

Frequently Asked Questions

About the ACT®



Q. What is the ACT?

- A.** The ACT is a national college admission examination that consists of tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science—and an optional Writing Test.

The ACT includes 215 multiple-choice questions. The ACT is prepared according to the:

- *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. (1999).
- *Code of Professional Responsibilities in Educational Measurement*, National Council on Measurement in Education. (1995).
- *Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education*, Joint Committee on Testing Practices. (2004).

Q. How long does the test take?

- A.** Just over four hours for the ACT without the Writing Test, including administration instructions and breaks. Actual testing time is 2 hours and 55 minutes, broken down as follows:

- English: 45 minutes; Math: 60 minutes;
- Reading: 35 minutes; Science: 35 minutes

The ACT Writing Test adds 30 minutes to the testing time.

Q. Why should students take the ACT?

- A.** There are at least four good reasons to take the ACT:

1. **The ACT tests are universally accepted for college admission.** All four-year colleges and universities in the United States, including all of the Ivy League schools, accept the ACT.
2. **The ACT tests are curriculum based.** The ACT is not an aptitude or an IQ test. Instead, the questions on the ACT are directly related to what is taught in high school courses in English, mathematics, and science. Because the ACT tests are based on what is taught in the high school curriculum, students are generally more comfortable with the ACT than they are with aptitude tests or tests with narrower content.

3. **The ACT is more than a test.** In addition to the academic tests, the ACT also provides a unique interest inventory that provides valuable information for career and educational planning and a student profile section that provides a comprehensive profile of high school work and future plans.

4. **The ACT is a good value.** As a private, not-for-profit organization governed by educators, ACT is committed to providing services at the lowest possible cost. Accordingly, the ACT provides a comprehensive package of educational assessment and career planning services at a modest fee.

Q. When are the test dates?

- A.** In the United States, U.S. Territories, Puerto Rico, and Canada, the ACT is administered on five national test dates: in October, December, February, April, and June. In selected states, the ACT is also offered in September.

Q. What is an ACT student Web account and why does a student need one?

- A.** ACT encourages all students to establish a free student Web account. The student will be required to provide identifying information in order to set up an account. Once they do, they will be able to do all of the following 24/7, anywhere they have internet access:

- Register online to take the ACT
- Print a copy of their admission ticket
- Make changes to their registration
- Update their student profile and view their account history
- Request additional score reports, if needed
- Order test preparation materials

Q. How often can a student take the ACT?

- A.** A student may take the ACT as often as he or she wishes. Many students take the test twice, once as a junior and again as a senior.

There are no limitations on how many times a student can take the ACT, but there are some restrictions on how frequently they can test.

For example, a student can test only once per national, international, or state test date. Students should definitely consider retesting if they had any problems during the test, such as misunderstanding the directions or not feeling physically well. They may also want to consider retesting if they are not satisfied that their scores accurately represent their abilities in the areas tested. If students see a discrepancy between their ACT scores and high school grades, or if they subsequently complete coursework or an intensive review in the areas covered by the ACT, retesting may be beneficial.

Q. When is the ACT Writing Test offered?

A. The ACT Writing Test is offered on all national test dates and three test dates internationally.

Q. How will students do on a retest?

A. ACT research shows that 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

If a student takes the test more than once, he or she controls what scores are sent to colleges or scholarship programs.

Q. What does the test cost?

A. The basic fee for the ACT in 2008–2009, which includes reports for the student, high school (if the student authorized reporting), and up to four valid college codes listed at the time of registration, is \$31.00 in the United States. There are additional fees for the optional Writing Test (\$15.00), late registration, standby testing, changing test centers or test dates, international testing, and for additional services and products.

Q. What should students take to the test center?

A. Students should be sure to take these items to the test center:

- Your admission ticket. **Your scores will be delayed, possibly up to eight weeks, if you do not enter the matching information exactly as it appears on your admission ticket onto your answer document.**
- Acceptable identification. Your admission ticket is not identification. You will not be admitted to test without acceptable identification.
- Sharpened soft lead No. 2 pencils with good erasers (no mechanical pencils or ink pens).
- A watch to pace yourself. The supervisor in standard time rooms will announce when five minutes remain on each test.
- A permitted calculator, if you wish to use one on the Mathematics Test. Not all calculators are permitted, such as the TI-89. For a complete description of prohibited calculators, visit www.actstudent.org or call 800/498-6481 for a recorded message.

