

# Resources for Educators

*In This Section:*

- 10 Strategies to Impact ACT Scores
- Helpful Websites
- Test Preparation

**ACT**<sup>®</sup>



**Strategy One: Increase Percentage of Students Taking Core Coursework**

Students who take the recommended core curriculum perform better on the ACT and enroll in college at a higher rate. Encourage all students to take a solid and rigorous academic curriculum.

**Five Year Trends—Average ACT Score by Level of Preparation**

Grad Year	Number of Students Tested		Percent <sup>1</sup>		Composite	
	Core or More	Less than Core	Core or More	Less than Core	Core or More	Less than Core
2004	661,290	405,328	56	35	21.9	19.4
2005	658,430	406,763	56	34	21.9	19.5
2006	647,298	413,888	54	34	22	19.7
2007	659,603	444,906	51	34	22	19.8
2008	873,743	431,748	61	30	22	19.5

<sup>1</sup>Percent of all students tested. Numbers will not add up to 100 percent due to student non-response.

**Expectations**

All students should be expected to be ready for college and work, not only those traditionally considered “college bound.” To be ready for college and work, every high school student should be prepared and encouraged to take and do well in rigorous Courses for Success. This includes one or more advanced mathematics course beyond Algebra II (e.g., Trigonometry) as well as Biology, Chemistry, and Physics.

**What We Can Do**

- ✓ **Coursework Review Worksheet**  
Use the worksheet as a guide in working with students to ensure they are taking a rigorous and solid core curriculum
- ✓ **Involve Parents**  
See that parents are involved with key educational and postsecondary planning
- ✓ **College Readiness Standards™**  
Use the College Readiness Standards from EXPLORE® and PLAN® to identify student’s academic strengths and weaknesses, and where intervention may be needed
- ✓ **Additional Resources**  
<http://act.org/path/secondary/>

For a complete listing of courses, visit [www.actstudent.org/college/courses](http://www.actstudent.org/college/courses)

## #2

**Ten Strategies to Impact ACT Scores****Strategy Two: Provide Test Preparation Experiences**

Students are more likely to perform at their best on a test if they are comfortable with the test format, understand appropriate test-taking strategies, and are aware of the test administration procedures.

**Clear Focus**

All test preparation efforts should have a clear focus or objective. With a clear idea of the purpose of test preparation activities, teachers and counselors will be effective in emphasizing appropriate topics.

**Pre-Test**

Psychological characteristics such as level of confidence, anxiety, and motivation can affect performance on the ACT. Familiarization with test procedures and question formats through practice on sample ACT tests, or on academic tests like EXPLORE and PLAN is likely to ease anxiety and increase confidence.

**Integration**

Integrate ACT practice test questions in your everyday subject exams on the topics you already cover with your students.

**Familiarization**

Familiarize students with general test-taking strategies such as using time effectively, understanding the directions for the ACT, reading each question carefully, responding to the questions, reviewing answers, marking the answer document, and preparing for the day of the test.

**What We Can Do**

- ✓ **Provide ACT Online Prep**  
Comprehensive content review for each of the ACT's four required tests. Includes a Writing Test that is scored instantly
- ✓ **Encourage Students to Use *Preparing for the ACT***  
A free booklet that includes a complete practice test and a written prompt with sample essays
- ✓ **Administer ACT Practice Tests**  
Retired ACT test forms may be purchased for students to use as practice tests
- ✓ **Administer EXPLORE and PLAN**  
A format similar to the ACT may help reduce anxiety
- ✓ **Web Resources**  
<http://act.org/path/secondary/testprep.html>

### Strategy Three: Review Content and Format of the ACT

It is important that students be aware of the content of the ACT, the skills measured on each test, and the types of questions on the tests.

#### Review

Prior to testing, review the format of each ACT test with students. The review should include content specifications for each test, test-taking strategies for each content assessment, and the number of questions on each test.

