Power Up: English ACT Prep, Week 2

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Time Frame 35 minutes

Essential Question(s)

- How can I increase my ACT score?

Summary

In this English ACT prep activity, students will focus on usage conventions. First, students will identify what is “not quite right” with some poor grammar depicted on memes. Then, students review seven of the most prevalent usage standards through a Card Matching activity. Finally, students apply their understanding to identify and correct poor usage in a passage. This is the second activity in a 10-week "Power Up" series for ACT prep.

Learning Goals

- Apply rules of word usage, subject-verb agreement, verb tenses, comparatives and superlatives, and reflexive pronouns to write conventional English.
- Identify when these rules are broken.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—English ACT Prep, Week 2.pdf
- Activity Slides—English ACT Prep, Week 2.pptx
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 2 - Spanish.docx
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 2 - Spanish.pdf
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 2.docx
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 2.pdf
- Usage Card Matching —English ACT Prep, Week 2 docx.docx
- Usage Card Matching —English ACT Prep, Week 2 docx.pdf

Materials

- Activity slides (attached)
- Skill Sets Check handout (attached, 1 per student)
- Usage Card Matching handout (attached, 1 per student)
- Device with internet access
- Pen/Pencil (for students)
- Paper
- Desmos account (teacher)

10 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.

As students enter the classroom, display **slide 3** from the attached **Activity Slides**. Use the Bell Ringer strategy to begin.

Have students find a partner or assign partners and direct them to get out a piece of paper. Ask students to discuss and then write down what is "not quite right" about the memes on the following slides.

Show **slide 4**. Give students time to write down their observations, then ask for a volunteer to share what was "not quite right" about the meme. Ensure students notice that the wrong "their/there/they're" was used before moving to the next slide.

Repeat this for **slides 5-6**, emphasizing the error on each slide:

- Slide 5: The wrong tense of the verb "lead" was used.
- Slide 6: Even though this might sound correct, "of" is not a replacement for "have."

Transition through **slides 7-8** to introduce students to the lesson's essential question and learning objectives to the extent you feel necessary.

Show **slide 9** and emphasize to students that usage, the topic of today's activity, makes up one of the largest percentages of questions on the English portion of the ACT.

20 minutes

Activity

Teacher's Note: Desmos Classroom Activity Prep

To use this Desmos Classroom activity, select the following link: "Power Up: English ACT Prep, Week 2." Create an account or sign in under the "Activity Sessions" heading. After you log in, the green "Assign" dropdown button will be active. Click the arrow next to the word "Assign," then select "Single Session Code." After making some setting selections, select "Create Invitation Code" and give the session code to students. For more information about previewing and assigning a Desmos Classroom activity, go to https://k20center.ou.edu/externalapps/using-activities/.

For more detailed information about Desmos features and how-to tips, go to https://k20center.ou.edu/externalapps/desmos-home-page/.

Students do not have to sign in unless they intend to pause and resume the activity at a later time.

Customizing the Activity

To meet the needs of your students, consider customizing **slides 13, 16,** or **19** with specific examples or details that you may already know your students struggle with.

Hidden Slides

Unhide **slides 12, 15, 18** and **20** to help students further understand the rationale behind why sentences are (non)examples. However, these slides can stay hidden and act as a reference guide for you.

Move to **slide 10** and introduce students to the Card Matching strategy. Give each student a copy of the **Skill Sets Check** handout.

Alternative Activity:

If you would prefer a paper version of the Desmos Card Matching Activity, use the following instructions and materials instead.

After introducing students to the Card Matching instructional strategy on slide 10 and passing out their Skill Sets Check handout, have students form small groups of 3-4 and pass out a set of the attached **Usage Card Matching** cards. Explain that students should match the sentences as either "example" or "non-example." To better scaffold the card matching, each card has been labeled as either Round 1, 2, or 3 (which correlates to the sentences found on the Desmos screens 1, 2, and 3). Please think of these rounds with each round increasing in difficulty, such as Round 1 cards as the easiest and so on. After each round, pause and review (as seen in the narrative above) and then continue with the next round. Change or use the slides as needed.

Provide students with your session code. Then, have students go to student.amplify.com/join/ and enter the session code. Direct students' attention to **screen 1** of the Desmos Classroom activity. Explain that they are to use their handout to match the sentence cards with the category cards: Example and Non-Example. When students match the cards correctly, the directions at the top of their screen will provide feedback and direct them to write the example in the Example column of their handout. Explain to students that they will need to analyze each grammar "rule" and "explanation" on their handout to figure out which "rule" their examples match with.

Once students complete screen 1, show **slide 11** and ask the class if there are any questions about how the cards are matched. Then ask for a volunteer to explain why the example listed is the proper use of the word "there." Use slide 12 as needed to further explain, especially if students are struggling with this topic.

Now direct students to **screen 2** of the Desmos Classroom activity and repeat the procedure with **slides 14** and 16. Use slide 15 as needed for further explanation. Advise students to make notes for any rules they missed on their handout.

Direct students' attention to **screen 3** of the Desmos Classroom activity and repeat the procedure with **slides 17** and **19**. Again, give students time to ask questions and strengthen their understanding. Also, use this time to resolve any misconceptions.

If time allows or for students who finish early, challenge students by having them match the cards on **screen 4** of the activity.

5 minutes

Wrap-Up

Display **slide 21** and have students repeat the steps from the Introduction: identify what is “not quite right” with the given meme. But this time, direct students to also *correct* the meme. Students can write their answer on the same paper from before or on an index card or sticky note if you would prefer to collect their responses.

Ask for volunteers to share what they noticed. Make sure the whole class agrees that there is more than one error. The wrong “their/there/they’re” was used, and the wrong “who/whom” was used. Students might also notice the punctuation error of not using an apostrophe indicating a contraction. But be sure that students do not think that “theirs/their’s” is a word or contraction. The correct meme would include “there’s” instead.

Show **slide 22** which reveals a sneak peak at what will happen next time but also provides students a Side Quest where they are asked to find or use the correct form of who/whom we learned about in their English (or other) class some time this week.

As time allows, facilitate a discussion about the struggles students had, what was easy, what they did not know at all. Ask them to reflect silently on what they personally need to work on and how they think they can accomplish it. Suggest that they add these details to their Goal Setting handout from the first week.

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 doing well 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
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Bell ringers and exit tickets. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/125
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- Klasik, D. (2013).
  The ACT of enrollment: The college enrollment effects of state-required college entrance xam testing. Educational Researcher, 42(3), 151–160. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23462378
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- 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