Power Up: Reading ACT Prep, Week 2

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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 reading ACT prep activity, students review the structure of the reading portion of the ACT and practice locating the main idea, supporting details, and evidence of an ACT-style reading passage about The Great Depression. Students practice responding to five ACT-style questions and review the correct answers as a class. This is the second activity in a 10-week "Power Up" series for ACT Prep.

Learning Goals

- Identify the genre, type, and purpose of a reading passage.
- Identify the main idea, supporting details, and evidence of a text.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 2.pdf
- Activity Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 2.pptx
- Passage—Reading ACT Prep, Week 2.docx
- Passage—Reading ACT Prep, Week 2.pdf
- Questions (Teacher Guide)—Reading ACT Prep, Week 2.docx
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- Questions—Reading ACT Prep, Week 2.docx
- Questions—Reading ACT Prep, Week 2.pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- Passage handout (attached; one per student)
- Questions handout (attached; one per student)
- Questions (Teacher Guide) document (attached; for teacher use)
- Highlighters or colored pencils (three colors per student)

5 minutes

Introduction

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.

Introduce the activity using the attached **Activity Slides**. Share the essential question on **slide 3** and the learning objective from **slide 4**.

Move to **slide 5** and introduce the Always, Sometimes, or Never True strategy to students. Read the statement on the slide: *The ACT reading test is divided into four passages.* Ask students to think for a moment, then ask for a volunteer to share if they believe the statement is always true, sometimes true, or never true. Move to **slide 6** which reveals that there are always four passages on the reading portion of the ACT. The slide also provides additional information about the exam: the test is 40 minutes, and there are 36 questions on the reading test.

Repeat this process with additional questions on **slides 7-10**.

20 minutes

Activity

Pass out the attached **Passage** handout to each student and move to **slide 11**. Tell students to look at the information provided at the top of the handout. Ask students to consider if the passage is fiction or nonfiction, and use their hand to indicate their answer. Direct students hold up one finger for fiction or two fingers for nonfiction. Confirm that the passage is *nonfiction*.

Move to **slide 12** and review the four types of passages that are on the ACT reading test: literary narrative, social science, humanities, and natural science.

- **Literary Narrative:** often excerpts from short stories, novels, memoirs, or personal essays.
- **Social Science:** often a straightforward discussion of a topic from psychology, history, political science, etc.
- **Humanities:** often a nonfictional, informational passage about a topic from art, philosophy, theater, etc.
- **Natural Science:** often a nonfiction, detailed passage about a science topic.

Ask students to hold up one, two, three, or four fingers (as indicated on the slide) to represent which type of passage is on their The Passage handout. Confirm with students that the passage type is *Social Science*.

Display **slide 13**. Ask students to consider what the purpose of the passage is. Ask students to hold up one, two, or three fingers (as indicated on the slide) to represent the purpose. Confirm with students that the purpose of the passage is to *inform*.

Reinforce to students that it is helpful to determine if the passage is fiction or nonfiction, the type, and purpose of the passages before answering questions.

Move to **slide 14** and give each student three highlighters or colored pencils. Then introduce the Categorical Highlighting strategy. Direct students to read the passage silently and to highlight, as they read, in different colors the main idea of the passage, supporting details of the passage, and evidence that supports the details highlighted. After providing about ten minutes for students to complete this, have students partner together and review the items they chose to highlight. Have a brief class discussion about what the main idea, supporting details, and evidence of supporting details are for the passage.

10 minutes

Wrap-Up

Display **slide 15** and pass out the attached **Questions** handout to each student. Have students answer the multiple choice ACT-style questions about the passage. Review the correct answers with students on **slide 16**. If students have questions about answers, use the attached **Questions (Teacher Guide)** document, which provides explanations for the correct answers to these ACT-style questions.

Move to **slide 17** and congratulate students on working to increase their ACT score. Suggest that students spend twenty minutes weekly reading a text to further prepare for the ACT reading section.

Research Rationale

Standardized testing in high schools has long stood 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). Aside from admissions, it is also important to keep in mind that standardized test scores can also provide students with scholarship opportunities they wouldn't otherwise have (Klasik, 2013). Though the topic of standardized testing continues to be debated, effective test prep can ensure that our students are set up for success.

With several benefits to high standardized test results on college admissions tests, it is important to consider how best to prepare students for this type of high stakes test. Those 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 time to understand this test including the timing, question types, rigor, and strategies for approaching specific questions can help to 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).

Resources

- Allensworth, E. M., & Clark, K. (2020). High school GPAs and ACT scores as predictors of college completion: Examining assumptions about consistency across high schools. Educational Researcher, 49(3), 198-211.
- Bishop, N.S. & Davis-Becker, S. (2016). Preparing examinees for test taking: Guidelines for test developers and test users. 2nd edition. Crocker, L. (Ed). In Handbook of test development (pp. 129-142). Routledge.
- Black, S. E., Cortes, K. E., & Lincove, J. A. (2016). Efficacy Versus Equity: What Happens When States Tinker With College Admissions in a Race-Blind Era? Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 38(2), 336–363. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44984542
- Buckley, J., Baker, D., & Rosinger, K. (2020). Should State Universities Downplay the SAT?. Education Next, 20(3).
- McMann, P. K. (1994). The effects of teaching practice review items and test-taking strategies on the ACT mathematics scores of second-year algebra students. Wayne State University. https://www.monroeccc.edu/sites/default/files/upward-bound/McMannP.-the-effects-of-teaching-practice-review-items-ACT-mathematics-second-year-algebra.pdf
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Always, Sometimes, or Never True. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/145
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Categorical Highlighting. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/192
- Klasik, D. (2013). The ACT of Enrollment: The College Enrollment Effects of State-Required College Entrance Exam Testing. Educational Researcher, 42(3), 151–160. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23462378
- Moore, R., & San Pedro, S. Z. (2021). Understanding the Test Preparation Practices of Underserved Learners. ACT Research & Policy. Issue Brief. ACT, Inc. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED616526.pdf