

# Preparing for the ACT, Postsecondary, and Career

## Course Description

*Preparing for the ACT, Postsecondary, and Career* is designed to assist students in (a) understanding what the ACT is, why it is important for their postsecondary readiness, and how to interpret their progress/results; (b) understanding how academic skills connect to career pathways and postsecondary opportunities; (c) preparing for the ACT exam through instruction, practice, and familiarity with the structure and format of the ACT exam; and (d) best practices for maximizing one's score (e.g. "test tips", strategies for dealing with test anxiety, benefits of retaking the exam). The course is appropriate for all students in grades 9-12.

The course is designed to be delivered in modules with each focusing on a different component of the ACT. It is recommended to always begin the course with Module 1 ("What is the ACT and why does it matter?"). Also, it is recommended that Module 2 (Reading) precede Module 4 (Science) due to the overlap in reading skills that are important to both sections. However, the modules may be delivered in any order and should be customized based on the needs of the students with regard to subject area. For instance, the sequence of modules and score-level standards being taught might differ if this class is being offered to students in grade 10 preparing to take the ACT for the first time versus students in grade 12 who are preparing to retake the ACT to improve their scores.

This course is designed as a 0.5 credit course.

By state law, all Tennessee students are expected to take a college entrance exam by high school graduation. To fulfill this requirement, students may take the ACT or SAT. The department chose to create an ACT-focused course based on its prevalence as the college entrance exam administered throughout the state.

## Module 1- What is the ACT and why does it matter?



- 1.1. Complete a career interest inventory or assessment. Apply results of career interest inventory or assessment to explore occupations and the activities or job duties related to specific careers. Identify an occupation of interest and plan the educational and career pathway to attain qualifications for the identified career.
- 1.2. Individually, or in groups, research postsecondary opportunities, citing multiple sources, and create a presentation based on criteria such as (but not limited to) career interest, type of institution, location, learning environment, academic and career programs, sports and activities, support services, diversity, cost and financial aid, and admission/acceptance requirements, including ACT score. Postsecondary opportunities include community college, four year college/university, technical school, industry certification, military training, apprenticeship, and professional training. Suggested information for the presentations includes (but is not limited to) information on acceptance criteria (emphasizing ACT requirements or averages, where applicable), academic and career concentrations, length of time to complete training or degree, and average salary based on concentration or credential.
- 1.3. Generate a personalized postsecondary/career plan which includes action steps toward a career pathway including (but not limited to) performance goal on the ACT, future high school coursework (may include early postsecondary opportunities, work-based learning, summer academic programs, etc.), intended major or concentration, multiple postsecondary institutions to apply to, and experiential learning opportunities such as internships, job shadows, volunteer work, or summer training/employment.
- 1.4. Summarize the components of the ACT sections by creating a table outlining the four components of the ACT (English, Reading, Math, and Science), the number of questions per section, the amount of time allocated, and the types of questions found in each section.

### Question Types

- Reading: Main Idea, Supporting Detail, and Inference/Evaluation
- Science: Data Representation, Research Summary, Conflicting Viewpoints
- English: Usage/Mechanics, Rhetorical Skills
- Math: Pre-Algebra/Elementary Algebra, Intermediate Algebra/Coordinate Geometry, Plane Geometry/Trigonometry

- 1.5. Demonstrate understanding of the meaning and impact of ACT results by analyzing a sample ACT score report, defining key terms, and explaining how ACT relates to postsecondary and career readiness.

Key Terms	Postsecondary and Career Readiness Terms
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACT Composite Score</li> <li>• ACT Sub-score (subject test)</li> <li>• College Readiness Benchmarks</li> <li>• College Score Reports</li> <li>• National Career Readiness Certificate</li> <li>• Percentile Rank (national &amp; state)</li> <li>• World-of-Work Map</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Score thresholds for remediation in college coursework</li> <li>• Job skill requirements</li> <li>• Opportunities for early postsecondary coursework such as Advanced Placement (AP), Cambridge International Exams, International Baccalaureate (IB), local dual credit, statewide dual credit, dual enrollment, and courses aligned to industry certifications or CLEP exams.</li> <li>• Financial aid and scholarship criteria at postsecondary institutions</li> </ul>

