



Test Prep

English 101



1. Grammar/Punctuation

Semi-Colon (;)

On the ACT, a semi-colon is used to separate 2 independent clauses. Remember that an independent clause can be its own sentence. You *are* allowed to use however/therefore after a semi-colon.

- John went to the mall; he bought a pair of Jordans.

Colon (:)

For a colon to be correct on the ACT, the 1st part must be an independent clause and the 2nd part must be anything that describes the 1st part.

- John went to the one place where he felt comfortable: the mall.
- Amy handed out three crayons: red, blue, and yellow.

Long Dash (-)

The long dash can be used in one of two ways on the ACT. One long dash is identical to a colon, and two long dashes function the same way as a set of parentheses.

- There was only one thing Scooby could do— run!
- John — who had an extensive collection of classic Air Jordans — went to the mall looking for a new pair.

Run-On Sentence (aka Comma Splice)

A run-on sentence (or comma splice) occurs when 2 independent clauses are separated only by a comma. This is a grammatical error and will always signal a wrong answer choice on the ACT. Make sure you are aware of run-ons on the ACT.



- John went to the mall, he bought Jordans. **RUN-ON/COMMA SPLICE**

Clauses

The ACT will never explicitly ask about clauses, however having knowledge of them is essential if you want to correctly apply the rules listed here.

In basic terms, a clause has a subject and a verb, and an independent clause can be its own sentence.

A dependent clause, on the other hand, cannot stand alone as its own sentence. We can usually identify a dependent clause by the presence of a subordinating or “weak” conjunction (e.g. *after, although, because, since, unless, when, whenever, while, etc.*) at the start of it.

- Independent: John went to the mall.
- Dependent: *Since* John went to the mall.
- Independent: Amy ate some fries.
- Dependent: *Because* Amy ate some fries.
- Independent: Jim bought a car.
- Dependent: *When* Jim bought a car.

Modifiers

A modifier is a clause that is missing the subject, the verb, or both. Here are 4 things you need to know about modifiers that will help you identify them on the ACT:

1. The information contained within a modifier is just extra and optional.
2. If we delete a modifier from a sentence, what we have left is still a complete sentence and makes sense.
3. Modifiers are surrounded by commas.
4. When a modifier is placed at the beginning or end of a sentence, we omit the first or last comma, respectively.



- John, **who dates Tina**, went to the mall.
- **Sad about Tina**, John went to the mall.
- John went to the mall, **thinking about Tina**.

(***modifiers**)

Commas

Here are the 6 reasons for comma usage on the ACT:

1. Modifiers
 - My friend Tim, who is really funny, lives in Minnesota.
2. When a dependent clause is followed by an independent clause
 - Since he got a dog, John needed dog food.
3. To separate 2 independent clauses aka Comma + FANBOYS conjunction (For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So)
 - John went to the mall, and Bill stayed at home.
4. A list of 3 or more things
 - I like apples, oranges, and bananas.
5. To set up a quotation
 - John said, "I hate when it rains."
6. For 2 consecutive adjectives whose order can be reversed
 - They entered the dark, gloomy house./They entered the gloomy, dark house.



Extra Comma Rules

- No commas before or after prepositional phrases
- No commas + pronouns
- No commas around 'that'
- No commas before parentheses

Possessives

Its = Possessive form of a singular noun

Their = Possessive form of a plural noun

- The dog wagged *its* tail.
- The children did not want to share *their* toys.

*It's = a contraction of *It is*, They're = a contraction of *They are*, There = to indicate a place

Here are some examples of possessives for singular and plural nouns:

- My friend's boat (1 friend, 1 boat)
- My friend's boats (1 friend, more than 1 boat)
- My friends' boat (more than 1 friend, 1 boat)
- My friends' boats (more than 1 friend, more than 1 boat)

Who/Whom

Who (They, We, She, He) is a subject pronoun and appears before a verb.

Whom (Them, Us, Her, Him) is an object pronoun and does not appear before a verb.

- Who passed the football to whom
- They passed the football to them.
- He passed the football to him.
- She passed the football to her.
- We passed the football to us.



Less vs Fewer

Less: Used for uncountable nouns

Fewer: Used for countable nouns.

- I had *less* time to complete the exam than John did.
- John scored *fewer* points than Sam in the basketball game.

Effect vs Affect

Effect: Functions as a noun

Affect: Functions as a verb

- The movie had great sound *effects*.
- Tina was *affected* by the noise during her test.

