Practice with Purpose: Facilitating the ACT (Full Test)

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Time Frame 270

Essential Question(s)

- How can I increase my ACT score?

Summary

This resource supports educators in facilitating a realistic, full-length ACT-style practice test to simulate the actual exam experience. Students learn about the structure of the ACT, effective test-taking strategies, complete a full-length practice test, review their performance, and reflect on areas for improvement. By the end of the activity, students will better understand the testing experience and have a plan for focused preparation in each subject area.

Learning Goals

Standards

College and Career Preparation Standards 6–12 (6th -12th)

9.8 (S): Students will strengthen both collaborative and independent study skills, refine academic writing, and develop strategic test-taking, reading, and interview techniques to excel academically and prepare for college and career success.
10.8 (S): Students will strengthen bothcollaborative and independent study skills, refine academic writing, and develop strategic test-taking, reading,and interview techniques to excel academically and prepare for college and career success.
11.8 (S): Students will strengthen bothcollaborative and independent study skills, refine academic writing, and develop strategic test-taking, reading,and interview techniques to excel academically and prepare for college and career success.
12.8 (S): Students will strengthen bothcollaborative and independent study skills, refine academic writing, and develop strategic test-taking, reading,and interview techniques to excel academically and prepare for college and career success.
9.9 (A): Students will demonstrate belief in their own capacity for growth and learning by recognizing that intelligence and abilities can be developed through effort, effective strategies, and access to opportunities and resources.
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Attachments

- Activity Slides—Practice with Purpose.pptx
- English Test 1 Explanations—Practice with Purpose.docx
- English Test 1 Explanations—Practice with Purpose.pdf
- English Test 1 Study Tool—Practice with Purpose.docx
- English Test 1 Study Tool—Practice with Purpose.pdf
- Math Test 1 Explanations—Practice with Purpose.docx
- Math Test 1 Explanations—Practice with Purpose.pdf
- Math Test 1 Study Tool—Practice with Purpose.docx
- My ACT Outlook—Practice with Purpose.docx
- My ACT Outlook—Practice with Purpose.pdf
- My ACT Study Guide—Practice with Purpose.docx
- My ACT Study Guide—Practice with Purpose.pdf
- Practice Test 1—Practice with Purpose.pdf
- Reading Test 1 Explanations—Practice with Purpose.docx
- Reading Test 1 Explanations—Practice with Purpose.pdf
- Student Answer Sheet—Practice with Purpose.docx
- Student Answer Sheet—Practice with Purpose.pdf

Materials

- Activity Slides (attached)
- My ACT Study Guide handout (attached; one per student)
- My ACT Outlook handout (attached; one per student)
- Practice Test 1 handout (attached; one per student)

- Student Answer Sheet handout (attached; one per student)
- Math Test 1 Explanations handout (attached; class set, see preparation note)
- Math Test 1 Study Tool handout (attached; class set, see preparation note)
- English Test 1 Explanations handout (attached; class set, see preparation note)
- English Test 1 Study Tool handout (attached; class set, see preparation note)
- Reading Test 1 Explanations handout (attached; class set, see preparation note)
- Science Test 1 Explanations handout (attached; class set, see preparation note)
- Timer
- Pen/pencil
- Scratch paper
- Sticky notes (optional)
- Highlighters (optional)
- Calculators

20 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Framing the Activity

This test can be used as a diagnostic, or to compare results with those from an earlier practice test to track progress. We also recommend using the Power Up: ACT Series either before or after this activity. This series consists of ten 35-minute activities for each core subject that are meant to be easily embedded in the classroom curriculum.

- Power Up: English ACT Prep 10-Week Series
- Power Up: Math ACT Prep 10-Week Series
- Power Up: Reading ACT Prep 10-Week Series
- Power Up: Science ACT Prep 10-Week Series

Use the attached Activity Slides to share the essential question on **slide 3** and the learning objectives on **slide 4**.

Display **slide 5** and introduce students to the instructional strategy Stand Up, Sit Down . Model what to write for the activity by asking students what they would need to bring to the ACT. Use the Possible Student Responses as a guide. Write down all student answers on a board or chart paper.

Next, pass out scratch paper or sticky notes to each student. Move to **slide 6** and explain that students will start by writing everything they know about the ACT. Encourage them to write at least three things. Then, have them write down why the ACT matters.

Next, move to **slide 7** and have everyone stand up. Ask for volunteers to share one thing they wrote about what they know about the ACT. Write down what they said on the board or chart paper. Inform students that if they hear someone share something that they also wrote to cross it out. Continue asking students to share until no one has anything new to add. Move to **slide 8** and go through the same process for the next prompt. Once you have your lists for each prompt, ask students to find patterns in their answers or to share what surprised them.

Teacher's Note: Possible Student Responses

What do I know about the ACT?

- It's broken up into three required subject tests (Math, English, and Reading) and one optional (Science).
- It's a timed test.
- Know what the instructions for each test are so you don't waste time reading them after the test has started.

Why is it important?

- My score influences the decision about which school I can get into.

What do I need to bring?

- Timing device (inaudible)
- Calculator
- Pencils

toward a test-optional format, the ACT can be important in obtaining scholarships and school admissions. If you have students who plan to enter the workforce directly after high school, let them know that improving this score can provide more options if they later decide to pursue a degree or obtain certifications. You may also want to mention that a good ACT score on the English portion of the exam may help students avoid paying for remedial classes when starting college.