- 1.6. Complete an entire official practice ACT test, in simulated test conditions, at the beginning (pre-test) and end of the course (post-test).<sup>1</sup>
- 1.7. Generate a personal ACT plan—with progress benchmarks and ACT goal—by identifying areas of strength and weakness based on the sections and question types. Track progress towards goal and the growth plan throughout the course.
- 1.8. After taking the ACT practice test, analyze performance and reflect on test taking experience to develop a personal test experience plan that includes potential solution(s) to be practiced during simulated ACT assessments. Test experience plan should include (but is not limited to) strategies that address:
- Fatigue
  - Anxiety
  - Nervousness
  - Pacing/Time-Management
- 1.9. After taking ACT practice test, and then interwoven throughout the other modules, discuss and practice ACT test taking tips including (but not limited to):
- Pacing required for each section
  - Reading questions carefully
  - Reading all answer choices carefully
  - Eliminating wrong answers
  - Underlining important details or scanning for information
  - Answering every question
  - Checking answers

<sup>1</sup> You may prioritize specific sub-tests based on the needs of students and modules being covered. All practice tests, however, should be administered under simulated test conditions.

- Marking your test document precisely and erasing completely
- Guessing the same letter choice
- Understanding there is only one correct answer
- Skipping questions that are more challenging and returning to answer or guess as a time-management strategy

## Module 2 - Reading

2.1 Identify why skills tested on the ACT Reading test are important to career and postsecondary plans by identifying examples of complex text in documents, manuals, textbooks, etc. relevant to expectations in career and postsecondary settings. Compare Lexile levels of relevant text to Lexile levels expected to be found on the ACT.

2.2 Apply knowledge of the structure and format of the ACT Reading subtest and use strategies to maximize the number of correct responses through regular practice with ACT Reading sample questions.

Structure & Format	ACT Reading Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ACT Reading test is a 40 question, 35 minute multiple choice test. There is approximately 9 minutes allotted per passage.</li> <li>• The reading test is composed of four passages from the categories of Prose Fiction/Literary Narrative, Humanities, Social Studies, and Natural Science.</li> <li>• There are two basic categories of questions on the reading test:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Referring questions:</b> require finding or using information that is clearly stated in the passage</li> <li>▪ <b>Reasoning questions:</b> ask you to apply information that is stated or implied to answer a question.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop comfort and familiarity with the pace required for the ACT Reading test.</li> <li>• Refer to the passages when answering questions.</li> <li>• Read passages and answer questions according to personal preference, not necessarily in the order of the test design.</li> <li>• All answers must be supported directly and specifically in the text.</li> <li>• Re-check your answers whenever possible.</li> <li>• Look out for answer choices that are the exact opposite or contradictory to the correct answer.</li> </ul>

2.3 Demonstrate mastery of skills needed for ACT growth by prioritizing skill-gaps based on pre-test data and ACT Reading standards (<http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCRS-ReadingStandards.pdf>) by applying skills to a range of complex texts aligned with individual interests including (but not limited to) sample ACT passages, fiction, and non-fiction.

2.4 Apply knowledge and practice with the ACT Reading test to modify personal ACT plan to support goals for ACT growth and outcomes based on personal postsecondary plan.

## Module 3 - Math

- 3.1 Identify why skills tested on the ACT Math test are important to career and postsecondary plans by creating or analyzing a résumé for a career in which strong mathematical skills and knowledge are essential to workforce readiness and success. Examples should include (but are not limited to) careers that require different levels of educational attainment (e.g. industry certification, associate’s degree, bachelor’s degree, master’s/doctorate) including relevant local industry examples.
- 3.2 Apply knowledge of the structure and format of the ACT Math test and use strategies to maximize the number of correct responses through regular practice with ACT Math sample questions.

Structure & Format	ACT Math Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ACT Math test is a 60 question, 60 minute multiple choice test.</li> <li>• The content of the test is typically broken down into the following math subject areas:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 55 percent Algebra</li> <li>▪ 38 percent Geometry</li> <li>▪ 7 percent Trigonometry</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Calculators are allowed for the entire subtest but are not necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memorize and be fluent using certain common formulas and concepts.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Practice with the same calculator to be used on the actual test. Note that cell phones <b>may not</b> be used as calculators during testing.</li> <li>• The correct answer is always among the answer choices; some answers may be checked by plugging answer choices into the question.</li> <li>• Eliminate obvious wrong answers.</li> </ul>

- 3.3 Demonstrate mastery of skills needed for ACT Math growth by prioritizing skill-gaps based on pre-test data and ACT math standards (<http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCRS-MathStandards.pdf>) by applying skills to a range of mathematical concepts.
- 3.4 Apply knowledge and practice with the ACT Math test and standards to modify personal ACT plan to support goals for ACT growth and outcomes based on personal postsecondary plan.

