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General Information

The English and Reading sections of the ACT test are two separate entities. While the *Reading* section evaluates reading prowess and comprehension, the *English* section places emphasis on the following **three competencies** and you will be given a **subscore** in each. The percentage in parentheses indicates the approximate portion of questions that contribute to each subscore.

- **Conventions of Standard English** (38 to 43%), including sentence structure, word usage, and punctuation
- **Production of writing** (38 to 43%), including organization, topic development, cohesion, and unity
- **Knowledge of language** (18 to 23%), including style, tone, and choice of words

The English section of the ACT is timed for **35 minutes** and contains **50 questions**.

On this test, you will evaluate the writing of another person to determine what changes should be made to make the writing more effective. The passages contain numbers pairing certain content with particular questions on the test. Some questions refer to the entire passage (this is noted, too), some to a paragraph, and others to an underlined phrase or sentence. When answering a question, be sure you are referring to the part of the passage with that question number.

Questions may cover the development of topics, essay audience and purpose, developing and evaluating supporting material, and relevance of statements. You may also be asked about the organization of writing ideas, opening and closing sentences, or transitions in a text. Style questions may address tone, precision of words, image usage, or identifying redundancy or ambiguity.

Please note:

- There are **no questions about spelling, vocabulary, or simple recall of grammar** rules. You may need to utilize your knowledge of these concepts while reasoning about a question, but there will be no questions that ask specifically about these things.
- Some questions are about an **entire passage** or paragraph. The question number will be

- **All questions refer to passages.** There are *no* questions that merely refer to a word or sentence alone.

shown near the appropriate text in the reading material. Other questions refer to **an underlined portion of the passage**, which is also marked with the question number.

- There is an **answer option of “no change”** for many questions. Choose this option if the sentence or passage portion is correct as written.

Note: With the advent of the enhancements to the 2025 ACT, the following tweaks were made to the English section:

- All questions will have stems stating directions for that question.
- An argumentative essay has been added to the reading passages.
- Some passages have been reduced in length.

Production of Writing

One of the English focuses on the ACT is “production of writing.” These questions assess your understanding of the purpose of writing and how to keep it **focused and organized**. Questions include assessing the **topic development** in a piece of writing, determining whether or not the piece has met its **goal**, and evaluating the **relevancy** of the materials included to support the main idea. Questions also address the **overall organization, unity, and cohesion** of the text. Understanding the structure of writing will help you understand how to enhance it to make it more effective for the reader.

Transition Words

Transition words or phrases help identify the relationship between different ideas, different paragraphs, or even different parts of a sentence. They are like **signposts** to give the reader a sense of direction about where the writing is going. Is an example about to be given? If so, a transition phrase like *for instance* might be used like this:

When you travel, it is important to pack smaller versions of needed items. *For instance*, sample sizes of toiletries and cleaning products work well.

Is the writer showing an exception? Look for words like *yet*, *however*, or *despite*.

Molly was intrigued by the idea of making \$5,000 a day working from home for an hour a day, *yet* she was skeptical that it was legitimate employment.

Conclusions are often introduced with *consequently*, *therefore*, or *thus*.

The evidence clearly points to the defendant’s participation in the crimes. *Therefore*, you

must find him guilty on all charges.

Transition words **help the reader make the connections** the writer intends them to make.

Introduction Paragraph

As the name suggests, the introduction paragraph **introduces the reader to the topic** or main idea of the text, provides **background information** on the subject, and **presents the position** the writer will take on the subject. The introduction paragraph is usually the first paragraph of a text. In some texts, the introduction section is longer than one paragraph, but it serves the same purpose of exposing the reader to what the text will be about.

Conclusion Paragraph

Similar to how an introduction paragraph introduces the topic of a text, the conclusion paragraph **wraps up** a piece of writing and leaves the reader with a **sense of closure**. Often, the conclusion **summarizes** the main points presented in the text and offers the reader something to think about or **calls them to take action** after their reading. This is not the place to introduce new evidence or ideas, but to **review the points that have been made**, so the reader feels like things have been wrapped up in a satisfactory way and they are not left with questions or uncertainties about what they read.

Sentence Placement and Flow

To create a sense of unity and cohesion, writers thoughtfully place and position their sentences and ideas. In a broader sense, a piece of writing will generally start with the **introduction**, then move into the **body paragraphs**, and end with a **conclusion** paragraph. The paragraphs themselves usually begin with a **topic sentence** that identifies the subject of the paragraph, then include **examples with explanations** of how those examples support the claims made by the author.

Transition sentences then move the reader to the next point that is explained in the next paragraph. Organizing the text in this way makes it easier for the reader to follow the writer's train of thought and draw the conclusions the writer intends for them to draw. When sentences or ideas are presented in a haphazard, disorganized way, it is confusing for the reader, and the intended message may get lost.