This ACT practice helps with general test preparation and reading comprehension skills that can transfer to other areas of life, including military or other organizations that require aptitude tests. Share that their scores are also used to show the state what students have learned. If your school has an average goal to achieve, you can share that here.

20 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 10**. Explain to students that before they take a full ACT practice test they will explore some relevant test-taking strategies first. Pass out the **My ACT Study Guide** handout. Using the Strategy Harvest instructional strategy, have students note on page 1 which of the strategies they have already used for big tests like the Pre-ACT or finals. Give them time to fill in the first row with their strategies and the pros/cons before inviting them to find a partner and take note of their strategies.

Transition to **slide 11** and invite students to access the prepared ACT Strategies Hive (a curation of online artifacts). Instruct students to explore 1-2 strategies for each subject and to write their notes/observations on page 2 of the handout. Allow students time to work independently, then have them find a partner and complete the handout accordingly.

After students have had enough time to fill out their handouts, ask for a few volunteers to share information about some of the strategies they think can help them while taking the ACT.

Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

If students are struggling to identify helpful strategies, encourage them to explore the “Overall” column first as those strategies focus on the importance of guessing. Also feel free to share your favorite strategies that helped you. Make sure to explain how strategies vary by person and their skills.

170 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note: Practice Testing

It may be helpful to remind students that the point of taking multiple practice tests is to build familiarity with the testing format and increase their testing stamina. By stamina, we mean that this test is about 4 hours long, and they are not allowed much movement or many breaks. Most students have likely not taken tests of this length. Encourage them to use this practice testing experience as a way to uncover challenges that could be addressed using the test-taking strategies reviewed in the Explore.

Use **slides 12-15** to display the specific timers for each subject test. Distribute a **Practice Test 1** handout and **Student Answer Sheet** handout to each student. Instruct students not to begin the test until told to do so.

When proctoring the test, announce: "You will have **35 minutes** for this section. Work only in this section. If you finish early, check your work. Do not move ahead to the next section. When time is called, stop immediately and put your pencil down." Start the relevant timer. Allow students time to work. You may provide a 5-minute warning (optional but common).

Once the timer goes off, announce: "Stop. Put your pencil down. You may not continue working in this section. Please turn to the next section and wait for instructions." Pause briefly between sections (1-2 minutes) so that students can stop working and turn to the next section.

Students are not allowed to return to previous sections just as this is not allowed during a real ACT test. For a typical ACT administration, there is a 10-minute break after the Math subtest and before Reading. No breaks occur between the other sections except for the brief transition time needed to give directions. Collect all testing materials at the end.

Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

The sample script for starting the test is based on the English section. Please change the number of minutes students have based on the respective time for each section:

- English - 35 minutes
- Math - 50 minutes
- Reading - 40 minutes
- Science - 40 minutes

The test sections and slides are in the same order as the ACT to ensure realism.

55 minutes

Extend

Research shows that practice alone doesn't prepare students for the ACT. Helping students understand the thought process behind the correct and incorrect answers is just as important as building strong test taking skills.

Move through **slides 16-23** to review the correct answers for each subject test. Have students mark the incorrect answers on their Student Answer Sheet. Then have them input the total correct in the space provided. Transition to **slide 24** and explain how students will use the following charts to help figure out their subject scores. Then use **slides 25-28** to walk students through how to calculate their scores by subject. Use **slide 29** to help students calculate their composite score. Explain that the composite score is the average of math, reading, and English; since science is optional, we will not add it to this score.

Teacher's Note: Calculating Scores

Share the following with students:

The ACT automatically takes the highest score from each subject test when a student takes the ACT called the "super score." Most schools accept this score. They can access a calculator from My.ACT.org once they have an online account.

Most students increase their score after taking the ACT a second time. You can mention that most students are able to apply for a fee waiver and are able to take the ACT twice for free. Check the requirements for more details at ACT Fee Waiver Program. Encourage them to take the test as often and as early as they can.

Teacher's Note: Optional Tech Modification

If available, consider having your students use this online resource for an easier and faster way to calculate their scores.

Move to **slide 30** and pass out the **My ACT Outlook** handout. Instruct students to circle or highlight the current range of their composite score from this practice test. Next, tell the students to think of a goal range. Have them identify the two subjects that they want to focus on to improve their score.

Display **slide 31**. Explain that now that they know which subject(s) they need the most help with, they should move to that station to dive deeper into the answer explanations. Inform students that while in their station groups, they should use the My ACT Outlook handout as a guide to review the correct/incorrect answer explanations. Once they feel confident in their strategy for improving their score in a subject area, they should move to a different station. Give students enough time to at least complete their handout for two subject tests. Encourage students to annotate their answer sheet and handouts however they want and to use their peers at every stage.

Teacher's Note: Providing Digital Access to Explanations

If time allows, let students explore each subject station to review the answer explanations. However, if time is limited, we highly recommend providing digital access to all of the subject answer explanations to students through your LMS or classroom norms.

5 minutes

Evaluate

Have students return to their seats and pass out sticky notes to each student. Display **slide 32** and have students reflect on their plan for improving their score for next time. Have them write on a sticky note one action they will take. Consider posting these in a designated space in your room as a constant reminder to students.

Research Rationale

Standardized testing in high schools has long been used 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). In addition to admissions, it is important to keep in mind that standardized test scores can also provide students with scholarship opportunities they would not otherwise have had (Klasik, 2013). Although the topic of standardized testing continues to be debated, effective test preparation 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. Students from groups that may historically struggled 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 the time to understand this test, including the timing, question types, rigor, and strategies for approaching specific questions, can help 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

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