



Breaking Down the ACT

**THERE ARE NO PENALTIES FOR WRONG ANSWERS
!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!ANSWER EVERY QUESTION!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

Time is of the essence: You must be **RUTHLESS** with it. Don't obsess over any answer. The English section is 75 questions in 45 minutes, 36 seconds per question. Reading and Science are 40 questions in 35 minutes or 52.5 seconds per question. So you **must** be methodical: for the toughest questions, *literally* cross off the possible answers you're certain are wrong. If you have to go back to them, you're not starting from scratch. Take a split second to draw a line through a letter. It's a smart investment.

If you find yourself with 20 seconds left for a section and four questions you haven't answered, your only alternative is to **guess**. Nothing to lose, everything to gain.

There are going to be occasional imperfect answers. Don't obsess over one; **Don't** take it personally. You're looking for the **BEST** answer, just like it says at the beginning of every section of every test. Think of it this way: there are no questions in which the vote could reasonably be 51 votes for answer A and 49 votes for answer B; the vote is always going to be 100-0. **The right answer is always the ONLY possible answer!**

For some difficult questions, you might have to answer through the Process of Elimination. And you might even end up with an answer that you don't quite understand. Whatever you do, **don't** try to figure out why that answer is the right answer, as long as you're sure the other three are not. Fill in the circle and move on. You know, **ruthlessly**.

English

Big Picture

1) There are five 15-question passages, 75 in all. About 20 percent of the answers are A or F, as in *No Change*.

2) Some grammar and usage questions are similar to SAT Writing sentences, the ones in which one section of the sentence is underlined. Like the SAT, **listen** to them and see if they sound OK. In fact, **hearing** the sentence through your inner voice is also very important for many, many other questions. Why? You might not know *why* something is right or something is wrong, but you will know – you will **hear** – that it's right or it's wrong. *That* something is wrong is far more important than *why* it's wrong.

3) Another way to spot a "bad" sentence is to say this to yourself: "Would I write this?" If the answer is no, then the sentence is probably wrong.

4) Vocab is a minor issue, unlike the SAT. On the other hand, punctuation is a major issue, unlike the SAT.

5) There are usage and grammar questions, like the SAT, but many questions are about common sense and logic, i.e., Reading Comprehension. And as all the passages are well-written, pay attention to first and last sentences of paragraphs, and first and last paragraphs. They can point you in the right direction or provide important information.

6) The first sentences of paragraphs are especially important. There's a reason your English teachers stress *topic sentences* – they set up the rest of the paragraph. But the most important concept to remember in this section is . . .

. . . Context

1) Keep thinking *Context*, which is another way of saying *The Big Picture*, because so many questions must be considered in the *Context* of a sentence or a paragraph, or even the entire passage. For example, if the tone of the passage is “formal,” a possible answer that contains slang is a throw-out. The same goes for an “informal” answer. Conversely, in an “informal” passage – it might be lighthearted or humorous or gently ironic – the “formal” answer is a throw-out.

2) Maybe the question asks the best way to rework a sentence, or the best place to move a sentence or phrase or even a paragraph. Maybe the question asks whether making a certain change helps or hurts a passage, and why (In these questions, there will be two *Yes, because* reasons and two *No, because* reasons). Or you might be given a premise and asked if the passage's contents back up that premise, or not. Always think *Context*.

There is another kind of *Yes, because/No, because* question that often comes at the end of a passage: it begins, *Suppose the writer had intended to write a brief essay that . . .* and then finishes, *Would this essay successfully fulfill the writer's goal*. If you don't know the answer right away, reread/underline the topic sentences. They often give you the right answer. Then briefly thank that English teacher who stressed their importance.

3) At least twice in each passage there will be two questions from the same sentence. They must work in tandem, in *Context*. Don't do the first one in a vacuum, and *then* answer the second one as if they're not connected. Instead, think of the two questions as one question with two parts.

4) Some passages trace the history of a person, or trace some chronological development and include dates in chronological order. There might be questions that are really about looking for the “next” date, which makes sense in the *Context* of the passage.

5) Or let's say the underlined word or words contain a verb, and the three answers besides *No change* all contain verbs. That means the answer is about choosing the right verb. Look at the other verbs in the sentence or paragraph. Are they all present tense? If they are, then the answer will almost certainly be a present tense verb, even though a past tense verb might seem fine. But it isn't, in *Context*.

6) Same goes for commas. The underlined phrase contains a comma or two, and all or most of the possible answers contain a comma or two or some other punctuation? Then the answer is about commas (or the lack of them) and punctuation.