Dividing into Paragraphs

Texts are best organized when **one main idea is the focus of each body paragraph**. When the writer switches ideas, then they should start a new paragraph with examples and explanations specific to that idea. Dividing the text into paragraphs makes it easier for the reader to navigate and understand as the ideas are clearly separated.

Knowledge of Language

The knowledge of language questions on the test ask you to consider language usage.

Questions in this section assess your ability to determine the most **precise and effective word choice** based on the purpose of the piece. These questions also involve maintaining **consistency in tone and style** throughout a text. Understanding how to revise for clarity, how to remove redundant or unnecessary information, and choosing the most appropriate words for the context and purpose will help you with these questions.

Clarity in Writing

If writing isn't clear, it can't be effective. If you've ever read something, stopped, and asked yourself what on earth you just read, chances are you encountered some unclear writing. To be effective, the reader needs to be able to identify the writer's **main idea or claim**, understand the **purpose** of the writing, and **evaluate** its claims. When sentences are jumbled up or words are misused, the entire meaning of a text can change, and the writer's intended meaning and message risk being lost on the reader. Here is an example of a jumbled sentence and how it can be improved:

Amused the children were by the movie that was funny shown by the teacher.

The teacher showed a funny movie that amused the children.

Effective writing is clear, informative, and easy for the reader to understand.

Redundancy

While repetition can help a writer make their point, redundancy, or unnecessarily repeating information, can be distracting to the reader. Why use 50 words to say something that could be communicated in 20? Some writers think that by writing more, they are writing better, but that is seldom the case. Reader fatigue can begin to set in, and they may miss the intended message. Review text for **unnecessary information, repeated words or ideas, and duplicated sentences**. For example, this is a redundant sentence:

Scientists *collaborated together* to prepare the study.

By its definition, *collaborated* means “working together,” so to include both *collaborated* and *together* is redundant. Paring writing down to its most essential evidence and using precise words can help make it more clear for the reader to understand.

Maintaining Style and Tone

Effective writers determine their **voice** and maintain it throughout their text. If writing a persuasive piece, for example, an effective writer maintains a persuasive voice and provides evidence and an argument as to why their position is the “right” position to take on a subject.

They remain focused on their position and don't allow their writing to "wander." Can you find the sentence that should be deleted from this paragraph?

(1) The Westminster Kennel Club Dog Show is the oldest dog show in the United States. (2) It debuted on May 8, 1877, in Manhattan, New York. (3) The show was started by a group of hunters and originally showcased hunting breeds. (4) The best hunting dogs are Chesapeake Bay Retrievers. (5) Today, the Westminster Dog Show features over 200 different dog breeds.

If you chose sentence 4, you are correct. It does not support the writer's point.

Maintaining an **appropriate tone** is also important. For the purpose of the ACT, this means using a **formal** tone and avoiding the use of slang or informal language. Which word or phrase in this sentence would be inappropriate in formal writing?

Because of the storm out in the Pacific, waves at the beach this morning were 8-10 feet, and, dude, they were an amazing ride!

Yes, "dude" has no place in the type of writing you will evaluate on this test.

Connecting Clauses

Sentence variety in writing helps engage the reader by keeping the reading interesting. When every sentence is short and choppy, the writing can seem elementary and boring. When every sentence is long, it can be tiring for the reader to try to break those long sentences down to make meaning of them. That's why sentence variety is important.

Sentence variety can be achieved by **connecting clauses** to help make short sentences longer and more engaging for the reader. Clauses can be joined in a variety of ways. Independent clauses may be joined with a semicolon or by using a comma and a conjunction. Independent and dependent clauses can be joined together, often by using a comma. Varying the way in which clauses are connected can also add variety to a text and keep the reader engaged.

Consider the effectiveness of these two versions of the same information:

Casey worked hard in school. However, she was often overlooked by her teachers. One reason is that she was quiet in school. She was also studious.

Although she worked hard in school, Casey was often overlooked by her teachers because she was quiet and studious.

Word Choice

Depending on purpose and audience, word choice in texts can vary widely. However, it should always be **appropriate to the purpose and audience**. It is not appropriate to use slang in an

academic report that will be presented to a panel of professors. Similarly, it wouldn't make sense to use academic vocabulary in a text to a friend. Word choice, or diction, should be based on who the writing is intended for and what its purpose is.

When considering word choice, one should also consider a word's connotation. The **connotation** of a word is the way it makes people feel when they read or hear it. Some words have **positive** connotations, others have more **negative** connotations, and others are **neutral** and don't elicit much feeling or reaction from an audience. Consider the feelings evoked by the italicized words in the following sentences:

Luke was very *interested* in what Carlo had to say.

Luke was *curious* about what Carlo had to say.

Luke was *nosy* and wanted to know what Carlo said.

While sharing basically the same denotation or definition, *interested* is more positive, *nosy* is definitely negative, and *curious* is neutral. It is important to consider how the audience will respond to word choice and, depending on the purpose, adjust accordingly.
