

ACT Reading Test Preparation

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Overview of the Session

- Understanding the ACT Reading Test
- Types of reading passages
- Types of questions
- General test-taking strategies for the reading section
- Sample test passages
- Tips for preparing for the test



Understanding the Reading Test

- A total of 40 questions in 35 minutes
- 4 passages, each with 10 questions
- Scoring
 - 1 test score for Reading
 - 2 subscores for Literature/Humanities reading skills and Social Sciences/Sciences reading skills



Types of Passages

- The following types of passages, each with 10 questions, are presented in this order:
 - Prose Fiction
 - Social Sciences
 - Humanities
 - Natural Sciences
- Some types of questions will show up in every type of passage. Others will be unique to specific types.



General Information about Passages

- Each passage is about 750 words
- Each passage is placed into two columns with line numbers in the margin
- Each passage uses the same instructions. Instructions never change. Therefore, save time by reading and understanding the instructions before taking the exam.



Prose Fiction Passages

- Prose fiction is the only fiction on the test
- Consists of excerpts from novels or short stories.
- Passages usually have a plot (a sequence of actions) and characters
 - **Keep track of the actions** – Who does what? Where was it done? When was it done? Why was it done?
 - **Keep track of characters** – What kinds of conflict do they face? Conflict with another character? Internal (conflict within him/herself?) External (Man vs. Nature)? How does the character change?
 - **Keep track of tone** – Who is telling the story? Are they biased? Objective? Be alert for connotative words.



Social Science Passages

- Expository writing that may focus on a variety of subjects, including anthropology, biography, business, education, geography, history, political science, and psychology. Passages focus on analysis.
- Common organizational patterns include cause/effect, chronological, and comparisons, so anticipate these types of questions
 - **Keep track of organizational patterns** – Is something being compared? Is information offered in time sequence? Are the causes of something being discussed? Note these patterns.
 - **Note the main idea** – If possible underline it.



Humanities Passages

- Excerpts from memoirs, personal essays, and non-fiction prose in the areas of art, music, philosophy, television, and theater.
- Passages are expository or descriptive and often focused on appreciation of the arts.
 - **Note the main idea.** If possible, underline it.
 - **Note the supporting details.** Mark the booklet.
 - **Look for cause/effect relationships.** Why is something happening? Who or what is responsible?



Natural Science Passages

- Scientific writings that focus on concepts, details, generalizations, and theories.
- Contain many details, and these details need to be related to larger ideas.
- Uses organizational patterns: enumeration, classification, compare/contrast, sequence.
 - Recognize the organizational pattern. Note the main idea and the supporting details.



Types of Questions

Questions will ask you to use referring and reasoning skills to:

- determine main ideas
- locate and interpret significant details
- understand sequences of events
- analyze the author's or narrator's voice and method
- make comparisons
- determine the meaning of context-dependent words, phrases, and statements
- comprehend cause-effect relationships
- draw generalizations

The ACT.

<http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/descriptions/readdescript.html>



Strategies for the Reading Test

- Balance your time
 - 35 minutes for 4 passages – that's less than 9 minutes per passage. Don't spend too much time on any one passage or any one question.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses
 - Use practice tests and study the scores to learn:
 - The amount of time it takes for you to read different types of passages.
 - The scores you earn on different passages.
 - The types of questions that are the most difficult for you.



Strategies for the Reading Test

- Begin with the types of passages that are easiest for you.
 - You'll be able to read them more quickly.
 - You'll be able to move through the questions more quickly.
 - You'll spend time on questions that you have a better chance of answering correctly.



Strategies for the Reading Test

Know the instructions. Review them the night before the exam so you don't need to spend valuable test-time reading them.

- **DIRECTIONS:** There are four passages in this test. Each passage is followed by several questions. After reading a passage, choose the best answer to each question and fill in the corresponding oval on your answer document. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.



Strategies for the Reading Test

- Read the entire passage carefully before answering the questions.
 - Look for main ideas, supporting details, and organizational patterns.
- Mark the text as you read.
- Read all the choices before selecting the best answer.
- Eliminate incorrect choices before guessing.
- Leave no item unanswered before you move to a new passage. If you are uncertain, choose an answer and circle the question.

Identifying Organizational Patterns

One way to identify organizational patterns is to look for transition words as clues. Here are some common patterns and transition words:

- **Sequence** – first, second, next, then, finally
- **Cause/Effect** – because, consequently, therefore, as a result
- **Comparison** – similarly, likewise
- **Enumeration** – first, second, third



Marking Up Text

You can't read and remember every point in the passage. Instead, make it your goal to identify items that you'll likely need to refer to. This will help you save time.

