LAST-MINUTE PREP TIPS FOR THE ACT

THIRTY-SIX EDUCATION

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ENGLISH

Format

• 75 questions broken into 5 passages of 15 questions each
• Strange line breaks in paragraphs so questions line up with underlined references—look for indentation to indicate the start of a new paragraph:

PASSAGE I

Dragonfly

The nature trail is six feet wide and seven miles long. It slithers through the forest like a snake curving, and bending along the banks of the river.

The county cleared this path and paved it with packed gravel, so they would have a peaceful place to hike and bike.

I ride this trail nearly every day—not on a bike, but on “Luigi.” That’s the nickname I gave my

1. A. NO CHANGE
   B. snake, curving and bending
   C. snake curving and bending.
   D. snake, curving, and bending.

2. Which of the following alternatives to the underlined portion would NOT be acceptable?
   F. path, paving
   G. path and then paved
   H. path before paving
   J. path paved

3. A. NO CHANGE
   B. knowing they
   C. that they
   D. people

4. F. NO CHANGE
   G. day; not on a bike
   H. day not on a bike
   J. day, not on a bike;
ENGLISH

Strategies for the section:

• Read a full paragraph before answering the questions it contains
• "Listen" for what sounds good and bad; eliminate the bad options
• Try to focus on grammar whenever possible; when you can explain the underlying grammar to yourself, you’ll be more accurate
• Avoid redundancy
• When in doubt, choose shorter answers. Shorter is usually better
Quick tip #1: avoid redundancy

The original subway line was 9.1 miles long and had twenty-eight stations. [A] The first train took twenty-six minutes to complete the route, which ran from City Hall to West 145th Street in under a half an hour.  

19. A. NO CHANGE  
   B. in the completion of its route.  
   C. in twenty-six minutes.  
   D. DELETE the underlined portion and end the sentence with a period.

PASSAGE V

Three Stars, Many Stories

Many thousands of years ago, people around the world began attaching different stories to the stars in the night sky.

61. A. NO CHANGE  
   B. stories, which they connected to  
   C. stories, to which they related to  
   D. stories because of

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Quick Tip #2: a semi-colon is the same as a period

[3] We became inseparable childhood friends, and we remained close, even though we attended different high schools and colleges.

[2] Joan enjoyed jogging and painting cityscapes. I loved hiking trips and writing. We shared an appreciation of the outdoors and a passion for our creative work.

45. A. NOCHANGE
   B. close, yet even
   C. close; even
   D. close. Even

46. Which of the following alternatives to the underlined portion would NOT be acceptable?
   F. cityscapes, while I
   G. cityscapes; I
   H. cityscapes. I, on the other hand,
   J. cityscapes I
Quick Tip #3: be very literal with questions with directions—give them what they want!

Luigi’s motor moves slowly as we venture along the trail.

7. Which choice would most logically and effectively emphasize the positive, friendly attitude the narrator has toward Luigi?
   A. NO CHANGE
   B. travels safely
   C. proceeds carefully
   D. purrs softly

In the 1920s, Mexican artist Diego Rivera (1886–1957) practiced the art of painting frescoes, large murals done on fresh plaster.

30. The writer wants to suggest that the art of the fresco had been in decline previous to Rivera. Which choice best accomplishes that goal?
   F. NO CHANGE
   G. engaged in
   H. influenced
   J. revived
Math

Format

• 60 minutes to answer 60 questions
• Questions get harder as the section progresses
• Covers material from pre-algebra, algebra I, geometry, algebra II, and trigonometry
Math

Strategies

• Read questions very carefully. Make sure you know what you’re solving for!
• Write down your steps meticulously
• The first 45 or so questions tend to be much easier than the last 15, so make sure you move quickly through the early part of the test
• Use your calculator any time you’re unsure of a mental math calculation
• The best strategy for most questions is to identify content you recognize from class and answer the question as if it is free-response, then look to the answers for a match
• If you get stumped, plugging in the answers and making examples are both alternative options
READING

Format

- 35 minutes to answer 40 questions broken up into 4 passages with 10 questions each
- Passages are always in the following order: Literary Narrative, Social Science, Humanities, Natural Science
- Questions aren’t asked in the order they appear in the passage; most questions don’t have line references
- Questions contain a blend of “main-point” questions and “detail” questions
- The Humanities passage is typically broken into two paired passages relating to the same topic
**READING**

**Strategies**

- Read the whole passage first!!!
- As you read, pay attention to the structure of the passage.
- After you finish reading, take a brief moment to review the main point of the passage.
- If you’re unsure of an answer, try to find the reference in the passage. Most of the time, you can find a sentence that directly answers each question.
- Pay careful attention to the timing—you have 8 minutes and 45 seconds to read and answer all 10 questions for each passage.
- If you have no idea how to answer a question or where to find it in the passage, guess and move on.
Focuses for each passage type

• Literary Narrative: focus on characteristics and relationships, NOT plot. If there are limited characters, pay attention to setting and sensory descriptions.

• Social Science: find the main point of the passage. Usually, it’s in the first and last paragraphs of the essay. By the end of the passage, you should be able to point to a sentence or two that clearly summarize the essay’s main point.

• Humanities: read passage A, then answer the questions from passage A. Then, read passage B and answer its questions. Finally, answer the comparative questions. Passages typically have a “moral” or conclusion in the last paragraph; use this to compare the points made by the authors.

• Natural Science: make sure to track different researchers as you read the article. Who researched/argued for which position? If there are no scientists named, identify major sections of the essay to find answers later.
Format

• 35 minutes to answer 40 questions, typically broken up into 6 passages of 6 or 7 questions
• Passages contain verbal and visual information; they can be explanations of scientific topics, summaries of experiments, and opposing scientific arguments
• Covers science content including biology, chemistry, physics, earth science, and other science disciplines
• Questions test retrieval of data, interpretation of experimental results, understanding of lab methodology, and general science reasoning
• Most questions can be answered with only the information provided (though 1 or 2 questions per test recently have included outside information)
Strategies

• Read the passages first!!!
• Focus more on where the information is than on exactly what it says
• While reading, focus your attention on which variables are tested in each experiment and differences between different charts and graphs
• Don’t try to memorize methodologies and experimental setups; you can check back on that later
• Pay very careful attention to the wording of the questions—they contain many clues like “experiment 1,” “temperature,” or “trial 5” that will help you find the information you need to answer each question
• Break complex questions into smaller pieces you can look up one-by-one. If necessary, write down information you find while doing so
• If you can’t find the answer on your own, compare answers to the results to the data provided. At very least, you can improve your chances when guessing.
• Pay careful attention to the timing—you have between 5 and 6 minutes to read the passage and answer 6 to 7 questions
LAST-MINUTE TIPS

How to be most effective in your prep

• Take several practice tests to analyze what needs the most work. There is a direct correlation between amount of prep and score improvement.
• If you can only focus on a section or two, Math and English are usually easier to bring up in the short term
  – Identify a few question types you seem to miss frequently, study the underlying content, and practice more of the same question type
• To improve timing for Reading and Science, practice doing individual passages timed for 9 minutes (Reading) and 6 minutes (Science)
• Practice, practice, practice!!!