You may NOT take any of the following items into the test room:

- Food or drink, including water
- Books, dictionaries, notes, scratch paper, or other aids
- Highlighters, colored pens or pencils, or correction fluid
- Any electronic device other than a permitted calculator (examples include timer, beeper, cell phone, media player, PDA, headphones, camera)
- Reading material
- Tobacco in any form

(continued)

Q. When and how are scores reported?

A. ACT score reports are produced for students and the high schools, colleges, and scholarship agencies indicated by the student at the time of registration. Most multiple-choice scores are added to the computer file 2–2 ½ weeks after each test date. Writing scores are usually added two weeks later. Reports are normally sent 3–8 weeks after the test date (5–8 for ACT Plus Writing), unless there is an unpaid registration fee. Student Reports are automatically mailed directly to the student’s home mailing address. High School Reports are sent directly to the student’s high school. (If a student does not provide a valid high school code, no High School Report is created; only the Student Report is produced and mailed. Any later request for a High School Report requires an Additional Score Report fee.)

■ **Additional Score Reports**

Students may also request Additional Score Reports after they test.

Q. What scores are reported?

A. Students who take the English test and the optional Writing Test will receive all of the same scores that students who do not take the Writing Test receive, plus:

- A scaled score, ranging from 1–36, that reflects their combined performance on the Writing Test and the English Test for the same test date
- A Writing Test subscore ranging from 2–12 that reflects performance on the Writing Test only

Q. What scores are reported if a student tests more than once?

A. If a student has taken the ACT more than once, we maintain a separate record for each test date. If requested to send a report to a college, we will release only the record from the test date indicated. This protects students and ensures that they maintain control of their records.

A student may ask ACT to report more than one test date record to an institution. However, he or she may not select test scores from different test dates to construct a new record; a student must

designate an entire test date record as it stands. ACT does not create new records by averaging scores from different test dates. If a student wishes to report Writing results, the entire record for that test date must be reported.

Q. How were the specifications for the Writing Test determined?

A. We followed the same curriculum-based process used for the current four-test battery. This process began with the ACT National Curriculum Survey® involving both high school English teachers and college faculty who teach entry-level composition courses. The information we obtained through the survey was considered by a national panel of educators who helped us design the exact test specifications. Using this process enabled us to develop a Writing Test that measures writing proficiencies that are taught in high school and are important for readiness to succeed in entry-level college composition courses.

Q. Is half an hour long enough to test writing skills?

A. The Writing Test was designed so that the prompt can be properly addressed in the time allotted. The test is a different type of assignment than a college paper, but it does measure skills students use when writing a college paper—such as the ability to focus on the subject at hand, to develop their ideas, and to write logically and coherently with proper sentence structure and sound reasoning.

Q. How does the ACT Writing Test correspond to state learning standards?

A. Since the ACT is a curriculum-based achievement test, there is a high degree of overlap between the ACT Writing Test and state standards. We have compared the specifications for the new Writing Test to the state standards in over thirty states. The ACT Writing Test measures the essential writing skills that have been identified by postsecondary English/writing instructors for college success, and appear in most, if not all, state standards.

Q. How much does the Writing Test cost?

A. The fee for the Writing Test is an additional \$15.00. This has been a significant factor in our decision to offer the Writing Test as an option. Not all students have to pay the increased fee when the colleges they are considering do not require or use it. The ACT registration fee for 2008–2009 is \$31.

Q. Is the ACT Writing Test “coachable”?

A. The Writing Test is a curriculum-based test, just like the other tests in the ACT. This means that it measures the knowledge and skills taught in high school that are important for readiness for college-level work. In this sense, all the ACT tests are “coachable,” because the best preparation for any student taking the ACT is rigorous college preparatory coursework in high school. We provide a variety of materials to students at no charge that describe the test content and format in detail, explain what to expect on the day of the test, and provide sample items so they can become familiar with the test prior to taking it. It is our goal that all students be familiar with the test and what it measures.