- In your test booklet, mark
 - Main Ideas (topic sentences)
 - Supporting Details --examples, facts, and statistics
 - Transition words—these often indicate the organizational pattern being used
- Your mark-up only needs to make sense to you. Some suggestions. . .



Sample Mark-Up

Research is constantly going on to refine the theories of personality. Learning theories suggest that the personality changes throughout a person's life, and that present situations are at least as important as past events in directing behavior. For example, psychoanalytical theory suggests that human behavior is largely determined by internal forces set into action in infancy and childhood. Humanistic theories are more optimistic, seeing the mature desire for self-fulfillment as a guide to behavior. There is no one theory that completely explains personality; each has its strengths and weaknesses.

Working with Examples

- Use the Example Passages handout
- Read and practice marking-up the text
- Answer the questions provided on the slides



Determine Main Idea

Read example one and answer this question:

Which of the following statements best expresses the main idea of this passage?

- A. Egyptians used copper.
- B. Most copper minerals are sulfides.
- C. The name of the island of Cyprus comes from the Greek word for copper.
- D. Copper is a metal that has been known and used longer than any other type of metal.



Locate Significant Details

Read example one and answer this question:

According to the passage, copper may be characterized as

- A. having limited use.
- B. being an ore mixed with sulphoric acid.
- C. being an excellent conductor of electricity.
- D. being difficult to mold or shape.



Understanding Sequence of Events

Read example two and answer this question:

According to the passage, which of the following events occurred most recently?

- A. Mount St. Helens erupted.
- B. Paricutin was formed.
- C. Vesuvius was formed.
- D. Krakatoa erupted.



Draw Generalizations

Read example two and answer this question:

According to the passage, Paricutin is similar to Vesuvius in that they both

- A. are in Mexico.
- B. are volcanoes.
- C. built up quickly.
- D. are almost 4,000 feet high.

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Make Comparisons

Read example two and answer this question:

According to the passage, compared to Vesuvius, Paricutin is

- A. more scenic.
- B. more violent.
- C. less frequently active.
- D. younger.

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Comprehend Cause/Effect Relationships

- Read example three and answer this question:
On the basis of information in the passage, indoor air in the wintertime should be moist in order to
- A. protect the furniture from excessive drying.
 - B. increase the circulation of the blood.
 - C. lower heating expenses.
 - D. prevent mucous membranes from drying out.



Determining Word Meaning

Read example three and answer this question:

In line 6, the word *chilling* most closely means

- A. to calm down.
- B. to make discouraged.
- C. a penetrating coldness.
- D. a numbing fear.



Analyzing Voice or Method

Read example four and answer this question:

The story is told from the point of view of:

- A. Bill, the main character.
- B. a biased narrator.
- C. a detached narrator.
- D. Bill's teacher.



Making Inferences

Read example four and answer this question:

On the basis of the information in the passage, we can determine that Bill

- A. watches less television than the average student.
- B. watches more television than the average student.
- C. watches the same amount of television as an average student.
- D. watches no television.



Preparing for the Test

Identify strengths and weaknesses

- Take practice tests.
- Rank the types of passages from least to most difficult for you to comprehend.
- Identify the types of questions that give you trouble.
- Create a test strategy.

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Creating a Test Strategy

- Start with the passage that is easiest for you to understand
- Leave the most difficult type of passage for the end
- Don't allow yourself to spend too much time on question types that cause you difficulty. Make a choice, mark the question, and move along.



Study Strategies

- #1 – READ! Read anything and everything. Set aside time each week to read.
- Read actively. Make yourself
 - Determine main points
 - Identify organizational patterns
 - Mark supporting details
 - Note words that indicate bias
 - Practice marking-up your text



Study Strategies

- Read material that challenges you—your toughest passage type. The more familiar you become with a writing style, the easier it will become to comprehend it.
- Practice reading in timed situations. Time yourself and work to read faster.



Use Available Materials

- ACT Sample Test Questions: (A complete test)
<<http://www.actstudent.org/sampletest/index.html>>
- Study Guide Zone: (1 passage)
<http://www.studyguidezone.com/act_reading.htm>
- The ACT 2007 | 2008 Preparing for the ACT.
- ACT Reading, Improving College Admission Test Scores, Instructivision, Inc.



Readily Available Reading Materials

- Natural Sciences articles

<http://discovermagazine.com/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/science/index.html>

- Social Sciences articles

<http://www.businessweek.com/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/business/index.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/politics/index.html>

<http://www.biography.com/>

- Humanities

<http://www.nytimes.com/pages/arts/index.html>

- Prose Fiction

<http://www.bartleby.com/>

Also weekly news magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*, etc.) usually have science, education or society, and arts sections.