7) Asked the best place to insert a sentence? Make sure that it creates a proper connection between the sentence *before* and the sentence *after*. If the sentence in question is the first or last sentence of a paragraph, then you might have to find the sentence that creates a proper link between the two paragraphs. Again, you must deal with *Context*.

8) Asked if the first paragraph of a passage should be moved? The first thing you should do is figure out if the second paragraph can now serve as the *new* first paragraph.

One way to do this is check names: if someone's last name is mentioned in the original second paragraph, but the first name is not, then it can't be the new first paragraph. Why? Because the first mention of someone has to include *both* names.

9) If, say, a paragraph ends with the phrase "ill will and danger," and the next question is about the beginning of the next paragraph, in *context*, that next paragraph has to connect to the previous paragraph, as well as the sentence that follows.

10) If there's a question box after a paragraph's last sentence, the answer becomes the paragraph's new last sentence, not the first sentence of the next paragraph. But don't forget, ta da, *context*: that sentence has to connect to the beginning of the next paragraph.

11) Pay attention to "*but words*." I list many of them at the end of the notes about this section. They're more important in the Reading section, and I go into them in detail in my notes about that section, *but* they can also be important in this section. They tell you that part of the passage is heading in another direction.

Context, context, context!!! Always look for context!!!!!!

Did I mention that you always have to always look for context?

Punctuation

1) **Commas:** Many of the 75 questions will test your knowledge of comma placement. When it comes to commas think *natural pause*. Imagine giving a presentation in class, and not in the sing-song monotone you used in third grade. A comma will come when you instinctively stop for a split second, as you would after *class* in the previous sentence, and after *split second* and *previous sentence* in this sentence.

a) No commas in a possible answer? Fear not. If the question is comma-centric (natural pause, comma), your natural inclination is to assume that the right answer will include at least one comma. **WRONG!** There might be as many as 15 or 20 comma/punctuation questions, and there will be several right answers *without* commas or any other punctuation. Yes, it's counterintuitive, and yes, it's a fact that you won't accept at first, but you'll learn (some faster than others).

b) An *appositive* is a noun or noun phrase that "re-names" another noun right beside it, and there is a comma before *and* after it. For example, *John, that slob, actually cleaned up his room*. Or, *Richard, the club treasurer, is resigning next month*. One way to help identify the correct use of an appositive is to remove it and the commas that surround it. The sentence will read OK without them. Don't confuse a modifier(s) with an appositive. In the sentence, *Rock star and producer Eminem was born in Detroit*, *Rock star* and *producer* modify *Eminem* and need no commas. However, in *Eminem, a rock star and producer, was born in Detroit*, there is an appositive that requires commas. There will be at least a couple of *appositive* questions in the section.

c) Certain words and phrases in mid-sentence are almost always preceded and followed by commas. The most common is *however*. Common ones besides *however* are *nevertheless*, *though*, *therefore*, *of course*, *in comparison*, *on the other hand*, *alternately*. There can be an exception: the original sentence contains a "*however word*" in mid-sentence, but that sentence is wrong and the correct answer turns it into two sentences.

d) In the real world, we occasionally, for a rhetorical effect, write a sentence made up of two sentences/independent clauses separated by a comma. For example, "*Some people think cats are great pets, others think they're creepy*." In ACT World (and SAT World) that is a no-no, a never, an automatic cross-off! Never!! Hear it? Cross it off!!!

This is the mantra to memorize: **Sentence, Comma, Sentence Is NEVER Right.**

2) **Semicolons:** In ACT World, and the real world, they are almost always used to turn two sentences (or independent clauses) into one, separated by the semicolon. Make sure you can “hear” that each *side* of the sentence can stand by itself as a sentence.

Another mantra to memorize: **Sentence, Semicolon, Sentence Is Right.**

4) **Colons:** Usually, what follows a colon is an explanation of what precedes it, as it is in the fourth line of the Big Picture paragraph of the English section. Colons also precede lists (enough with the natural pauses), but that’s relatively rare in ACT World. What follows a colon does not have to be a grammatically correct sentence. But it can be. If a possible answer includes a colon, and grammatically correct sentences are on both sides of it, don’t get crazy wondering why there is no possible answer with a semicolon.

3) **Long Dash:** Some answers are sentences that include phrases set off by long dashes. *After I got the \$4000 bill – an amount that shocked me – I tried to figure out how to pay it by the end of the month.* Think of them as super commas which create a visual effect and are used for emphasis. A sentence could also include a long dash near its end (natural pause, comma), followed by a few words. This also creates a visual effect for emphasis. There will be a two or three questions in which long dashes are an issue.