#### English—45 minutes

Content Skills	Proportion of Test	No. of Questions
Punctuation	.13	10
Grammar and Usage	.16	12
Sentence Structure	.24	18
Strategy	.16	12
Organization	.15	11
Style	.16	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>75</b>

#### Reading—35 minutes

Content Skills	Proportion of Test	No. of Questions
Prose Fiction	.25	10
Humanities	.25	10
Social Sciences	.25	10
Natural Sciences	.25	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>40</b>

#### Mathematics—60 minutes

Content Skills	Proportion of Test	No. of Questions
Pre-Algebra	.23	14
Elementary Algebra	.17	10
Intermediate Algebra	.15	9
Coordinate Geometry	.15	9
Plane Geometry	.23	14
Trigonometry	.07	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>60</b>

#### Science—35 minutes

Content Skills	Proportion of Test	No. of Questions
Data Representation	.38	15
Research Summaries	.45	18
Conflicting Viewpoints	.17	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>40</b>

The four content areas of Biology, Earth/Space Sciences, Chemistry, and Physics are represented on the test. The content areas are distributed over the different formats in such a way that at least one passage, and not more than two, represents each content area.

#### What We Can Do

- ✓ **Encourage Students**  
Encourage students to visit [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) for the free test preparation materials
- ✓ **Practice Tests**  
Encourage students to take the practice tests according to what they need to work on: timing, pacing, or content areas. Review the results with students
- ✓ **Review Test-Taking Strategies**  
Review with students general test-taking strategies such as pacing, understanding directions, responding to questions/guessing, and reviewing
- ✓ **Share With Faculty**  
Share the content and format of the ACT with faculty in your school
- ✓ **Web Resources**  
[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

**Strategy Four: Align Curriculum with Skills Tested**

Review and evaluate the rigor and alignment of instruction in English, mathematics, science, and social studies to ensure that the foundational skills leading to readiness for college-level work are taught, reaffirmed, and articulated across high school courses.

**Evaluate**

Review the College Readiness Standards Report to identify academic skills where students may need enhanced instruction. The Item Response Summary reports from EXPLORE and PLAN can be used early to identify college readiness gaps that may exist in the curriculum.

**Share**

Share the valuable information that the College Readiness Standards Report provides with the appropriate teams of teachers who teach the core subject areas. The more the teachers know about the academic skill levels of their students, the more effective they will be in providing the best academic preparation for students to become college ready.

**Implement**

Incorporate teaching strategies into an already existing curriculum to address gaps in academic skills that have been determined by the College Readiness Standards Report.

**What We Can Do**

**Share the Following Information  
with Teachers, Curriculum  
Coordinators, and Administrators**

- ✓ Curriculum Review Worksheets
- ✓ Test Question Analysis Activity Booklets
- ✓ College Readiness Standards Table

These free resources can be found at  
[www.act.org/standard/instruct](http://www.act.org/standard/instruct)

# #5

### Strategy Five: Involve Faculty and Parents

We should all focus on helping our students become academically prepared, primarily through direct academic intervention and second, through the cultivation of nonacademic factors that support academic achievement.

#### Educators should:

- Review the Career Interest Inventory and College Readiness Standards with parents and students.
- Intervene to encourage students to re-engage with their academic work with the help of core faculty.
- Promote postsecondary goals through rigorous coursework and effective career planning with both student and parental input.
- Educate parents on how to interpret student score reports and how to use the information for educational and career planning.
- Collaborate with fellow faculty members on ways to use the Item Response Summary reports to identify a student's or class weaknesses in a particular skill area and develop and implement interventions.
- Share with faculty what the ACT is and how the results are used by students, schools, and postsecondary institutions.

#### Students and their parents should:

- Seek help to focus on academic work and improve academically supportive behavior.
- Seek information and support for activities that prepare students for postsecondary education, including financing, career decision-making, and relevant work and school experiences.

#### What We Can Do

- ✓ Host an Assessment Results Interpretive Session for parents
- ✓ Create a Student/Parent conferencing questions newsletter to assist parents and students in communicating with each other. The newsletter and questions serve as a course pre-registration planning guide
- ✓ Display the ACT College Readiness Standards Report throughout the school
- ✓ Share information regarding EXPLORE, PLAN, and the ACT in a newsletter for parents

## #6

**Ten Strategies to Impact ACT Scores****Strategy Six: Examine and Discuss Data**

Reliable student outcome assessment data can be a tool used in evaluating curriculum, improving instructional programs, and aiding in identifying areas that need improvement or where change may be required.

