Power Up: English ACT Prep, Week 6

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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 review the vocabulary and roles of different paragraphs (i.e. introduction, body, and conclusion paragraphs), topic sentences, and thesis statements. Students then select the most appropriate transition words, identify roles of sentences, and apply this knowledge to order the paragraphs of an essay. This is the sixth activity in a 10-week "Power Up" series for ACT prep.

Learning Goals

- Determine the appropriate transition word to use in a sentence.
- Identify how thesis statements, claims, pieces of evidence, and statements of reasoning play a role in the structure of a passage, paragraph, or an essay.
- Apply understanding of transition words and roles of sentences to order paragraphs in an essay accurately.

Attachments

- Activity Slides—English ACT Prep, Week 6.pdf
- Activity Slides—English ACT Prep, Week 6.pptx
- Great Gatsby—English ACT Prep, Week 6.docx
- Great Gatsby—English ACT Prep, Week 6.pdf
- Production of Writing—English ACT Prep, Week 6 - Spanish.docx
- Production of Writing—English ACT Prep, Week 6 - Spanish.pdf
- Production of Writing—English ACT Prep, Week 6.docx
- Production of Writing—English ACT Prep, Week 6.pdf
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 6 - Spanish.docx
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 6 - Spanish.pdf
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 6.docx
- Skill Sets Check—English ACT Prep, Week 6.pdf
- Structure of an Essay—English ACT Prep, Week 6 - Spanish.docx
- Structure of an Essay—English ACT Prep, Week 6 - Spanish.pdf
- Structure of an Essay—English ACT Prep, Week 6.docx
- Structure of an Essay—English ACT Prep, Week 6.pdf
- Teacher Guide-Gatsby—English ACT Prep, Week 6 .docx
- Teacher Guide-Gatsby—English ACT Prep, Week 6 .pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- Production of Writing eLearning activity (linked)
- Structure of an Essay handout (attached, 1 per student)
- Skill Sets Check handout (attached, 1 per student)
- Production of Writing handout (optional; attached, 1 per student)
- Great Gatsby handout (optional; attached, 1 per group)
- Teacher's Guide- Great Gatsby
- Electronic devices with internet access (1 per student)
- Pen/pencil
- Scissors

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: Preparing the Activity

During the Activity portion, students will work through a digital Production of Writing eLearning activity. However, if you prefer printable handouts, see the directions for the Alternative Option.

Students need a device, preferably a tablet or laptop, to access the eLearning activity: k20.ou.edu/production-of-writing. While a smartphone will work, it will be more difficult to read the larger portions of text on the smaller screen.

Alternative Option: If you would prefer to not use the eLearning activity, print the attached **Production of Writing** handout. Print the attached **Great Gatsby** handout and cut into strips to separate each paragraph. Consider laminating for durability and storing the paragraph strips using paper clips or zip top bags to keep all the pieces together.

Use the attached **Activity Slides** to facilitate the activity.

Transition through **slides 3-4** and discuss what students will learn for this week by reviewing the essential question and learning objectives.

Pass out the attached **Structure of an Essay** handout. Display **slide 5** and explain the I Notice, I Wonder strategy to students. Have students read the handout, then write what they noticed and wondered about the structure of an essay. Ask for several volunteers to share what they notice and what they wonder.

Possible Student Responses:

- I noticed ...
  - This looks like an outline I've seen before, probably in 8th grade.
  - It looks like a five-paragraph essay. I've done one of these before.
  - I noticed that body paragraph two is a bit different from body paragraph one.
- I wonder ...
  - I wonder why body paragraph two only has one example of reasoning for two pieces of evidence. I guess that's so the reasoning will discuss both.
  - I wonder why you have to have transitions at the end of paragraphs. Could they go at the beginning?
  - I wonder if I always have to have three body paragraphs.

Display **slide 6** and share that the focus is shifting from grammar and conventions of standard English to the production of writing, which makes up about 30% of the entire English portion of the ACT.

20 minutes

Activity

Teacher's Note: Teacher Guide for H5P

Before facilitating the following activity, see the attached Teacher Guide handout for answers to help clear up any misconceptions.

Show **slide 7** and pass out the attached **Skill Sets Check** handout. Explain that the front side has reminders for transition words and phrases and the back side has notes for parts of a paragraph. Let students know that the Examples column (right column) will remain empty for now.

