Power Up: Reading ACT Prep, Week 7

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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 how to look for tone, context, inferences, and the use of paraphrasing in an ACT-style reading passage. Students first review the meanings of these key terms before answering questions. They rate their level of confidence on their answers before reviewing the correct answers as a class. Students reflect on how knowing the meaning of tone, context, inference, and paraphrase helped them answer ACT-style questions. This is the seventh activity in a 10-week "Power Up" series for ACT prep.

Learning Goals

- Interpret words and phrases in a prose text.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.pdf
- Activity Slides—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.pptx
- Passage—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.docx
- Passage—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.pdf
- Questions (Teacher Guide)—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.docx
- Questions (Teacher Guide)—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.pdf
- Questions—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.docx
- Questions—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.pdf
- Vocabulary Matching—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7 - Spanish.docx
- Vocabulary Matching—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7 - Spanish.pdf
- Vocabulary Matching—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.docx
- Vocabulary Matching—Reading ACT Prep, Week 7.pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- Vocabulary Matching handout (attached; one-half per student)
- Passage handout (attached; one per student)
- Questions handout (attached; one per student)
- Questions (Teacher Guide) document (attached; for teacher use)

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.

Teacher's Note: Lesson Preparation

Prior to teaching the lesson, cut the **Vocabulary Matching** handouts in half to reduce the number of copies.

Introduce the activity using the attached **Activity Slides**. Share the essential question on **slide 3** and the learning objective on **slide 4**. Move to **slide 5** and pass out the attached **Vocabulary Matching** handout to each student. Here students match the words *context*, *inference*, *paraphrase*, and *tone* with their definitions.

After providing time for students to match the four definitions, move to **slide 6**, which provides the correct answers. Review the meaning of each definition with students. Tell students that the four defined words are commonly seen in questions on the ACT reading section. Knowing the meanings of these words can help students answer more questions correctly and spend less time on each question.

20 minutes

Activity

Pass out the attached **Passage** and **Questions** handouts to each student. Move to **slide 7** and have students individually read the passage and answer the questions in ten minutes. Remind students that when completing the ACT reading section, they have approximately ten minutes on each passage and set of questions so they are practicing the pacing of the test. Start the 10-minute timer on the slide and have students complete the passage and questions.

After the timer expires, display **slide 8** and introduce the GUS Method strategy to students. Tell students to review and mark each question with a **G** for guess, **U** for unsure, and **S** for sure, depending on their level of confidence on each answer.

Then, move to **slide 9** and have students check their answers. Display **slide 10** and direct students' attention to the questions they marked as guesses and answered incorrectly to compare the correct answers with their answer choice. Provide a few minutes for students to look over each question and self-reflect about their answer choices. 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.

5 minutes

Wrap-Up

Move to **slide 11** and have students recall the four vocabulary words from the beginning of the lesson: *context*, *inference*, *paraphrase*, and *tone*. Ask students to think about how knowing what these words mean helped them to answer the practice questions. Have students take a moment to respond to the question on slide 11 on the back of their Passage handout. If time allows, ask for a few volunteers to share what they wrote.

Remind students that they do not need to answer every question correctly on the ACT reading test to obtain a score of 19 or above. By obtaining a minimum score of 19, students can begin college level coursework and not be required to take a remedial English college course. Display **slide 12** and congratulate students for working diligently to increase their ACT score.

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).
- K20 Center. (n.d.) GUS method. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/76
- K20 Center. (2021, September 21). K20 Center 9-minute timer. [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/ZvN435zg2zE?si=4ToRlQx-IcnQwP81
- 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
- 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