Power Up: Reading ACT Prep, Week 4

Laura Halstied, Michell Eike
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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 examine how to approach the paired passages portion of the ACT reading test. This is the fourth activity in a 10-week "Power Up" series for ACT Prep.

Learning Goals

- Analyze how to approach a pair of passages on the ACT reading test.
- Identify comparative relationships.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 4.pdf
- Activity Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 4.pptx
- Passage—Reading ACT Prep, Week 4.docx
- Passage—Reading ACT Prep, Week 4.pdf
- Questions (Teacher Guide)—Reading ACT Prep, Week 4.docx
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- Questions—Reading ACT Prep, Week 4.docx
- Questions—Reading ACT Prep, Week 4.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)
- Pen/pencil

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.

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

Move to **slide 5** and ask students to recall how many passages are on the ACT reading section. Ask for a volunteer to respond. Prompt students that there are four passages on the reading section if they cannot recall. Move to **slide 6** and tell students to imagine that they encounter this question set on the ACT, how would they approach it? Students should notice that the slide contains two passages, labeled *Passage A* and *Passage B*. There are questions about each passage individually as well as questions about the passages combined. Using the Elbow Partner strategy, have students talk to an elbow partner about what the best strategy is to respond to questions about two passages.

Teacher's Note: Sample Student Responses

There are two smaller passages that need to be read, so I would start with Passage A and then read Passage B. Then I would answer the questions.

15 minutes

Activity

Tell students that one of the four ACT reading passages contains what is called a paired passage. The paired passage has two shorter passages instead of one long passage. It also has questions about each passage individually and questions about comparing the two passages. Move to **slide 7** and introduce the Point of Most Significance strategy to students. Tell students they are going to watch a short video that reviews how to approach the paired passage portion of the ACT reading test. Have students think of the most important tip from the video as they watch. Move to **slide 8** and play the "ACT Reading Practice" video.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=jRuqs4OL8pQ

After watching the video, ask for a couple of volunteers to share their Point of Most Significance.

Display **slide 9** and pass out the attached **Passages** and **Questions** handouts to each student. Ask students not to start reading until you start a timer on the next slide.

Move to **slide 10** and tell students they will have four minutes to read Passage A and answer the questions about it. Use the 4-minute timer on the slide.

After the timer expires, move to **slide 11** and tell students they will have five minutes to read Passage B and answer the remaining questions. Start the 5-minute timer on the slide.

Display **slide 12** and ask students to think about how the tips from the video helped in completing the questions in nine minutes. Ask students how they would approach this section of the actual ACT if passage B had more questions than passage A. Have a few students share their thoughts. If it is not mentioned by students, suggest that they focus on the passage that has the most questions for this portion of the ACT reading section test.

10 minutes

Wrap-Up

Move to **slide 13** and review the correct answers for the questions as a class. 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.

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
- 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 4-minute timer. YouTube. (2021b, September 21). https://youtu.be/kpCsfuvzQeY
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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
- The Princeton Review. (20187, July 8). ACT reading practice: How to handle dual passages | The Princeton Review. [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRuqs4OL8pQ