Grammar/Usage/Etc.

1) You will need to find subject/verb mismatches and verb tense mismatches.

2) You will need to find pronoun mismatches.

3) You will need to choose between the possessive pronoun *its* and the contraction *it’s* (it is). The two are counterintuitive: the possessive is the one **without** the apostrophe. **And *it’s* is ALWAYS WRONG.** The word does **NOT** exist. You will also need to choose between the singular possessive *its* and the plural *their*.

4) You might have a question in which you have to choose between the possessive *their*, the contraction *they’re* (*they are*), and the noun/adjective/adverb *there*.

5) **Possessive apostrophes:** There will probably be one such question (and maybe a second) in each passage. If the word “**of**” precedes the underlined words, that helps you identify the question as one about a possessive, but “**of**” is not always present. If not, try to figure out what the sentence would be if “**of**” were present. For example, “**the girls’ faces**” is the same as “**the faces of the girls.**”

5) Sometimes an underlined sentence will sound right, but won’t be. The sentence will start with a dependent clause, a clause that *can’t* stand by itself as a sentence. It will be followed by a comma and either a noun or pronoun that will ostensibly be the sentence’s subject (and be part of an independent clause, a clause that can stand by itself as a sentence). For example, this sentence might *sound* ok to you: *Writing in 1908, Upton Sinclair’s The Jungle aroused public opinion and prompted Congress to act.*

But it isn’t, because *The Jungle* was not doing the writing in 1908. In other words, the noun/subject following the dependent clause and comma does not refer back correctly to the dependent clause. By the way, *Upton Sinclair’s* is not the noun/subject, it’s a possessive modifier of the subject, the title. In fact, a possessive can **never** be a subject. The same applies to an article – *a, the* – and any adjective that modifies the subject/noun. And this is how the *correct* sentence should start: *Writing in 1908, Upton Sinclair. . .*

6) **Less is more:** This concept is the key for several questions: the right answer is the shortest answer. Maybe the underlined portion of the sentence is not needed; the right

answer could be *Omit the underlined portion*. Or maybe the right answer is just one or two words, far shorter than the other three possible answers. Maybe the sentence is *John wanted an answer by Tuesday and when he didn't get it he was annoyed and aggravated*. The right answer, of course, is either *annoyed* or *aggravate*. The two are synonyms, for all intents and purposes, thus *annoyed and aggravated* is redundant. Occasionally, this kind of redundancy will include three words. What if you don't know the definition of one? Not to worry. It will be a synonym or "first cousin" of the other two.

7) **Being:** If *being* is underlined as part of a question, it means the answer will not be *No change*; the sentence must be corrected (notice the use of the semicolon here). And if *being* is in a possible answer, that answer is a throw-out. In other words, ***being = bad!***

8) Good writing is almost always about using active verbs, and very few answers will include passive verbs: for example, *I took it* rather than *It was taken by me*.

9) Sometimes a question is: *Which of the following alternatives to the underlined portion would NOT be acceptable*. Circle **NOT** so you don't forget what you have to do. Then realize that what's underlined is **Correct** and that three of the possible answers say the same thing, in different words. That makes it easier to find the "bad" answer.

10) **WOOFBIT:** This is my acronym for seven small prepositions: ***With, Of, On, For, By, In, To***. There might be a question in which one of these is used incorrectly. The right answer will likely be another one of the seven. This is about the colloquial use of the language, or the way the use of the language has developed over the years. You have to trust your ear on this one. For example: *I went to the store* and *I went for a haircut*. At the very least, you should be able to knock out two of the possibilities.

11) **Gerunds:** There won't be many right answers that include the *ing* form of a verb, which is called a gerund. Gerunds are, in fact, nouns. Take the sentence *Jogging is one of my favorite things, after raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens*. *Jogging* is the subject; it is a *thing* (as in *person, place, or thing*).

12) **'s/s':** 'S is a singular possessive. S' is a plural possessive.

13) Sometimes a question will involve two sentences in the passage. But as mentioned before, the right answer does not have to be two sentences. Sometimes, the opposite is true: the question will involve one sentence that should be changed into two.

14) **AVEN:** This is an acronym for the use of *affect* and *effect*. In the real world, *affect* is almost always used as a verb and rarely used as a noun, and *effect* is almost always used as a noun, and rarely used as a verb. In ACT World, when questions are involved, *affect* is *always* used as a verb and *effect* is *always* used as a noun.