**Share and Review**

It is essential that data is shared with all the key influencers involved in student instruction. Assessment data can be a valuable tool to improve instruction and student success if it is reviewed, shared, and acted upon.

**Data Review Questions to Consider**

- How did our students perform on the assessment compared to other students nationally, locally?
- What are the academic skill weaknesses of our students? How does our current curriculum address their weaknesses?
- What will be our action plan to address the identified academic areas of concern and weakness?
- How do our student score results relate to the College Readiness Standards? Are they adequately prepared for success?
- Are there any trends or differences in our student scores by ethnic and gender groups?
- How do our student Composite Scores relate to their educational plans?
- Is the academic achievement of our students improving?
- Which students are identified as needing intervention? What is our intervention plan?
- Are there students who are under challenged in their curricula based on their assessment results?

**What We Can Do**

- ✓ Use the College Readiness Standards in developing new courses or in aligning curriculum
- ✓ Create cross disciplinary teams that include core faculty members, counselors and administrators to review data on a regular basis at the school and district levels
- ✓ Share and educate all staff members on how assessment data can be used to enhance instruction
- ✓ Provide continual data analysis updates and appropriate professional development

### Strategy Seven: Engage Early in College Readiness Assessments

Effective student-level assessments should be standards-based and emphasize higher-order thinking skills important to success in school and work. The results should provide information to document student academic achievement and program effectiveness, and provide contributing information for appropriate course placement decisions and instructional strategies.

#### Benefits to Students

A standards-based longitudinal assessment is a systematic way to explore careers and the associated educational requirements for those careers. An assessment should show the connections between course selection achievement and lifelong objectives. Engaging students in early assessments creates a longitudinal, systematic approach to educational and career planning, assessment, instructional support, and evaluation. Early assessments can also increase access to post-high school options.

#### Benefits to Instructors

An effective standards-based longitudinal assessment connects teaching and learning. It relates what is being taught to what is being learned. The assessment results provide helpful information for aligning the curriculum with life-relevant goals and objectives and suggests high-quality instructional activities.

#### Benefits to Administrators

A comprehensive standards-based assessment system provides documentation for accomplished standards and objectives and evidence of student change and growth over time. An effective assessment system provides information for making informed decisions about relative strengths and weaknesses of instructional programs.

#### What We Can Do

- ✓ Promote a positive attitude about the value of assessments
- ✓ Administer EXPLORE and PLAN
- ✓ Review assessment results with students and parents and use them as a tool for course selection and career and college planning
- ✓ Engage faculty in reviewing student level assessment data as a tool of intervention with students
- ✓ Support implementation of census testing—district or statewide

## #8

**Ten Strategies to Impact ACT Scores****Strategy Eight: Retesting****Research shows**

Of the students who took the ACT more than once:

- ✓ 55 percent increased their Composite Score on the retest
- ✓ 22 percent had no change in their Composite Score on the retest
- ✓ 23 percent decreased their Composite Score on the retest

**When Should A Student Retest?**

If a student is not satisfied that scores accurately represent his or her abilities (especially if students see a discrepancy between their ACT scores and their high school grades).

If a student completed new coursework or engaged in an intensive review in the subject areas included in the ACT since last tested.

**Questions to Ask Students Wishing to Retest**

- What are their reasons for wanting to retest?
- Are there significant weaknesses present when looking at content skills sub scores?
- Did the student struggle with the time management of the test?
- Was there any specific subject area that gave the student more trouble?
- What is the student's plan to prepare for the next test?
- What assistance does the student need from me to help them prepare?
- What have you done since you last tested?

**What We Can Do**

- ✓ Encourage students who had problems during testing, such as misunderstanding the directions, running out of time, or not feeling well enough to retest
- ✓ Review the student's essay with them using EssayView. Use the student's essay as a learning tool to help improve their writing and to prepare for the retest

### Strategy Nine: Promote a Serious Attitude

The ACT is an important source of information about students' capabilities, interests, and backgrounds. This information is used by many people, including counselors, admissions personnel, teachers, parents, and the students themselves, to assist students in making decisions about their future education.