Modifier vs Long Intro

1st Situation

- Hall of fame soccer striker Lionel Messi visited my school today. (long intro, no commas)
- The best soccer player of all time, Lionel Messi, visited my school today. (modifier, commas)

2nd Situation (all commas or no commas; both are okay, but you won't be offered both, tend to lean toward no commas)

- In 1913, an article, written by New York Times columnist Jim Smith, alleged that the mob had infiltrated City Hall.
- In 1913 an article written by New York Times columnist Jim Smith alleged that the mob had infiltrated City Hall.



A String of Nouns Joined by Prepositions

When the ACT is testing the number (singular or plural) of a noun contained within a string of nouns joined by prepositions, the rule is to judge singularity or plurality based on the first noun in the string.

- The keys on the table of my cousins in college for agricultural sciences in Canada are/is gold.
- **The keys** on the table of my cousins in college for agricultural sciences in Canada **are**/is gold.

Titles and Authors

Titles and authors need to be essential to the understanding of the passage/sentence they are in for them not to have commas. If, however, they are not essential, then you must place them between commas.

'Has, Have, Had'

There are only 2 reasons to use 'has, have, had' on the ACT:

1. If there are 2 events at different moments in the past. In this case, the older event gets 'had'
 - I liked watching basketball because I *had* played in college.
2. If something is still occurring
 - I played basketball for 5 years. (meaning you do not play anymore)
 - I *have* played basketball for 5 years. (meaning you still play)

Being & Having

'Being' and 'Having' are only right if they're at the beginning of a sentence.

- Being that I was a doctor, it helped that I was there at the accident.



Conjunction Pairs

The following words are conjunction pairs, meaning they must always appear together.

- Either...or
- neither...nor
- not only...but also
- not...but
- both...and
- whether...or

Pronoun Ambiguity

On ACT English, pronouns can never be ambiguous. This means that if it is ever unclear who or what a pronoun is referring to, then that pronoun needs to be replaced by the subject itself.

Repetitiveness

Repetitiveness will always render an answer choice incorrect, therefore you need to be on the lookout for it. Here is an example:

- He looked at it visually.

You can have either of these two words (looked and visually), but not both.

Idioms

Idioms are common phrases that exist in the English language and that don't necessarily have any rules. For ACT purposes, you just need to know them. If English is not your first language, then idioms can be difficult for you. In that case, try to learn as many idioms as you can but do not fret too much: idioms are not the most frequently tested concept and you can still get a very high score without them.



- Kick the bucket.
- Spill the beans.

Illogical Comparisons

We can only compare things with other things that are actually comparable. For instance, you cannot compare a person to a thing or a thing to a company. In addition, proper comparisons must be the same in terms of singularity and plurality.

- **Wrong:** The Mets' pitching is better than the Yankees.
- **Right:** The Mets' pitching is better than the Yankees'.
- **Right:** The Mets' pitching is better than the Yankees' pitching.

In the above example, the wrong sentence is comparing 'Mets' pitching' to 'Yankees', which doesn't make sense. The right sentences address this problem.

- **Wrong:** Positions in accounting and finance offer much more lucrative salaries and benefits than healthcare or education.
- **Right:** Positions in accounting and finance offer much more lucrative salaries and benefits than positions in healthcare or education do.

Here, 'positions in accounting and finance' are being compared to just 'healthcare or education' in the wrong answer choice, which, once again, is illogical.

- **Wrong:** The effects of television violence on brain chemistry are similar to that of video game violence.
- **Right:** The effects of television violence on brain chemistry are similar to those of video game violence.

In this final example, the wrong sentence has the right comparison but uses the wrong word (singular vs plural) to compare the two things.



Location Creates Relationships

Bad location puts words near each other that create false relationships and change the meaning of a sentence in unwanted ways.

For example, take the following sentence:

- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **in the field behind Joan's house atop the rabbit hutch** and discuss our friends and our hopes for the future. (**Incorrect:** This answer suggests that the house is atop the rabbit hutch)
- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **in the field atop the rabbit hutch behind Joan's house** and discuss our friends and our hopes for the future. (**Incorrect:** This answer suggests that the field is atop the rabbit hutch)
- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **atop the rabbit hutch in the field behind Joan's house** and discuss our friends and our hopes for the future. (This answer is **correct**)
- We talked just as easily as we had in the past, when we would sit **behind Joan's house in the field atop the rabbit hutch** and discuss our friends and our hopes for the future. (**Incorrect:** This answer suggests that the house is in the field)



2. English Question Types

Adding or Deleting Sentences

When you need to consider adding or deleting a sentence from a paragraph, all you need to do is answer the following question:

***The single thing the paragraph is saying is: _____?**

Whatever we are considering adding or deleting needs to be in line with the paragraph's main focus, which is what the above question allows you to determine. If the sentence in question is not in line with the paragraph's main focus, then you should delete it. If it is, then you need to carefully consider the appropriate reason for adding it.

