

# ACT English Quick Guide

Use this packet as a quick reference for the most important ACT English concepts and strategies

## OVERVIEW

75 questions in 45 minutes (30-40 seconds/question)

Multiple Choice - Five Passages

All questions on the ACT English fall into two main categories:

<b>GRAMMAR</b> Mechanics and usage; rules of agreement; structure	<b>RHETORICAL</b> Meaning and organization; expression of ideas; relevancy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Subject-Verb:</b> Agreement</li> <li>✓ <b>Verbs:</b> Tense, Form, Parallelism</li> <li>✓ <b>Pronouns:</b> Antecedent, Agreement, Case</li> <li>✓ <b>Punctuation:</b> Commas, Colons, Dashes</li> <li>✓ <b>Combining Sentences:</b> Independent Clauses</li> <li>✓ <b>Diction:</b> Word choice, Adverb/Adjective, Idioms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ <b>Relevancy:</b> Relate to paragraph and sentence topic</li> <li>✓ <b>Add/Delete:</b> Relevant =&gt; Add, Irrelevant =&gt; Delete</li> <li>✓ <b>Transition:</b> Connect parts before and after Addition, Comparison, Contrast, Cause-Effect</li> <li>✓ <b>Placement/Order:</b> Logical sentence position, phrases</li> <li>✓ <b>Concision/Clarity:</b> Avoid Redundancy/Repetition</li> </ul>

- Always glimpse at the answers; identifying the question type will help you to quickly decide the best approach and rules to follow. (Choices: *will eat, ate, have eaten* => focus on verb tense)
- Read first the underlined portion, getting more context by reading slightly above or below
- For rhetorical questions, skim the passage to identify main idea or paragraph topics
- Consider if **A) NO CHANGE** is incorrect and decide why; if not leave it as is and move on!
- Always consider the choice **D) DELETE/OMIT**; it's rarely given and worth looking at closely

## KEY STRATEGIES: Grammar

### Key Strategy #1: Identify the Subject & Verb and check agreement

The subject and verb are the foundation of any sentence, and all other parts describe these two. If you get lost in a longer sentence, always come back to the main subject-verb (simple sentence).

Singular **Subject** => Singular Verb:

A **musician** develops her own unique style over time.

Plural **Subjects** => Plural Verb:

Most **mistakes** result from oversight or carelessness.

*Example #1:* Don't get distracted by words or phrases in between the main subject and verb. Look for the subject before prepositional phrases (commonly beginning with "of/for/by/from/to/in/on/at"):

Teachers working in Oaktown at the local charter school implements new methods of instruction.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. is implementing
- C. implement
- D. has implemented

*The correct answer here is C. The subject (teachers) is plural and therefore the verb (implement) must also be plural. Notice that "Teachers" occurs before the "in": state the subject and verb together to find agreement.*

*Example #2:* The subject sometimes comes after the verb:

When we left the beach yesterday, there was still many people swimming.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. are
- C. were
- D. have been

*The correct answer is C. Agreement is between the verb (were) and plural subject (people).*

*Example #3:* A subject can be an entire verb phrase (gerund) acting like a noun:

Climbing the tallest mountain on all seven continents require extensive planning and focus.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. will have
- C. requires
- D. requiring

*The correct answer is C. "Climbing" is the subject requiring a singular verb "requires".*

## Key Strategy #2: Check the Verb Usage – make sure all the verbs work together

All the verbs in a sentence must coordinate and flow logically using the proper tense and structure.

- **Tense:** Reflects the time frame of the action; certain verbs change their forms depending on usage  
present: *begin, beginning*                      past: *began*                      future: *will begin*  
present perfect: *has, have begun*              past perfect: *had begun*              future perfect: *will have begun*
- **Parallel Structure:** Maintain a consistent pattern throughout (We are **running, jumping, diving...**)

Example #1: Verbs in a sentence do not always have the same tense, but must follow logically.