#### Student Uses of the ACT

- Explores educational programs/majors and career opportunities based on the student's interests and achievements
- Identifies students' relative strengths and weaknesses and how they relate to the requirements or expectations of different courses of study
- Enables students to communicate with prospective postsecondary institutions regarding their academic and extracurricular needs and interests

#### High School Uses of the ACT

- Identifies student academic strengths and weaknesses
- Assists students and parents in identifying potential postsecondary institutions that meet the educational and career goals of the students
- Identifies and assesses students' plans for involvement in extracurricular activities, part-time work, and other activities during college

#### Postsecondary Institutional Uses of the ACT

- Matches college opportunities to student interests
- Advises students about their choice of program/major
- Placement of students in courses that best match each student's level of readiness
- Contacts students and better acquaints them with institutional opportunities
- A factor in admissions and scholarships

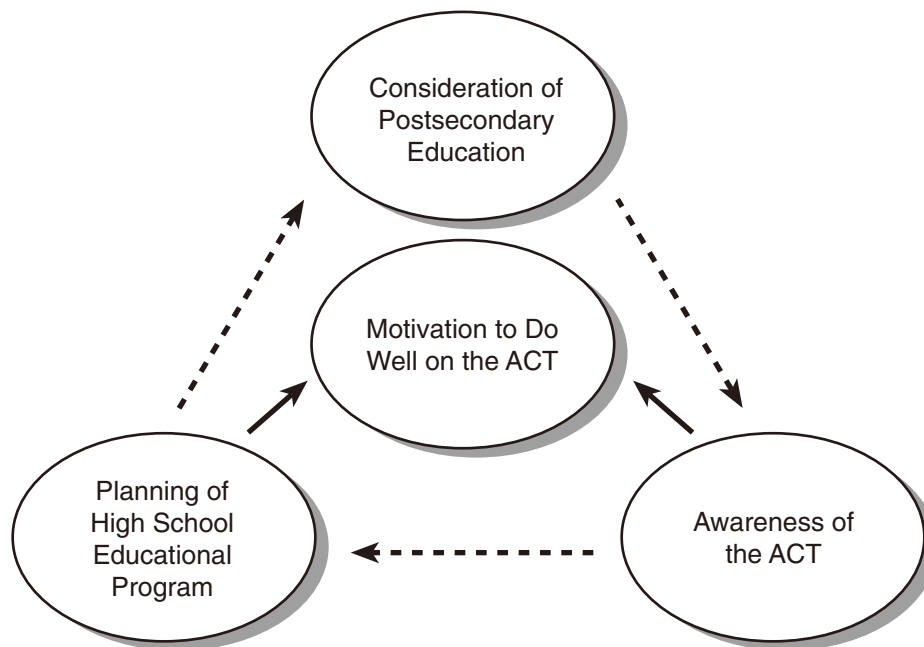
#### What We Can Do

- ✓ Inform students that the ACT is a tool, not a judgment
- ✓ Educate faculty on the many uses of the ACT
- ✓ Promote early college and career planning with students, and stress the importance of the ACT
- ✓ Encourage students to take advantage of the free Educational Opportunity Services (EOS) to begin engaging with colleges and universities about postsecondary options

## #10

**Ten Strategies to Impact ACT Scores****Strategy Ten: Enhance Student Motivation**

Student motivation is a direct result of a clear understanding of where students are going, how they are getting there, and why their plans are important.

**Factors Affecting Student Motivation to Do Well on the ACT****What We Can Do**

- ✓ Encourage students to explore and consider opportunities for postsecondary education early in high school
- ✓ Incorporate students' plans for postsecondary education into their high school programs of study
- ✓ Promote early awareness of postsecondary institutions and why the ACT is important
- ✓ Share with students how the results of the ACT are used

# Course Work Review Worksheet

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

For each of the courses listed below, fill in the month and year the course was completed and the grade received. If the course was not taken, leave the corresponding spaces blank.