15) An adjective can't describe an adjective. You need an adverb. For example, *John is an exceedingly cool kid* or *The restaurant has a curiously exotic atmosphere*

16) A correct answer can include consecutive words ending in *ing*.

17) Don't be careless and confuse *than* (comparison) and *then* (time).

18) In several questions your most important task will be to identify the word or words that point you to the focus of the correct answer. Here are two such questions in The Real ACT book: Test 2, Question 48 and Test 3, Question 6. What are the words? Tsk, tsk. That would be telling. It's up to you to figure them out. Some of these questions begin, "*Given that all of the choices (possible answers) are true, which one would most effectively . . .*" That means all four possible answers are correct when it comes to grammar and usage. How do you find the right answer? You have to look for *Context* and nuance, and more *Context*. I promise, you will not wake up nights screaming, "*Context!*"

19) Many questions in English, Reading, and Science will include capitalized words such as *NOT*, *LEAST*, and *EXCEPT*. **Circle them! That's an order!!** (It's a really, really good idea, too.) It's worth a one-second investment to avoid a careless mistake by forgetting just what it is these questions are asking you to figure out. Believe me, it happens, and when it does, it automatically merits a self-administered noogie.

20) Some questions involve or connect in some way to the previous question. You **must** assume you answered that previous question correctly. Why? A score of 26, very respectable but not great, means approximately 60 right answers, or 80 percent.

21) *Could of*, *would of*, *might of* are **ALWAYS WRONG!!!** It should be *could have*, *would have*, *might have*, etc. Don't be careless and miss that.

22) You've been taught not to use the pronoun *you*. But in an informal passage, when the author talks directly to the reader, *you* or *your* is fine. In *Context*, of course.

23) Beware of sentences that begin with a singular subject, followed by a prepositional phrase that ends with a plural noun, followed by a plural verb (or vice versa). In *Mastery of CPR techniques are mandatory for firemen*, the subject is *mastery*, not *techniques*. So *are*, the plural verb, is incorrect. The sentence is meant to trick you. The sentence should be changed to, *Mastery of CPR techniques is mandatory for firemen*.

Similarly, beware of sentences that begin with a singular subject, followed by a modifying phrase that is set off by commas and ends in a plural verb, followed by a plural verb (or vice versa). In this case, the vice versa is: *The sharp fangs of the snake, each one filled with poison, is its only defense*. The subject is *fangs*, not *poison*, so the verb must be plural, *are* not *is*. Another trick by those fiends from the ACT: *poison* and *is* may be right next to each other, but they do not match up correctly.

24) Most nouns that end in *y* will end in *ies* as plural nouns.

25) Two consecutive sentences will **not** begin with *However*.

26) *Whose* is a possessive, *who's* is the contraction for *who is*.

27) Choosing between *which* and *that* or *this* and *that* is **never** an issue.

28) You've been taught – **badly** – that you can't begin a sentence with *Because*.

Wrong! You can. You can also begin a sentence with *And* and *But*.

29) Whenever you can, create *visual aids*. Let's say it's a two-question sentence, and the underlined words referred to in the first question need to be changed or deleted. Cross off the underlined words and write in the answer. Now you can literally see what's right, and it makes it easier to answer the second question. Same goes for when back-to-back sentences are questions that "connect." Once you realize the next sentence/question is "connected," go back to the first sentence and cross off the word or phrase you deleted, or write in the word or phrase you changed.

What should you do when there are too many words to change? Cross off the underlined words on the left, circle the answer on the right, and draw a line to the words you've crossed off. That really does make it easier to answer the second question.

30) **Third person pronouns:** We often misuse them in the real world, so they certainly are fair game in ACT World. The most common error involves the use of "*it*" in situations in which we don't know to what *it* refers. The third person pronouns are:

Subjective (used as subjects): *I*, *he*, *she*, *we*, *they*, *who*.

Objective (used as, you guessed it, objects): *me*, *him*, *her*, *us*, *them*, *whom*.

31) Some questions will involve the use (or not) of a transition word between sentences. *Context*, again. Occasionally the four possible answers will be three transition words and one that is not a transition word. Don't assume a transition word is needed.

