ACT English cheat sheet

English: 50 questions in 35 minutes, about 42 seconds each. When two choices are both correct, the shorter one usually wins.

Subject-verb agreement. Skip the phrase between subject and verb. *The box of old photos **was** in the attic*, not were.

No comma splices. Two complete sentences cannot be joined by a comma alone. Add *so*, *and* or *but*, or use a period or semicolon.

Semicolon = period. Both sides must stand alone as sentences. *The rain stopped; the game resumed.*

Colon. A complete sentence comes before it; a list or explanation comes after. *She packed one thing that mattered: snacks.*

Its / it's. *its* owns something; *it's* always means *it is* or *it has*.

Apostrophes. One owner: *the student's score*. Many owners: *the students' scores*.

Extra information. Nonessential detail takes a pair of commas: *My brother, who lives in Ohio, called.* Essential detail takes none.

Pronouns. One clear antecedent that matches in number. *The team packed **its** bags.*

Verb tense. Match the tense around it unless the timeline changes. *She opened the door and **saw** the cake.*

Shorter wins. When two choices mean the same thing, cut the redundant one. *He returned*, not *returned back again*.

Modifiers. A modifier sits next to what it describes. *Running to class, **Maria** dropped her phone.*

Writer's-goal questions. Pick the choice that does exactly what the question asks, even if another sounds nicer.

Practice with 1,026 original questions, free: prep36.com

ACT math formula cheat sheet

Math: 45 questions in 50 minutes. act.org assumes you know basic formulas. Calculator allowed on Math only; CAS models (TI-89, TI-92, TI-Nspire CAS, HP Prime) are banned; the non-CAS TI-Nspire is permitted. Online testers get Desmos built in.

Slope.	$m = (y_2 - y_1) / (x_2 - x_1)$
Line.	$y = mx + b$ (m is the slope, b the y-intercept)
Distance.	$d = \sqrt{(x_2 - x_1)^2 + (y_2 - y_1)^2}$
Midpoint.	$((x_1 + x_2) / 2, (y_1 + y_2) / 2)$
Quadratic formula.	$x = (-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}) / 2a$
Pythagorean theorem.	$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ (right triangles)
Triangle area.	(1/2) × base × height
Circle.	area = pi × r^2, circumference = 2 × pi × r
Trapezoid area.	$(1/2) \times (base_1 + base_2) \times$ height
Special right triangles.	45-45-90: x, x, x·sqrt(2). 30-60-90: x, x·sqrt(3), 2x
SOHCAHTOA.	sin = opp/hyp, cos = adj/hyp, tan = opp/adj
Average.	mean = sum / count, so sum = mean × count
Percent change.	(new - old) / old × 100
Probability.	outcomes you want / all possible outcomes
Distance, rate, time.	d = r × t

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ACT Reading and Science

Reading: 36 questions in 40 minutes. Science (optional): 40 in 40, no calculator, not in the Composite.

Reading

Clock math. 36 questions in 40 minutes is about 67 seconds each.

Checkpoints. Minute 10: question 9. Minute 20: question 18. Minute 30: question 27.

Behind a checkpoint? Do not speed-read. Guess on the hardest question in front of you, mark it, move on.

Read for structure. Note what each paragraph does. Go back to the text for details only when a question sends you there.

Prove it. Every right answer can be backed with words on the page. Outside knowledge does not count.

Order is yours. If one passage type always drags, do it last.

Two close choices. Reread the exact lines. The wrong one is usually too extreme, too broad or half right.

Science (optional)

Question first. Read the question, find the variable it names, then find that variable in the figure.

Axes and units. Check what each axis measures before you read any value. Wrong choices love swapped units.

Trends. As one variable rises, does the other rise, fall or stay flat? That answers many questions.

What changed. When two experiments differ, find the one variable that changed. The question is about it.

Jargon. Unfamiliar terms are usually defined in the passage or do not matter. The data carries you.

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ACT pacing and scoring

No penalty for guessing: fill every bubble. Composite = average of English, Math and Reading, rounded; one-half rounds up.

Pacing table

Section	Questions (scored)	Minutes	Sec per question	Halfway mark
English	50 (40)	35	42	question 25 at minute 17.5
Math	45 (41)	50	about 67	question 22 or 23 at minute 25
Reading	36 (27)	40	about 67	question 18 at minute 20
Science (optional)	40 (34)	40	60	question 20 at minute 20

Questions and minutes from act.org. Seconds and halfway marks: Prep36 arithmetic.

How many you can miss

Composite	Right of 131	Can miss
20	73	58
24	89	42
27	101	30
30	112	19
33	118	13
36	130	1

Prep36's practice-test curve, not ACT data. Balanced profile, same scale score in all three sections. A form from ACT can differ.

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ACT test-day checklist

Pack it the night before. Be inside the test center by 8:00 a.m.

Admission ticket. Print it from MyACT after your photo is uploaded.

Acceptable photo ID. You need it to get into the test center.

No. 2 pencils with erasers. Sharpened. No pens, no mechanical pencils.

A permitted calculator. For Math only, and optional. Fresh batteries.

A watch with no alarm. Allowed for pacing; it stays on your desk.

A snack. For the breaks, outside the testing room.

Laptop and charger. Only if you test online on your own device, set up in advance.

Arrival. Inside the test center by 8:00 a.m. for check-in.

Phone. Off and out of sight, smartwatch and fitness band too, even during breaks.

Taking Writing?

One optional 40-minute essay. It does not change your Composite.

The night before

Only this kit, once: about five minutes per sheet. Say the English rules out loud, write the formulas from memory, read the pacing table. No full practice test, nothing new. Then sleep.

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