English	Date	Grade
English 9		
English 10		
English 11		
English 12		
Literature		
Humanities		
Other:		

Mathematics	Date	Grade
Algebra I		
Algebra II		
Geometry		
College Algebra		
Trigonometry		
Other:		

Social Sciences	Date	Grade
U.S. History		
U.S. Government		
World History		
Economics		
Psychology		
Anthropology		
Sociology		
Other:		

Natural Sciences	Date	Grade
Biology		
Chemistry		
Physics		
Astronomy		
Earth/Space Science		
Other:		

## Recommended College Prep Courses

- English** Four years of English
- Mathematics** Three years of mathematics, including rigorous courses in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II
- Natural Sciences** Three years of science, including rigorous courses in Biology, Chemistry, and Physics
- Social Studies** Three years of social studies
- Additional Courses** Some colleges and universities require other classes as prerequisites for admission, such as two or more years of the same foreign language or courses in the visual arts, music, theater, drama, dance, computer science, etc.

\*Specific high school course requirements vary from institution to institution.

## Strategies for Pacing Yourself when taking the ACT

1. Use the time-per-question guidelines to pace yourself during the exam.
2. Try to answer the questions in less time than suggested in the table.
3. Answer the easier questions first and skip over the more difficult questions.
4. Answer the more difficult questions next.
5. Make sure you answer every question even if you have to guess; there is no penalty for guessing.
6. If time is available after answering all of the questions on a test, go back and check your work on that test.

## Time Limits for ACT Tests

Test	Number of Questions	Total Time Allowed	Suggested Time per Passage	Suggested Time per Question
English	75	45 minutes	1–1½ minutes	30 seconds
Mathematics	60	60 minutes		1 minute
Reading	40	35 minutes	2–3 minutes	35 seconds
Science	40	35 minutes	2 minutes	30 seconds

## General Test-Taking Strategies

The following suggestions for general test-taking strategies are intended to help you do your best on the ACT tests:

1. Before taking the ACT tests, be sure that you understand the directions for each of the tests.
2. Read each question carefully so that you understand what the question asks.
3. The suggested time-per-question guidelines should help you pace yourself during the tests.
4. Try to answer the questions in less time than those given in the table so there will be time to answer more difficult questions and review your answers.
5. Answer the easy questions first and skip over the more difficult questions.
6. Answer the more difficult questions next.
7. Answer every question during the time allowed, even if you must guess; there is no penalty for guessing.
8. If time is available after answering all the questions in a test, go back and check your work on that test. (The supervisor will announce when there are five minutes remaining on each test.)
9. Be precise in marking your answers on your answer document. The question that you are answering should match the number of the line of ovals on your answer document. Erase all unintended marks completely.
10. Once time is called, do not attempt to fill in or alter additional ovals on your answer document. This is prohibited, and your answer document will not be scored.

## Preparing for the Day of the Test

The suggestions below are intended to help you prepare for test day:

1. Be confident in your ability to do well on the ACT. You can do well!
2. Be prepared to work hard.
3. Know what to expect on the test day. Familiarize yourself with the information in *Preparing for the ACT*.
4. Take the practice tests in the exact order they are presented. Review your responses so you will feel comfortable about the approaching test day.
5. Prepare well in advance for the test. Do not leave preparation to the last minute.
6. Get plenty of rest the night before the test so you will be in good physical condition for taking them.
7. Students testing at a national test center should plan to arrive by the time listed on your admission ticket. If you arrive earlier than 7:45 a.m., you will probably have to wait outside until the testing personnel have completed their arrangements.
8. Dress comfortably. To conserve energy, your test center may be considerably warmer or cooler on the weekends than during the week. Please dress so that you will be comfortable in a variety of temperatures.
9. Bring the following items with you to the test center:
  - a. Your test center admission ticket (if you are testing at a national test center).
  - b. Acceptable Identification Required. Your admission ticket is not identification. See details on your admission ticket or at **www.actstudent.org**. *If you do not present acceptable ID at the time of check-in, you will not be admitted to test.* If you have questions about acceptable forms of ID, review the detailed list included in the student booklet *Registering for the ACT* or call ACT Test Administration (319/337-1510) before test day.
  - c. At least three sharpened soft-lead (No. 2) pencils with good erasers. Mechanical pencils, ink ball point, felt-tip, highlight pens, or any other writing instruments are not allowed.
  - d. A watch to pace yourself during the test. Do *not* bring a watch that has an alarm function. You will not be allowed to set an alarm because it will disturb other students. The supervisor will announce when you have five minutes remaining on each test.
  - e. A permitted calculator for use on the Mathematics Test, if you wish to use one. (See Figure 4.5.) To be certain your calculator will be permitted on test day, visit **www.actstudent.org** or call 800/498-6481 for a recorded message.