## Module 4 – Science

- 4.1 Understand how skills tested on the ACT Science test (e.g. comparing and contrasting conflicting viewpoints, recognizing experimental design, interpreting data, etc.) are important to career and postsecondary plans by identifying job duties that might require reasoning, judgment, or analysis. With peers, discuss and compare different occupations and the role of scientific-reasoning skills and make observations about the characteristics of each.
- 4.2 Apply knowledge of the structure and format of the ACT Science subtest and use strategies to maximize the number of correct responses through regular practice with ACT Science sample questions.

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<sup>2</sup> Please refer to supplemental resources for examples of common formulas and concepts.

Structure & Format	ACT Science Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ACT Science test is a 40 question, 35 minute multiple choice test.</li> <li>• The content of the test is typically broken down into the following science subject areas:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Biology</li> <li>▪ Chemistry</li> <li>▪ Physics</li> <li>▪ Earth/space sciences (geology, astronomy, meteorology)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The test has seven passages and each one is conveyed in one of three different formats:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Data representation</i>: 30-40 percent</li> <li>▪ <i>Research summaries</i>: 45-55 percent of the questions</li> <li>▪ <i>Conflicting viewpoints</i>: 15-20 percent</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The test content parallels information commonly taught in science courses for grades 7-12 but emphasizes scientific reasoning skills rather than recall of science content. Extensive knowledge of these subjects is <b>not</b> required.</li> <li>• Questions may require mathematical reasoning but do not rely on mathematical skills.</li> <li>• Calculators are <b>not</b> allowed on this subtest.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing this section within the time allotted requires speed, spending approximately 5 minutes per passage (for both reading and answering questions).</li> <li>• In order to navigate the text and graphs efficiently, it may help to make notes in the test booklet.</li> <li>• In the conflicting viewpoints text, it may be helpful to make notes that summarize the viewpoint outlined in that section of the test booklet.</li> <li>• ACT Science is very similar to ACT Reading in that all correct answers will be directly and specifically mentioned in the text.</li> <li>• Identifying the correct answer does not require understanding all scientific terms in the text.</li> <li>• Careful attention to the provided charts, graphs, and tables.</li> <li>• Develop comfort and familiarity with the pace required for the science subtest.</li> </ul>

4.3 Demonstrate mastery of skills needed for ACT Science test growth by prioritizing skill-gaps based on pre-test data and ACT Science standards (<http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCRS-ScienceStandards.pdf>) by applying skills to a range of scientific concepts and practicing skills needed for each type of passage.

4.4 Apply knowledge and practice with the ACT Science test and standards to modify personal ACT plan to support goals for ACT growth and outcomes based on personal postsecondary plan.

## Module 5 – English

5.1 Identify why skills tested on the ACT English test are important to career and postsecondary plans by analyzing grammar, tone, diction, and use of rhetoric in exemplar biographies, brand websites,

or similar media and create a personal biography, blog, web page or similar artifact describing one’s projected career, education, and/or personal aspirations.

5.2 Apply knowledge of the structure and format of the ACT English test and use strategies to maximize the number of correct responses within the subtest through regular practice with ACT English sample questions.

Structure & Format	ACT English Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ACT English test is a 75 question, 45 minute multiple choice test.</li> <li>• The test has five essays and content of the test is typically broken down into the following English subject areas:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ 45-60 percent usage/mechanics                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10-15 percent punctuation</li> <li>▪ 15-20 percent grammar and usage</li> <li>▪ 20-25 percent sentence structure</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ 40-55 percent rhetorical skills                                     <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 15-20 percent strategy</li> <li>▪ 10-15 percent organization</li> <li>▪ 15-20 percent style</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• The ACT English test assesses understanding of <i>standard</i> conventions of English; note that casual conversation, emails, or other informal written communication often uses slang or regional terms that are not correct in standard written English.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider the style of the writing used in each essay when answering the questions. The five essays are written in a variety of styles and some questions will ask one to select the best answer based on the style and tone of the essay as a whole.</li> <li>• Reread the sentence substituting the answer selected in the passage context as a way of checking one’s work.</li> <li>• Read the sentence before and/or after the underlined portion to determine the meaning and the best answer choice.</li> <li>• Develop comfort and familiarity with the pace required for the reading subtest.</li> <li>• Refer to the passages when answering questions.</li> </ul>

5.3 Demonstrate mastery of skills needed for ACT English growth by prioritizing skill-gaps based on pre-test data and ACT English standards (<http://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/CCRS-EnglishStandards.pdf>) by applying skills to a range of complex texts.

5.4 Apply knowledge and practice with the ACT English test and standards to modify personal ACT plan to support goals for ACT growth and outcomes based on personal postsecondary plan.