Because we studied extensively this weekend, we will perform very well on the real test next Tuesday.  
(Past -----leading into-----> Future)

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. were performing
- C. perform
- D. have performed

The correct answer here is A. The first action ("studied") is past, but the test is in the future.

Example #2: Many verbs take a different form depending on the tense (present, past, past perfect). This happens especially with the verb "to begin" (begin/began/begun), but with others as well.

Isabella made the varsity team at her high school, and she has swam in three races so far.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. swims
- C. have swam
- D. has swum

The correct answer here is D. The verb "swim" becomes "swum" in the present perfect tense.

Example #3: Parallel structure can apply to the structure of phrasing within the sentence.

Buckminster Fuller was admired by many for his ingenuity, but encountered scorn for his radical ideas.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. scorned the many
- C. was scorned by some
- D. many scorned him

The correct answer here is C. Mirror the structure "was admired by" with "was scorned by".

### Key Strategy #3: Pronouns – Identify the noun that is being replaced

A pronoun is a word (he, it) used to take the place of a previously mentioned noun (antecedent).

- **Tip:** Just identify the noun that it replaced and make sure it agrees in number and gender.

*Example #1:* If the pronoun acts as a subject, use the proper subjective case: I, he, she, they, we, who  
If the pronoun acts as an object, use the proper objective case: me, him, her, them, us, whom

We were both completely surprised when the school honored Thomas and I with top academic awards.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. Thomas and me  
C. I and Thomas  
D. ours

*The correct answer is B. Since "Thomas and I" are the objects of the verb "honored", the pronoun "I" must change to the objective case "me". Tip:* If you remove the name of the friend ("Thomas"), the correct case becomes clear: objective ("me")

*Example #2:*

Possessive pronouns express ownership: my, mine, his, her(s), your(s), theirs, ours, whose

Relative pronouns connect a phrase or clause to a noun: who, whom, which, that, whomever

The inspector who rang in the middle of the night asked us if we had seen anything suspicious.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. whom rang  
C. who's rung  
D. whose

*The correct answer is A: "Who" is a relative pronoun (subjective) telling us which inspector.*

- **Tip:** 99% of the time, "whom" will directly follow a preposition (e.g., of whom/for whom/by whom/to whom); if you don't see a preposition immediately before it, "whom" is wrong.

*Example #3:* Reflexive pronouns emphasize the original noun or pronoun without commas: *I myself*

He, himself, will oversee the coordination of the five international offices.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. Himself, he will  
C. He himself will  
D. He, his self, will

*The correct answer is C. "Himself" follows "he" directly without the need for any commas.*

## Key Strategy #4: Punctuation – Commas, Colons, Dashes, and Apostrophes

All **Clauses** have at least one subject and verb; **phrases** do not. Independent Clauses can stand alone as complete sentences. Dependent Clauses are fragments that require additional information.

- **Independent Clause:** He trains for the marathon every year. (complete thought and sentence)
- **Dependent Clause:** Although he trains for the marathon every year,...(waiting for more information)

1. **Commas:** Most common punctuation question; use commas sparingly and only when necessary:

- Separate items in a list: *We used apples, oranges, bananas, and lemons in our recipe.*
- Set off non-essential information (appositive): *John, the owner of the store, expanded his business.*
- After an introductory phrase or clause: *Since last century, the study of genetic coding has increased.*
- Separate independent and dependent clauses: *After he rebuilt it, the theater had a thriving arts scene.*
- **Tip: NEVER** use commas between the subject and verb or an adjective and noun or:
  - to separate an essential phrase or clause, or inside of a non-essential phrase or clause
  - between two independent clauses; a semi-colon is necessary in this case

Example #1: Dependent clauses are separated from independent clauses with a comma.

Whichever direction the film ultimately takes, the final cut will show the indelible mark of his mentor.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. takes the, final
- C. takes the final,
- D. takes; the final

Example #2: Commas separate out parts of a continuing idea or action by the subject.