## ACT Websites

- [www.act.org](http://www.act.org) ACT's home page links to all ACT's programs, services, research, innovative users, and much more.
- [www.act.org/readiness](http://www.act.org/readiness) An introduction to all the components of ACT's College Readiness System.
- [www.act.org/aap](http://www.act.org/aap) ACT information related to content of the ACT, test dates, test prep solutions, electronic registration, guidance for students, counseling information, research briefs, etc. Visit this page to learn more about the optional Writing Test.
- [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) ACT's home page for student-oriented information. Includes information about ACT registration, test preparation, and the college admissions process.
- [www.actstudent.org/onlineprep](http://www.actstudent.org/onlineprep) The only Internet-based test prep program created by the developers of the ACT. Features two complete "retired" ACT tests. Includes personalized study plans for each student.
- [www.actonlineprep.com](http://www.actonlineprep.com) Demo link
- [www.act.org/explore](http://www.act.org/explore) Information describing EXPLORE, ACT's curriculum-based achievement test for 8th or 9th graders. Download instructional material, ordering information, and more.
- [www.explorestudent.org](http://www.explorestudent.org) A website designed specifically for students who will take or have taken ACT's EXPLORE test. Provides tips for preparing for EXPLORE, information for interpreting scores, and interactive career exploration tools.
- [www.act.org/plan](http://www.act.org/plan) Information describing PLAN, ACT's college readiness test for 10th graders. Download sample test questions, instructional materials, ordering information, and more.
- [www.planstudent.org](http://www.planstudent.org) A site for students about to take or who have already taken PLAN. The site describes test content and format, provides tips for doing your best, and score interpretation information.
- [www.act.org/essayview](http://www.act.org/essayview) Learn about EssayView, a program that allows you to access images of the essays your students have written in response to the ACT Writing Test.
- [www.act.org/aap/disab](http://www.act.org/aap/disab) ACT information on accommodations and National Test Center Options for students with disabilities.
- [www.act.org/aap/concordance](http://www.act.org/aap/concordance) The concordance tables provide a tool for finding comparable scores on the ACT and the SAT.

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- [www.act.org/qualitycore](http://www.act.org/qualitycore) QualityCore is ACT’s new instructional improvement program, designed to improve college readiness by ensuring high school courses are rigorous and focused on the most essential post-secondary skills. QualityCore provides research-based educator resources to shape rigorous course content and improve outcomes, as well as formative item pools and end-of-course assessments that monitor student achievement.
  - [www.act.org/ew/resources](http://www.act.org/ew/resources) This is your one-stop website for downloadable ACT resources.
  - [www.act.org/discover](http://www.act.org/discover) Learn more about ACT’s Internet-based comprehensive career planning program. Sign up for a 30-day trial or for *DISCOVERies*, the definitive DISCOVER newsletter!
  - [www.act.org/workkeys](http://www.act.org/workkeys) WorkKeys is ACT’s job skills assessment system. Find case studies describing WorkKeys successes or tackle a practice test online.
  - [www.act.org/standard](http://www.act.org/standard) ACT’s unique College Readiness Standards connect EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT test scores with student skills. Learn how to use these Standards to identify what students know and what they are ready to learn next.
  - [www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/benchmarks.pdf](http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/benchmarks.pdf) ACT has established benchmarks scores for the ACT, PLAN, and EXPLORE that indicate a high probability of student success in selected first-year college courses.
  - [www.act.org/news/use](http://www.act.org/news/use) Sign up to receive ACT’s monthly newsletter. *News You Can Use* provides articles to inform students and parents about college and career planning.
  - [www.act.org/activity](http://www.act.org/activity) Sign up to receive *Activity*, ACT’s quarterly periodical that keeps you up to date on new developments at ACT, as well as important issues in the education world.
  - [www.act.org/path/parent](http://www.act.org/path/parent) ACT offers free resources to parents to help students prepare for college and explore career options.
  - [www.act.org/fane](http://www.act.org/fane) ACT’s Financial Aid Need Estimator. Enables families to calculate their Expected Family Contribution (EFC).
  - [www.act.org/research](http://www.act.org/research) Data, data, and more data! Also, find ACT policy reports, information briefs, and research reports.
  - [www.act.org/news/data/08](http://www.act.org/news/data/08) National and state ACT scores
  - [www.actinternationalservices.com](http://www.actinternationalservices.com) Education and workforce services ACT has developed over the past five decades extended to individuals and organizations throughout the world. Website available in English, Chinese, and Korean.

