Power Up: Reading ACT Prep, Week 1

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Published by *K20 Center*

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Time Frame 35 minutes

Essential Question(s)

How can I increase my ACT score?

Summary

In this first ACT prep reading activity, students focus on setting a goal for a future ACT. First, students review and reflect on the ACT process of superscoring. Then students review their existing reading scores before setting a goal to reach on the ACT and the reading test when they take the test again. Students choose at least one action to practice as a good habit leading up to the ACT, and they record their progress toward meeting their goal. This is the first activity in a 10-week "Power Up" series for ACT prep.

Learning Goals

- Understand the purpose of the ACT and the importance of the reading section.
- Evaluate current ACT performance and set a realistic goal for the overall test and the reading component.

Attachments

- Goal Setting—Reading ACT Prep, Week 1 - Spanish.pdf
- Goal Setting—Reading ACT Prep, Week 1.pdf
- MyACT Quick Start Guide.pdf
- Presentation Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 1.pdf
- Presentation Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 1.pptx

Materials

- ACT score report (obtained from site testing coordinator or by students from my.act.org)
- Activity Slides (attached)
- Goal Setting handout (attached; one per student)
- MyACT Quick Start Guide document (attached; for teacher use)
- Sticky notes (one per student)
- Highlighters or colored pencils; 1–2 per student
- Pencil/pen
- Calculators (optional)

15 minutes

Preparation

Teacher's Note: ACT Enhancements

The following resource has been updated to better align with the test changes that began in April 2025 for the online test and in September 2025 for the paper-pencil test. Some outside resources linked are based on the previous version of the ACT. Learn more about enhancements to the ACT in 2025.

Standardized testing, particularly the ACT, continues to be a metric used by many universities and scholarship organizations. Now is the time to motivate students to “power up” their ACT knowledge and show what they know on this important test. Many students lack knowledge of basic tips and tricks that could lead to big score gains, and some need a refresher on specific content that the ACT assesses. This 10-week series addresses key components of the reading assessment and equips students with what they need to boost their scores.

Coordinate with the site testing coordinator to make sure students have their ACT score report paper or access to their ACT ID number and the month and year that they took the ACT. Make sure students have access to this information prior to this ACT-prep activity.

Have your school’s average ACT scores for this first goal setting activity. Students without ACT scores can use the school’s average ACT scores for this activity. There will be opportunities later on in this series for students to compare their first set of scores to new ones after they have taken a practice test.

If students do not have an online account, help them create one using the attached **MyACT Quick Start Guide**, which provides detailed instructions for creating an online account.

5 minutes

Introduction

Introduce the activity using the attached **Presentation Slides**. Share the essential question on **slide 3** and the learning objectives from **slide 4**. Move to **slide 5** and use the I Notice, I Wonder strategy to have students analyze the table. Give students a few moments to look at the data, then ask several students to share something they notice. Next, ask several students to share something they wonder about the data.

Sample Student Responses

Students might notice that the score increased on three subject tests from November to April.

Students might wonder how the student increased their score.

Share the following with students:

- The ACT automatically takes the highest score from each subject test when a student takes the ACT.
- Most students increase their score after taking the ACT a second time.
- The ACT offers a Superscore Calculator that can be used to calculate students' superscores. They can also access it from My.ACT.org once they have an online account.
- Over the next ten weeks, they will be completing activities that can help them feel more confident when taking the ACT again.

25 minutes

Activity

Show **slide 6** and direct students to access the ACT student portal at my.act.org. Let students know that they can track their progress and set goals from test to test if they have access to their ACT online portal.

Have students navigate to their score report. Hand out the **Goal Setting** handout. Display **slide 7** and have them use highlighters or colored pencils to fill in their current composite score and reading score but have them wait to fill in their goals.

Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

As students complete their Goal Setting handout, be mindful that some students may feel insecure or embarrassed by their scores. Be intentionally encouraging and remind students that the purpose of this 10-week series is to improve their scores.

Display **slide 8**. Share with students that, while some schools are moving toward a test-optional format, the ACT can be important in obtaining scholarships and school admissions. If you have students who plan to enter the workforce directly after high school, let them know that improving this score can provide more options if they later decide to pursue a degree or obtain certifications. This ACT practice helps with general test preparation and reading comprehension skills that can transfer to other areas of life. Share that their scores are also used to show the state what students have learned. If your school has an average goal to achieve, you can share that here.

Display **slide 9**. This slide shows how many reading questions a student answer correctly to get each ACT score from 1 to 36. For example, to score a 23, they need to answer 24 questions correctly. Note that the dashes indicate a score is impossible to get due to how the scores are calculated.