32) **Never forget: WHATEVER IS NOT UNDERLINED IS CORRECT!!!!**

Reading

Big Picture

There are four 10-question passages: fiction, social sciences (politics, economics, etc.), humanities (theatre, movies, art, etc.), and natural sciences (dinosaurs, etc.). The answers, unfortunately, don't move down the passage in an orderly fashion: the answer to Question 1 might be in the second-to-last paragraph, and the answer to Question 10 might be in the second paragraph. So I recommend **VERY STRONGLY** – **what the Hecht, make it an order!** – that you circle or underline or otherwise highlight the following:

Topic sentences and Last sentences of paragraphs

“But words”

Proper nouns of any kind, not just names

Numbers (BOTH figures and written out)

Italicized words

A word or a phrase in quotes

Also, pay extra attention to the first and last paragraphs of a passage. Just as you would in the real world.

This underlining or circling might take you 60 or 70 seconds for the four passages, but it will save you many, many minutes in your search for answers.

Ignore this advice if you have a 181 IQ. Otherwise . . . **CIRCLE!**

1) This may seem obvious, but you must make sure you understand *exactly* what each question asks, and what each possible answer says. Sometimes one word in a possible answer is the reason it is wrong. So . . . **Be methodical! Don't be careless!**

2) Topic sentences: some passages may be *bor-ing* but all the passages are extremely well-written, and as with any good writing, topic sentences are **VERY** important. And if the topic sentence ends with a question mark, then circle the next sentence, too. Sounds logical, right? A paragraph's last sentence can also be important. For obvious reasons, it's worth repeating how important first and last paragraphs can be.

3) The **“but words”** – *but, however, nevertheless, yet, and still* are the most significant ones, but depending on the context, there are others: *despite, although, (though), while, on the other hand, conversely, alternatively* are some of them. In the right context, even *“even so”* might qualify. I repeat, they tell that you the passage, whether it's fact or fiction, is about to go in a different direction. That's why it's important to circle them. And what if the second sentence in a paragraph includes a **“but word?”** Pay *very close* attention. After all, that sentence will almost certainly contradict the paragraph's topic sentence, and that is very likely to be, uh, significant.

4) There will be times when the question will be about a particular phrase or two or three or four words. Make sure to read the *entire* sentence. Yep, *Context*. Sometimes you might have to read the sentence that precedes the question's specified sentence. For

example, if the sentence starts with *For example*, or *In fact*. You have to find out what *For example* or *In fact* refer to. Same goes if phrases like that are at the beginning of the specified sentence, but aren't the first two or three words.

5) As for capitalized and italicized words, words in quotes, and numbers, it might take you a while to understand how useful it is to circle them. The quicker you learn this, the better off you'll be. You probably won't believe me at first, but eventually you will.

6) Before you read the passage, look quickly to see if you can answer one or two questions without reading the entire passage. Such questions will likely ask for the meaning of a word or phrase, or will deal with a line or lines that don't "involve" the entire passage. But don't expect that to happen very often at all, which means you will almost always have to read the passage from start to finish and then answer the questions.

7) If a sentence includes two nouns or adjectives separated by *and*, and you don't know one of the words, fear not. Assume it is a first or second cousin to the word you know: *accusations* and *denunciations*, or *loyal* and *steadfast*, or *ambition* and *drive*.

8) Always read the italicized info that comes before the passage. Sometimes you will find useful information, especially involving dates.

9) As in the English section, some questions includes capitalized words such as **LEAST**, **NOT**, and **EXCEPT**. Circle them. **Always!** It's worth an investment of one second to avoid forgetting just what the question is about. It happens. **Too often!!!**

10) In both the Reading and Science sections, there will be questions that include the words *most likely*. For these, the answers are not in black and white; you have to use logic and common sense, and take a step beyond the printed page to find the answer.

11) The same thought process is needed when the question uses the words *suggest* and *infer*. Again, the answer is not in black and white. So put your Thinking Caps on.

12) Sometimes the question will involve an issue that the author does not believe in or subscribe to, something that is believed in or subscribed to by others who disagree with the author. So you have to make sure you realize that this is what's happening, and *then* separate the author's view and those of the "disagree-ers."

12) Like I said before, there are some passages that you might find boring. Tough noogies. Don't *ever* take these passages personally. I can't tell you how many ACT and SAT students of mine have confessed that they did poorly on a passage because it was bor-ing. You must fight your boredom and concentrate. **Concentrate!**

13) Some passages are relatively technical and not so easy to digest. Again, tough noogies. Don't get flummoxed. Instead, put your Thinking Caps on even tighter.