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## Professional Organizations

- [www.schoolcounselor.org](http://www.schoolcounselor.org) **The American School Counselor Association (ASCA)**, a national organization that represents the profession of school counseling, focuses on providing professional development, enhancing school counseling programs, and researching effective school counseling practices.
- [www.ascd.org](http://www.ascd.org) **The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)** is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that represents 170,000 members from the entire profession of educators—superintendents, supervisors, principals, teachers, and others. ASCD supports the advance of all aspects of effective teaching and learning.
- [www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org) **Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)** is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education in states and the District of Columbia. CCSSO provides leadership, advocacy, and technical assistance on major educational issues.
- [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org) **The American Counseling Association (ACA)** is a not-for-profit, professional and educational organization dedicated to the growth and enhancement of the counseling profession.
- [www.nacacnet.org](http://www.nacacnet.org) **The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)** is an education association of secondary school counselors, college and university admission officers, and counselors who work with students as they make the transition from high school to postsecondary education.
- [www.nassp.org](http://www.nassp.org) **The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)** is the preeminent organization and national voice for middle and high school principals, assistant principals, and aspiring school leaders from across the United States and around the world. The mission of NASSP is to promote excellence in school leadership.
- [www.ncda.org](http://www.ncda.org) **The National Career Development Association (NCDA)** is the organization for career development providers and a division of the American Counseling Association.

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- [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org) **The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)** is an organization to advance teaching, research, and student achievement in English language arts at all scholastic levels.
  - [www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org) **The National School Boards Association (NSBA)** is the nationwide, not-for-profit organization representing public school governance. The mission of NSBA is to foster excellence and equality in public education through school board leaderships.

## Government Agencies and Other Organizations

- [www.cgcs.org](http://www.cgcs.org) **The Council of Great City Schools** is an organization of America's largest urban public school systems.
- [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) This is the **U.S. Department of Education** website. This site integrates information about Department policies with the No Child Left Behind legislation. Includes information selected especially for parents, teachers, students, and administrators.
- [www.mapping-your-future.org](http://www.mapping-your-future.org) One-stop site for students, parents, and counselors with information on financial strategies, career options, and college planning. The site is sponsored by a group of guaranty agencies who participate in the Federal Education Loan Program (FELP).
- [www.nces.ed.gov](http://www.nces.ed.gov) **The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)** website for K–12 educators. The site highlights issues of concern with current research and statistics for teachers, administrators, school board members, and parents.
- [www.nclb.gov](http://www.nclb.gov) This is a section of the U.S. Department of Education that provides details about the **No Child Left Behind legislation**.



# What Kind of Test Preparation Is Best?

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## **Introduction**

The ACT is an achievement test—it indicates what a student is ready to learn next by measuring what they currently know and can do. Given the content and philosophy of the ACT, the approach that is most likely to increase ACT scores is high school coursework, because much of the knowledge and skills that are taught in high school is being measured on the ACT. The ACT was designed to reflect high school course taking, and as such it is a good measure of overall high school preparation by subject area and of student readiness for college or work after high school.

It would stand to reason that long-term learning in school, rather than cramming and coaching, would be the obvious best form of test preparation for the ACT. Earning high scores on the ACT is not simply a matter of innate ability or short-term preparation, but reflects a level of achievement resulting from planning, hard work, and dedication. To test this assumption, we can compare the score increases achieved by students who participated in various short-term test preparation activities to those associated with the longer-term preparation that students receive in planning for and taking college preparatory courses in high school.