Invite students to set a goal for a range of scores. First, ask students to consider what goal they can reach for their next composite and reading scores, thinking about what they have just seen on the previous slides. Recommend one step above where they currently are but allow students to set a goal for two steps if you feel that they are ready for the commitment and dedication required for a more significant score jump. Remind students that they can improve their score each time they take the test and that this goal is only for the next time they take the test at school. Direct students' attention back to the slide and ask them to look at the rows with scores in their range. Have them record on their goal sheet the number of problems they would need to get correct to meet their goal.

Teacher's Note: Slide 9

The official ACT exam may have a different key to convert the number of questions correct (raw score) to the scale of 1-36 (scale score). **The chart on the slide serves as a helpful estimate.**

Move to **slide 10**, which has directions for calculating the percentage of correct answers need to meet their goal. Using a calculator or scratch paper, have students find their goal percentage by taking the number of questions they recorded on their goal sheet and dividing it by the total number of questions on the reading test (36). Have them multiply that answer by 100 and record the percentage.

Ask the class to think about the following question: "*What is an action you can take between now and the next ACT exam to help improve your score?*"

After giving the students a few moments to think, move to **slide 11**. Ask students to read through the list of possible actions on their handout and commit to one action they can practice in the coming weeks. Explain that in the coming weeks they have the option to add other actions. For now, based on what they know about themselves and their goals, have them commit to just one action they can take and practice as a habit. Have students record the number of their selected action in the chart at the bottom of their handout. If they prefer and have enough room, students can instead copy the entire goal.

Ask students to use the columns to record each date they practice that skill to power up their ACT abilities.

Teacher's Note: Goal Setting and Fee Waivers for Future ACT Tests

Students may want a much larger jump for their scores. Encourage dreaming big but setting smaller obtainable goals along the way. Students can set one of these smaller goals for themselves and plan to increase that goal once they meet it. Let students know that just taking a test multiple times can help to improve their score because they will become familiar with the test setting and content.

For students who might be concerned about testing costs, share information on fee waivers available to some students using the video on **slide 12,** "How to Apply for an ACT Fee Waiver," or direct students to ACT Fee Waiver Program.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=8KVRiyY6h0I

Teacher's Note: Goal Setting Handout

The Goal Setting handout will be important for this 10-week series of activities. Students will set new goals at two other times in the coming lessons and need this sheet for reference. Keep your students' sheets in the classroom if possible. Consider having students take pictures of their Goal Setting handouts to help remind them to practice their goals.

If you do not have the space to keep students' Goal Setting handouts in your classroom, encourage students who have a device to take a picture of their goal sheet to keep. Let them know to bring the handout back to class with them each time.

5 minutes

Wrap-Up

Move to **slide 13** and provide each student with a sticky note. Introduce the How Am I feeling? What Am I Thinking? strategy to students. On one half of the sticky note, have students draw a simple illustration that describes how they are feeling about the reading section of the ACT. On the other half, have students write a sentence that summarizes what they are thinking about the reading section of the ACT.

Have students place their sticky notes in a common place in the classroom and review the notes after class to determine how students are feeling overall about the ACT. Use this information to inform your interactions with students the next time the class meets for ACT prep. Consider whether students need reassurance, encouragement, or whether they have questions about the reading section.

Next Step

Complete next week's activity, "Power Up: Reading ACT Prep, Week 2," to review identifying the main idea and supporting details of a text.

Research Rationale

Standardized testing in high schools has long been used as a metric for assessing college readiness and school accountability (McMann, 1994). While there has been debate surrounding the accuracy of such metrics, as well as concerns regarding fairness, many institutions of higher education continue to make these scores part of the admissions process (Allensworth & Clark, 2020; Black et al., 2016; Buckley et al., 2020). In addition to admissions, it is important to keep in mind that standardized test scores can also provide students with scholarship opportunities they would not otherwise have (Klasik, 2013). Although the topic of standardized testing continues to be debated, effective test preparation can ensure that our students are set up for success.

With several benefits of doing well on college admissions tests, it is important to consider how best to prepare students for this type of high-stakes test. Students from groups that may historically struggle to find success, such as those in poverty or first-generation college students, especially stand to benefit from effective test preparation (Moore & San Pedro, 2021). The American College Test (ACT) is one option students have for college admissions testing that is provided both at national centers and school sites. Taking the time to understand this test, including the timing, question types, rigor, and strategies for approaching specific questions, can help prepare students to do their best work on test day and ensure their score is a more accurate representation of what they know (Bishop & Davis-Becker, 2016).