Q. How is the Writing Test scored?

A. ACT has over twenty years of experience developing, administering, and scoring writing tests. Raters are carefully screened and trained so they are very familiar with the type of writing that merits each particular score. Raters must pass a test after training before being certified to score the ACT Writing Test. Students’ written responses are scored by two well-trained, qualified raters. If the two raters disagree by more than a point, a third rater will also score the test. We have an established record of high accuracy in scoring performance assessments.

Q. Have you ensured that the Writing Test will be fair to all students?

A. The Writing Test is based on empirical data that tells us what writing skills are being taught in high school classrooms that are important for readiness for college-level work. The test reflects classroom assignments and expectations. The writing prompts and scoring guides are written and reviewed by classroom teachers of writing. They have also undergone our standard fairness review by national sensitivity reviewers, who ensure that each prompt is clearly stated and focuses on a topic to which all students can respond.

Q. What advice should we give students about deciding whether to take the Writing Test?

A. Students should decide whether to take the ACT Writing Test based on the admission policies of the postsecondary institutions in which they are interested and on the advice of their high schools. We routinely list and update information on the ACT website about individual college policies—whether they require, recommend, or do not need results from the ACT Writing Test. Students should consult this list before registering.

Q. Where can I get more information?

A. We encourage you to go to www.act.org/aap/writing for more information on the ACT Writing Test, including:

- Sample essays
- Writing Test scores and comments
- *The Educator’s Guide to the ACT Writing Test*
- Decisions that colleges have made about the ACT Writing Test

ACT Fees 2008–2009

National Registration Fees

(for testing in the United States, U.S. Territories, Puerto Rico or Canada)

Basic fee per test option (includes reports to up to 4 college codes listed at time of registration)	
ACT (No Writing)	\$31.00
ACT Plus Writing	\$46.00
*\$15.00 Writing Test fee refundable, on request, if absent on test day or test option changed to ACT (No Writing)	
REregistration (for retesters):	
Basic fee	same as above
By telephone with <i>immediate</i> test center confirmation	additional \$12.00
Students who miss a test date may request a test date change	\$20.00

International Testing (outside the United States or Canada)

ACT (No Writing)	\$31.00 + \$25.00 surcharge
ACT Plus Writing (available for Oct, Dec, and April test dates only)	\$46.00 + \$25.00 surcharge

Additional Registration Fees

Late registration (add to basic fee or test date change fee)	additional \$20.00 <i>(United States and Canada only)</i>
Standby testing on test date (add to basic fee)	additional \$40.00 <i>(United States and Canada only)</i>
Test center change for same test date	additional \$20.00
Test option change to add Writing for same test date	additional \$15.00

Optional Services/Products

Test Information Release (only on designated national test dates)	\$17.00*
Multiple-choice questions, list of own answers, answer key, and scoring instructions (plus writing prompt and scoring rubric if student took the Writing test). Information included about ordering photocopy of answer document for additional \$12.00 fee (including essay pages if the Writing test was taken).	
ACT Online Prep—ACT's Internet-based test preparation	\$19.95
<i>The Real ACT Prep Guide</i>	\$25.00
(additional shipping charge to addresses outside the United States)	

Special and Arranged Testing

ACT (No Writing)	\$31.00
ACT Plus Writing	\$46.00

Score Reporting Fees

5th and 6th college codes at time of registration or testing	each \$9.00*
Additional Score Reports (ASRs) requested after testing (one test date per report):	
Regular Report (delivered next reporting cycle)	\$9.00
Priority Report (delivered 3–4 business days after processing)	\$13.00
ASR Service Fees (in addition to fee for each requested report):	
ASRs for tests taken <i>before</i> September 2006	additional \$17.00 per report
ASR phone requests (priority only, no regular reports)	additional \$12.00 per call

Note: Fees are nonrefundable unless noted with an asterisk.