The entrepreneur developed a unique new approach for his prototype; innovating greatly on past versions.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. **prototype, innovating**
- C. prototype to innovating
- D. prototype, and innovating

Example #3: If a clause or phrase is essential, then no commas are needed to separate it out.

Revolutionary hero and founding father, John Adams, was an early architect of our enduring democracy.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. father John Adams,
- C. father John Adams
- D. father, John Adams

The correct answer is C. If we removed "John Adams", the sentence would not make sense; thus, no commas are needed. If the info is extra or non-essential, put commas around it.

2. **Semi-Colons:** Used to connect two related independent clauses within one sentence ( ; = . )
3. **Colons:** Used in two ways:
  - Introduce a list: *I will need the following items for my cake: flour, sugar, eggs, and milk.*  
**TIP:** Only the items in the list follow the colon, nothing else.
  - To introduce an explanatory clause: *I'm confident that we will succeed: the team has planned ahead.*
4. **Dashes:** Can either be single or double:
  - Single Dash (Long Dash) – Similar to a colon: introduces an explanation or list
  - Double Dash – Identical to using two commas to separate a non-essential phrase or clause
5. **Apostrophes:** Used in two ways:
  - Form a contraction: *They won't (will not) be available to meet because it's (it is) too late in the year.*
  - Signify possession: *My other dog's bowl (singular)                      All of the dogs' owners (plural)*

### Key Strategy #5: Combining Sentences: Identify clauses and correct punctuation

When a question asks you to combine two sentences or independent clauses, follow these basic rules:

(Subj 1)(Verb 1)                      (Subj 2)(Verb 2)

*Option 1: Leave as two sentences:              John went to the jazz festival. Maria bought a souvenir album.*

*Option 2: Combine with semi-colon:              John went to the jazz festival; Maria bought a souvenir album.*

*Option 3: Use comma + conjunction:              John went to the jazz festival, and Maria bought a souvenir album.*

➤ **Note:** One subject and two verbs, no commas are used: *John went to the festival and bought an album.*

*Example #1: When there are two independent clauses, they cannot be connected with a comma only.*

An early morning ascent was necessary: we had to climb in darkness to reach the summit by sunrise.

*Which of the following alternatives to the underlined portion is LEAST acceptable?*

- A. necessary. We had
- B. necessary, we had
- C. necessary; we had
- D. necessary, and we

*The correct answer is B. A comma by itself can never join two independent clauses. A semi-colon, colon or comma + coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) is required.*

➤ **Tip:** Pay especially close attention to questions with the words **LEAST, NOT, EXCEPT** – with these questions, three choices are correct and you want to find the one that is not.

### Key Strategy #6: Subject must come directly after introductory clause or phrase

Whenever a sentence begins with a phrase or clause describing someone or something, that someone or something must come directly after the comma, otherwise it is a misplaced modifier and unclear.

*Example #1: Ask yourself who or what is being described; it must come immediately after the comma.*

Sailing our skiff past the bulkhead, the blue whales that we spotted were enormous and majestic.

- A. the blue whales spotted
- B. there were blue whales that we spotted
- C. we spotted blue whales that
- D. spotting blue whales that

*The correct answer is C. The introductory clause is describing someone or something "sailing". In this case, it's the subject pronoun "we", so "we" it must come directly after the comma.*

### Key Strategy #7: Diction – Choose the word with the correct meaning and idea

These questions ask you to select the word that most accurately conveys the intended meaning in the sentence. Use the Method Test Prep Vocabulary Builder to increase your vocabulary in a short time.