'An Excuse for The Main Idea'

The most popular question in section 1 is: An Excuse for the Main Idea.

Given that all the choices are true, which one most effectively introduces the paragraph and provides a transition into the rest of the essay?

On these questions, you need to:

***Announce the Main Idea to Yourself**

If the question is asking about a specific paragraph, then you need to announce the main idea of that paragraph. Similarly, when it is asking about the passage as a whole, then you need to announce the main idea of the entire passage.



Direction-Based Questions

On questions that are giving you specific directions to follow (e.g. *Which choice provides a supporting example that is most similar to the examples already in the sentence? Which choice provides the most effective explanation for the action described in the sentence?*), the rule is very simple:

***Follow Them!**

Furthermore, the most specific answer tends to be right.

Primary Purpose Questions

Suppose the writer's primary purpose had been to instruct the reader how to build a replica of an ancient ship. Would this essay accomplish that purpose?

***Is this the one and only thing the passage was about?**

If so, then say 'yes.'

If what is being mentioned is just something they brought up along the way, say 'no.'

Sentence Location

For Sentence Location questions (To make the paragraph most logical, the sentence should be placed...), the first thing you must do is:

***Look Within and Imagine**

What this means is that you must read the sentence in question very carefully (*look within*) and tell yourself where a sentence like that would



logically need to appear, in a general context (*imagine*). The sentences themselves will usually contain clues as to where they would best be placed, which is why you need to take the time to analyze them before looking at the paragraph as a whole. After properly completing these steps, the appropriate placement of the sentence will usually become much clearer.

*You need to watch out 'married sentences' that may appear on these questions from time to time. Married sentences are sentences that appear one after the other and whose flow would be disrupted if a sentence were inserted between them. In this case, you would need to place the sentence after the second married sentence.

Stylish Deletion of a Word

This is when a word that was inessential from the beginning is removed from a sentence. For instance,

John was a man **who was** bent on world domination.

vs.

John was a man bent on world domination.

Gradeful proved to be the most effective test prep company in the history of the world.

vs.

Gradeful proved the most effective test prep company in the history of the world.

The Double Negative

If this sentence were deleted, what would be lost?

This type of question is really asking 'what does it have?'



Transition Words

For these types of questions, you need to remember this tip:

***Invent Your Own**

Although this sounds rather basic, if you do it properly and don't just read every answer choice first, you will get these questions right more consistently.

When we say, "Invent your own," we mean that you should come up with a word (or phrase) to replace the given one, based on the sentence before and after. Doing this really forces you to read well.

Occasionally, you should be aware of when you're in the conclusion, since this might change the word you would invent.

- Cause and Effect: Due to, Therefore, Because, Consequently
- Repetition: Similarly, Likewise
- Contradiction: Even though, Despite, Nevertheless

Verb Tense Questions

On questions that are testing verb tense, ***you should take clues from throughout the paragraph**. If there is no compelling reason to change the verb tense at the point being tested, then you should keep the same tense as the surrounding verbs.

Word Choice Questions

'Word Choice' questions on the English Section of the ACT will either be testing Formality or Word Meaning. Most of the time, these questions come down to the actual word's meaning (aka the environment where that word tends to get used). In these cases, you must understand how the



underlined word is being used in context and then pick the only answer choice that is suitable in that situation.

When, occasionally, these questions test formality, the correct word must be in line with the formality of the text. It is safe to assume that most ACT passages will be written in a formal tone and as such, you should be leaning toward formal words as your answer.

This type of question can be difficult for students who do not possess a vast vocabulary. If this is the case for you, then commit to learning all of the unfamiliar vocabulary you come across and don't get burned twice by the same word!

Wordiness/Repetitiveness vs Conciseness

Sometimes on the ACT English Section you will be given multiple answer choices that seem to be saying the same thing, except one will be (much) shorter than the others. It's important to note that ***if all else is equal, then the shortest answer will always be correct.**

*Beware of decoy conciseness questions. These decoys will have all the same elements as a normal conciseness question, however the shortest answer won't be equal to the other in terms of content and/or meaning.