Move to **slide 8** and have students take out their electronic devices. Invite students to access the **Production of Writing** eLearning activity. Share the link: k20.ou.edu/production-of-writing or QR code provided on the slide. Have students read the table of contents then press the "Begin" button.

Display **slide 9** and emphasize to students that they should be on **page 1 of 2** of this eLearning activity. The page number is located in the top-right corner of their screen. Direct students to read the directions for each section of this page, complete the tasks, and then press the "Check" button at the end of each section. Pressing the "Check" button gives students feedback.

On the first page, students are asked to add transition words or phrases to a paragraph through a fill-in-the-blank activity. Display **slide 10** and encourage students to use the list of transition words from the table on the slide or from the front of their Skill Sets Check handout for guidance. Then let students practice their inferencing skills by identifying the type of essay and type of paragraph they were given. Give students 2-3 minutes to work through the first page. Afterwards, ask for volunteers to share what they think the main idea or focus of the full essay might be. Use hidden **slide 11** as a reference.

Show **slide 12** and direct students to go to **page 2 of 2** by clicking the "Next Page" arrow at the top or bottom of their screen. Here students are asked to identify whether each sentence is a claim, a piece of evidence, or a statement of reasoning (CER). Direct students to drag the sentence from the left to the right underneath the corresponding role. For example, students should drag the second sentence underneath the word CLAIM. Remind students to refer to their Skill Sets Check handout to help identify the roles of each sentence.

Give students about three minutes to complete the activity. Then ask the class why they think it is important whether a sentence is a claim, an example of evidence, or a statement of reasoning. Facilitate a brief discussion on recognizing the role of a sentence in a paragraph. This can help determine whether the paragraph should or should not contain a specific sentence. For example, when a question on the ACT asks students whether or not a sentence should be added in a specific place, it is helpful to be able to recognize the function that sentence serves to determine its placement.

Alternative Option

If your students are not using the eLearning activity, then give each student a copy of the Production of Writing handout. The first page corresponds to the directions on slide 9 with the second page corresponds to the directions on slide 12.

Next, display **slide 13** and have students navigate to the final activity: https://k20center.ou.edu/h5p/3-paragraph-sort/. The link is provided in the eLearning activity at the bottom of page 2 of 2. Let students know that this essay should sound awkward, as there are paragraphs out of place, and it is up to them to rearrange the paragraphs of the essay so that it flows properly. Have students work independently for a few minutes.

Afterwards, recommend to the class that they re-read the last sentence of each paragraph, then use that information to identify the introduction paragraph and the conclusion paragraph. Both will sound similar because the conclusion will restate the thesis. Once they have identified the introduction paragraph, they then know that the last sentence is the thesis statement. Being able to identify the thesis statement will them help understand the organization of the whole essay because usually it provides a list or description of the main ideas. This list of main ideas is then reflected in the topic sentences of each body paragraph. Give students just a couple more minutes to complete the activity while still working independently or with a partner. Remind them to click the "Check" button to see if their new ordering is correct.

Alternative Option

If your students are not using the eLearning activity, then give each student a copy of the **Great Gatsby** handout. The first page corresponds to the directions on slide 9, and the second page corresponds to the directions on slide 12.

If time allows, challenge the class to identify the thesis statement. Then ask the class how the thesis statement is related to the topic sentence of each body paragraph. Emphasize to students that this relationship aides in the organization of this essay. This skill supports the ability to answer questions on the ACT about identifying the main idea and if the passage supports the main idea.

Teacher's Note: Structure of an Essay Handout

Students should use their Structure of an Essay handout to identify the purpose of each paragraph; however, the outline content is not a one-to-one match for the sample essay so remind students that there is flexibility in writing.

5 minutes

Wrap-Up

Transition through **slides 14-15** which provide students test-taking tips concerning “Box” questions. Share with the class that questions that have a box around the number are questions about the whole passage or about a section of the passage. Explain to students that eliminating choices that do not match the formatting or wording of that section of the passage can help with picking the correct answer. Let students know that if they are trying to pick between answer choices, then the option that supports the main idea of the passage is often the best choice.

Show and explain **slide 16** which reveals a sneak peek at what will happen next week and also provides students a “side quest” where they will fill in the “Examples” column of the Skill Sets Check handout by listening to an argument and identifying the various parts of the essay.

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.
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