- Be able to differentiate between similar sounding and commonly confused words:  
*their/there/they're your/you're it's/its than/then affect/effect accept/except*
- Choose the correct part of speech: Adjectives modify Nouns; Adverbs modify Verbs, Adjectives, Adverbs
- Become familiar with common idiomatic expressions used in English ("preoccupied with" "regard as")

Inside the atrium, elegant designed chandeliers reflect a thousand points of light throughout the space.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. elegantly designed
- C. elegance designed
- D. elegant design

*The correct answer is B. The adverb "elegantly" must be used here because it is modifying the verb "designed" – acting here as an adjective modifying the noun "chandeliers". Choice C is a noun and Choice D is an adjective.*

## KEY STRATEGIES: Rhetorical

Rhetorical questions deal with the overall meaning of the passage or the main point of a paragraph or sentence. The focus for most rhetorical questions is relevancy – which choice relates most directly to the topic at hand. All rhetorical questions will give you specific instructions – follow them precisely.

### Key Strategy #8: Adding or Deleting Information

1. Determine the main idea of the paragraph or sentence
2. If the information is relevant to the main idea and not already stated elsewhere, then add it
3. If the information is irrelevant to the main idea or already stated elsewhere, then delete it

These questions are generally presented with two “yes” choices and two “no” choices.

- Determine the relevancy (yes or no) first in order to eliminate half the choices immediately
- Then choose the explanation that fits best – often it’s the one that deals with relevancy/focus.

*Example #1:* Sometimes the question asks: “If the writer deleted this portion, the paragraph would primarily lose what?” Determine what information is lost and what is relevant that would be missing.

Native to a region in northern Laos, the Hmong hill tribes still live much as they have for centuries.

*If the writer deleted this phrase and adjusted the punctuation, the sentence would primarily lose what?*

- A. further details on the ethnic makeup of the Hmong tribes.
- B. an important contrast with the other ethnic tribal populations.
- C. specific information on the geographic location of the Hmong tribes.
- D. an example of similar ethnic groups in the area.

*The correct answer is C, since the portion underlined deals primarily with location.*

### Key Strategy #9: Transition Words and Sentences lead from one part to another

A transition word connects two sentences or clauses. The most common types of transition are:

- **Addition:** moreover, furthermore, additionally, for example
- **Comparison:** likewise, similarly
- **Contrast:** however, nevertheless, although, despite, while
- **Cause-Effect:** thus, therefore, because, since, consequently

1. Determine the part that comes before the transition and the part that comes after the transition
2. Decide how they are related and what the best connection or transition should be to link them
  - Tip: If two or more choices have the same transition meaning, then eliminate both.



Therefore raising interest rates can have an adverse effect on the value of currency, it can boost lending.  
A. However  
B. Although  
C. Nevertheless  
D. Thus

*The correct answer is B, since "although" provides the necessary contrast.*

### Key Strategy #10: Be Concise and avoid any Repetition or Redundancy

Throughout the ACT English section always remember to be as concise and clear as possible. This means avoiding all repetitive statements, redundant ideas, and awkward or unclear phrasing.

*Example #1: Be careful to spot unnecessary repetition or redundancy in an otherwise correct sentence.*

Every year we annually sail my grandfather's Yankee clipper to Bermuda in an Atlantic race.  
A. Each year  
A. Once a year  
C. Yearly  
D. OMIT the underlined portion and adjust the capitalization as necessary

*The correct answer is D. Since the word "annually" appears, "every year" is unnecessary.*

*Example #2: If a sentence can use fewer words and still have the same meaning, that's the best choice.*

Owing to the fact that he was the fastest runner, the coach encouraged him to race in the Olympic trials.  
A. In relation to the fact  
A. In spite of the fact that  
C. Although  
D. Because

*The correct answer is D. The same meaning is kept, using far less words and no empty phrases.*

### Key Strategy #11: Placement of Sentences

1. Read the sentence that is being placed; determine any clues or reference words ("This city")
2. Use the clue word, such a pronoun, to find where in the paragraph it references or links to.
3. Place it in the most logical spot, focusing on chronological order, steps in a process, etc.