

ACT Reading Test Tips

The Reading Test has questions that test your ability to understand the main ideas, analyze how the text is written, connect different pieces of information, and use visual information when needed.

1. Practice the Reading Test over and over again. Try to take a practice test every week or two. It will help you learn to pace yourself and you will get familiar with the types of questions asked. The more familiar you are with the test, the easier it will become for you. The ACT Reading Test will ask you questions about the passage as a whole, require you to draw a conclusion about something that isn't directly stated in the passage, details about the passage, vocabulary in context, and the purpose or function of a part of the passage. As you practice for the test, make sure to go back and review the explanations for each question to identify your mistakes. The ACT publishes official practice reading tests at <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act/test-preparation/reading-practice-test-questions.html?page=0&chapter=0>
2. When you sit for the exam or during your practice tests, look through the passages real quick and pick the subject you like the most. You do not have to read the passages in order. If you enjoy science, then read the science passage first. If you enjoy social studies, then read that passage first. Reading something you enjoy first will help you get your brain going and the rest of the test will go smoother for you. As always, circle your answers in the book and then bubble them in when you finish the page.
3. When approaching a passage on the Reading Test, follow these steps:
 - a. Skim or quickly read the passage first to get the main idea and purpose of the passage. Don't get bogged down in the topic. Just get a general idea of the passage.
 - b. Make notes next to each paragraph in the book. Note the topic and purpose of the passage. Keep track of different people and their opinions.
 - c. Map out the questions. Remember that questions will not be asked in the order of difficulty. The goal is to pick up as many quick points as possible. So determine the order of difficulty for the questions and answer the easy questions first. Questions that give a specific line reference or have key lead words that you can easily find in the passage will be the easiest to answer. Tackle them first! Skip difficult questions or those that you find yourself spending too much time on. Do not spend more than 30 seconds on a question. Bubble in your Lucky Letter and move on. You can always make a mark by the questions you've guessed on and go back to them if you have time after you've finished everything else.

- i. Look for questions that say “In line _____...” These are easy to pick out and answer quickly. They are a great way to pick up points. Be sure to read 5 lines above and 5 lines below the line referenced to ensure that you have context.
 - ii. Then look for questions that want you to “fetch” or go get some information. They will give you a specific term to look for and pick out in the passage.
 - iii. Look for the main idea that connects all the ideas in the passage and connects all the questions. This main idea will appear over and over again in the passage and questions. This will help you answer questions about the big picture the passage is addressing.
 - d. Work the answers to eliminate as many wrong answers as possible. Look for any word in the answer choice that makes the entire answer wrong. Cross out all the answer choices you can eliminate. Be sure to eliminate any answers that do not answer the question that was asked. Remember, there are 3 times more wrong answers on this test than correct answers. Your job is to find them and eliminate them. There is only 1 correct answer.
 - e. Follow our answer bubbling strategy. Bubble in your answers one page at a time. When you get down to the last 5 minutes, you can bubble answers one at a time. Use your Lucky Letter on any blank questions in the last 2 minutes. Do NOT leave any answers blank.
4. Beware of tricky answers. If even 1 word in the answer is wrong, the whole answer is wrong. Some answer choices may contain the following and should be eliminated.
- a. Details from the passage are changed or distorted so they are no longer correct.
 - b. The answer contains a true statement from the passage, but the statement does not answer the question.
 - c. Information is provided in the answer that was not included in the passage.
 - d. Answers that are too extreme to reflect the author’s purpose of the passage are not correct. These answers usually include words like always or never.
 - e. Answers that contradict the information in the passage should be eliminated.
5. The ACT uses phrasing to disguise the fact that there is only 1 correct answer and make you choose between multiple “good” choices. This is a trick. There is only 1 correct answer to each question on the test. ACT questions that are typically worded as so:
- a. It can *reasonably be inferred* that:
 - b. Which of the following *best describes*:
 - c. The author’s contemporaries *for the most part* believed:
6. Common types of wrong answers on the ACT Reading Test
- a. Too Specific – this type of wrong answer tries to trick you by focusing on a small detail mentioned in the passage. It might seem like a plausible choice because it was mentioned, but don’t be fooled! Ask yourself: Does this answer really describe the whole passage? Can it be the title of the passage?

- b. Too Broad – this type of wrong answer tries to trick you with a broad generalization that does not answer the question either.
 - c. Reversed Relationship – this type of wrong answer is tricky because it mentions all the right words, but the relationship between the words is flipped. Just because you see the right words in the answer does not mean it is correct. Take a moment to read the answer to see that the information is actually consistent with the passage.
 - d. Unrelated Concept – sometimes the ACT will throw in an answer choice that may be related to the topic, but is not discussed in the passage. This one really trips up the overthinkers.
7. Unless you have a year to study for the ACT, do not waste precious time studying vocabulary words. Prior to 2016, the ACT used to include sentence completion questions on the test that required a great deal of preparation. That is no longer the case and many vocabulary terms can be deduced by the context of the passage.
8. Learn to easily identify the most difficult and time consuming questions. Do NOT lose valuable time on these questions. Look for trends as you take practice tests. If you find yourself consistently getting stuck on a particular type of question, these could be considered your difficult questions. Learn to skip them. Use your Lucky Letter and move on. If you find yourself with time at the end of the test, you can go back and try to answer them. These questions generally fall into the following categories:
- a. Questions without a line number that make you hunt for a detail.
 - b. “Except” questions in which the author mentions all of these details “except...” and your job is to find which three were mentioned and which one isn’t.
 - c. Inference questions that ask you what the author most likely meant. These questions require you to evaluate (1) What did the author explicitly say in the passage? And (2) What does the author most likely mean?
9. When you’re trying to answer a question, pay attention to words and phrases that give a positive or negative feeling. Also, look for keywords that give hints about the answer. If you can figure out if the answer should be positive or negative, it can help you eliminate some choices. If you find words that show a contrast or a comparison in the passage, like “however” or “rather than” they can give you clues about the type of answer you’re looking for.
10. The best way to prepare for the ACT Reading Test is to read, read, read and practice, practice, practice . Read a wide variety of articles, memoirs, essays, novels, and even textbook chapters on subjects such as science, humanities, social studies and prose fiction. You are not expected to be familiar with the content you see on the Reading exam, but the more you read, the more comfortable you will become with these topics and the more you will understand what you are reading. You may even be surprised to find something on the ACT Test that you read up on during your studies.

After you read an article, spend some time writing down what you gleaned from the passage. What was the main idea? What was the author’s tone and purpose? What

conclusions can you draw from the text you read? Can you explain to someone else what you read?