## **Effects of Short-Term Test Preparation**

Several studies conducted between the early 1990s and 2003 examined ACT score increases attributable solely to short-term test preparation activities using repeat test-takers and cross-sectional samples of students who took the test at given time points. The typical student reported spending fewer than 10 hours preparing for the ACT. The greatest short-term benefits were associated with participation in commercial test preparation courses and test preparation workshops offered by local schools and with use of test preparation computer software. The next highest benefits of short-term preparation were those gained from use of selected commercial workbooks. (Other research shows that the effects of activities such as commercial test preparation classes and test preparation tutoring on ACT subject test scores were even smaller: score increases associated with these activities did not exceed one point for ACT English, Mathematics, or Reading [Briggs, 2001].)

## **Effects of Longer-Term Test Preparation**

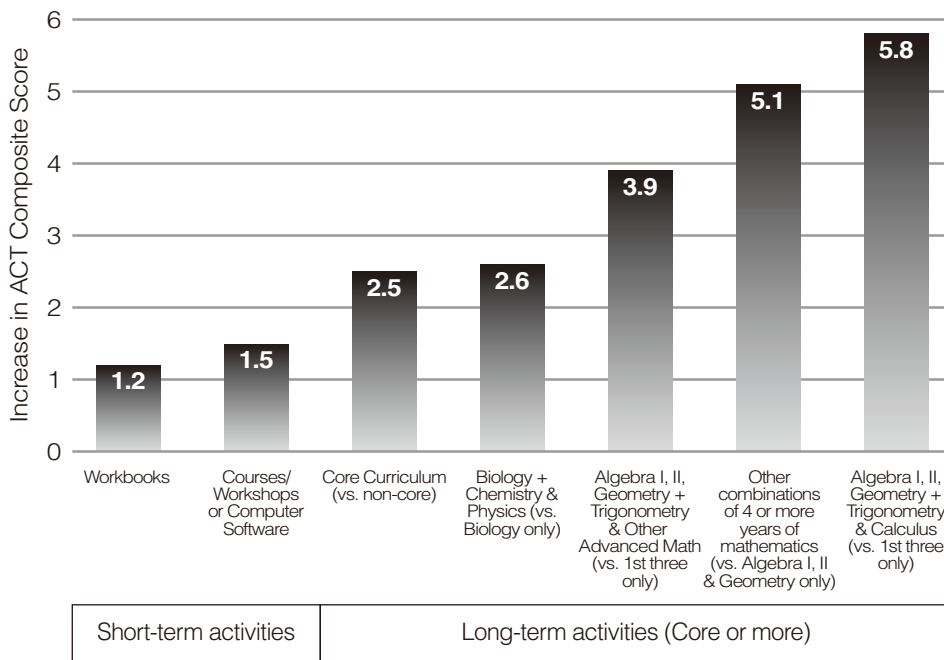
ACT research has continually demonstrated the benefits of taking longer-term, college preparatory coursework for increasing ACT scores, *regardless of students' prior achievement in high school*. As long as students enter these courses ready to learn, all of them can benefit.

Increases in the ACT Composite score associated with high school coursework are substantially larger than those associated with these short-term test preparation activities, regardless of the type of activity.

For example, taking the recommended core college-preparatory curriculum (4 years of English, 3 years each of mathematics, science, and social studies) was associated with ACT Composite scores of 2004 high school graduates that were greater than those of students not taking the core (ACT, Inc., 2004)—score gains nearly twice the amount of the increases associated with short-term preparation.

Within each subject area, 2004 high school graduates who reported taking or planning to take certain higher-level courses achieved even greater increases in average ACT Composite score than those who did not. The largest increases were those associated with additional mathematics coursework over and above the recommended core curriculum.

The results of these studies are summarized in the figure below. Score increases associated with the various activities are arranged in ascending order from left to right. Given that scores on the ACT are reported on a scale from 1 to 36, the degree of impact of these increases on ACT Composite score also increases substantially from left to right.



## Conclusion

Individual short-term test preparation activities appear to have a relatively small positive impact on ACT Composite score when compared to long-term activities best exemplified by high school course-taking.

Simply taking the right core courses in high school can increase ACT Composite score more than does any one of the most beneficial short-term test preparation activities. What’s more, taking specific courses over and above the recommended core curriculum can increase ACT Composite score by up to 5.8 score points, depending on the course taken. Thus, we see that the courses students take in high school matter much more than short-term test preparation activities.

