the place where you are most likely to find the main idea.
 - For paragraphs, the most likely place to find the main idea is the topic (first) sentence. The second most likely place to find the main idea is the concluding (last) sentence of the paragraph.
 - If you don't feel like you didn't get the main idea, read more.

- For passages, the most likely place to find the main idea, in order, is:
 - 1. the thesis statement (last sentence of the first paragraph)
 - 2. the first sentence of the introductory paragraph
 - 3. the first sentence of the conclusion paragraph
 - 4. the last sentence of the conclusion paragraph
 - 5. the topic sentences of each paragraph
 - If you don't feel like you didn't get the main idea, read the introduction and conclusion paragraphs.
- For context questions, take the time to move the sentence or replace the sentence and reread to see how it works.
 - Draw a line to where it should go and find the answer that puts it there.

9 Rules to Remember

1. Its = possessive. It's = it is
 - a. no apostrophes with possessive pronouns (his, hers, its, etc.)
2. A pronoun that ends in "one" or "body" is singular.
 - a. Everyone (is/are) happy to take ACT prep.
 - b. ex. someone, none, everybody, somebody, anybody, each, etc.
3. With "either/or" and "neither/nor" the verb agrees with the second subject.
 - a. Either Mike or his parents (is/are) to blame.
 - b. Either Mike or John (is/are) to blame.
 - c. rule of thumb: singular verbs end in "s"
4. Only use reflexives when the subject receives the action.
 - a. I cut myself shaving.
 - b. note: the subject must match the reflexive
5. "Fewer" for plural, "less" for singular
 - a. (Fewer/Less) students can read.
 - b. I want to spend (fewer/less) money.
6. "Who" is he. "Whom" is him. Rearrange the sentence and see what works.
 - a. (Who/Whom) is the best teacher?
 - b. (Who/Whom) are you talking about?
7. Use "who" for people. Use "that/which" for groups and things.
 - a. I go to a school (who/that) cares about its students.
 - b. It's Sarah (who/that) gets ahead by cheating.
8. Ignore amount pronouns (all, none, some, fractions) for verb agreement.
 - a. Some of my cookie (is/are) missing.
 - b. Some of my cookies (is/are) missing.
9. When two people possess the same thing, only the second gets the 's.
 - a. (Ryan's and Grace's/Ryan and Grace's) daughter whines a lot.
 - b. (Atlanta's and Philadelphia's, Atlanta and Philadelphia's) football teams have birds for mascots.

Strategy Review

1. What answers should you start with? shortest/least punctuation
2. When should you use a comma? 4 rules
3. What word tells you a sentence is in passive voice? by
4. What means it is? it's