Science

Big Picture

There will be six or seven *passages*, and the most important thing I can tell you about the section is this: *It's not really about science!*

It is, basically, more reading comprehension, because it's almost all about logic and common sense. For the most part you will read "visuals" – charts and graphs and figures and tables – and be surprised at how easy so many questions are (One passage, usually with seven questions, is words or almost words only). It can be as easy as drawing a line across from the vertical graph and finding where it meets the line you drew up from the horizontal graph.

In fact, well more than a third of the questions from the passages with "visuals" can be answered without reading any or most of the "background" information at the beginning of the passage. Just like with the reading passages, answer those questions first, then move on to the ones that require more thought (and reading).

1) **So here's the best advice for the section: DON'T OVERTHINK!** Many questions are easier than you think.

2) On my answer sheets I have notes so I can explain answers, and for so many of them, all I do is write **NR**. As in, **Not Read**, as in don't bother to read the material at the beginning of the passage; just read the question and the relevant graph, chart, figure, and table, put on your thinking cap, and realize the answer is literally right in front of you.

Are there any clues to identify a passage in which you must read the info at the beginning? In fact there are. If that first (and maybe second) paragraph contains a number of letters and symbols for various concepts and measurements, it might be worth the investment of time to write them quickly in a blank spot in the passage. That way you can quickly refer to the letter or symbol. This situation doesn't arise very often, and you will be quicker to identify such situations the more practice tests you take.

3) The last question in a passage is almost always the most difficult. So **NEVER** obsess over this question. Move on and come back for it if you have time.

4) Some questions tell you to consider more than one "visual," but sometimes only one of the visuals is needed/relevant to answer the question.

5) There is a chance one or two answers in the section will be "*That information is not available*" or "*That cannot be determined from the information given.*" In fact, most times when these phrases, or similar ones, appear, they are the answer.

6) The passage with no charts, graphs, figures or tables is **ALWAYS** the most difficult and time-consuming passage because you have to read every word. So no matter where it is – it's usually near the end of the section, but not always – **skip it and do it last**. Is that counterintuitive? Yes, of course it is. But it's a winning strategy you **MUST** follow. You certainly don't want to spend too much time on this passage and be forced to rush like crazy through an easy last passage or an easy last two passages. And never forget that this passage is about *reading* and *comprehending*, and like any reading

comprehension passage, the first and last sentences of paragraphs will often be important and lead to answers, as will numbers, italicized words, BUT WORDS, etc.

7) Occasionally, you might have to do some reasonably simple math.

8) Occasionally, you might have to plug numbers into an equation.

9) Occasionally, you will have to know some basic science.

10) There is a chance there will be a question – out of the 40 – that will be about science, and the answer will make no sense at all unless you're a science whiz or have that IQ of 181. Big deal! It's only one question! Don't obsess. Make an educated guess, or a close-your-eyes-and-point guess. After all, there is no penalty for a wrong answer.

And guess what: this kind of question is **ALWAYS** the last question of a passage.

11) Read the questions carefully, and don't confuse the words *increase* and *decrease*, two words that you will see in many questions.

12) We unconsciously follow the information on graphs and tables and charts, etc. from left to right and from down to up, but occasionally you have to look in the opposite directions. Don't get "tricked." Be careful, be methodical, read the questions carefully!

13) Two very basic science issues you need to get straight in your head:

- PH: the lower the number, the higher the acid content.
- Axis identification: the *x axis* is horizontal, the *y axis* is vertical.

ESSAY

The ACT essay, the last section of the test, asks questions that relate to your life as a high school student. The question might be about whether a high school student should need a 'C' average to get a driver's license, or whether teachers should be able to inject personal beliefs into classroom discussions. You must make a strong argument supporting your position, but you can take a position that is not completely one-sided, a sort of "yes, but." Of course, as with any good essay, you need to set up your argument with a strong first paragraph that ends with your "thesis" statement, and then follow with two or three supporting-example paragraphs. Two is usually enough to earn a respectable score, but if you have the time and a third example, go for it.

For your opening paragraph, you don't have to focus narrowly on the question. You might want to couch your first sentence or two with a wide-angle view of the topic. Think of the Inverted Pyramid formula for the five-paragraph essay: start from the "*world*" and then narrow your focus down to the question. It's not the most sophisticated approach, but you don't want to try to be Proust or F. Scott Fitzgerald here.

Don't forget to include a conclusion, which is **NEVER** a summary. In it you should take your argument one step further. And **NEVER** start it with, *In conclusion*.

It's worth repeating: ANSWER EVERY QUESTION!

There are no penalties for wrong answers!!!

Five unanswered questions and 30 seconds left? **GUESS (quickly)!!!!**