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every question type

WRITING HELP for
creating winning ESSAYS

Expert guidance from ACT coaches

Alexandra Mayzler
Joseph Daniele



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ACT **DeMYSTiFieD®**

Alexandra Mayzler and Joseph Daniele



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Part I

Introduction

Congratulations on taking the first step toward preparing for the ACT. In this section, you'll find answers to questions such as "Why this book?" and "What can you expect to learn?" and "How do I create a study schedule?" We recommend that you read through this section carefully to familiarize yourself with the DeMYSTiFieD preparation process.

chapter 1

About the Book

Why This Book?

You're probably standing in front of dozens of review book options (or you're staring at a screen with pages full of test prep books). Many books claim to deliver high scores, magic tricks, and test secrets. Selecting one title to use for your review is no easy choice. With *ACT DeMYSTiFieD*, we present one option for helping you get ready for the test. Here we will help you prepare for the ACT by carefully examining the content of the exam and then turning our attention to test strategies. While we cannot promise shortcuts and easy tricks, we can guarantee that our comprehensive approach will allow you to best prepare for the test. We developed the curriculum for this book after almost a decade of working with students. We have also spent years dissecting and practicing the ACT and have learned a thing or two along the way. *ACT DeMYSTiFieD* is our way of walking you through test preparation from start to finish. Although we cannot sit at every kitchen table with each of you, we hope that we'll come close with *ACT DeMYSTiFieD*!

What's in the Book and How to Use It

ACT DeMYSTiFieD will serve as your test prep coach. The book is organized to take you through a comprehensive preparation for the ACT. The book is divided into the sections of the test (English, Reading, Math, Science, and Writing), full-length exams, and an appendix. In each of the English, Reading, Math, Science, and Writing sections, we introduce approaches and strategies for tackling problems that typically appear on the ACT. These chapters focus on various types of ACT tasks and teach methods for those specific sections. The introduction to each strategy is given in a "step" list followed by an explanation of each of the steps. In the Science section, for example, it looks something like this:

Science Passages Steps

- Step 1:** Read the passage and data.
- Step 2:** Summarize.
- Step 3:** Paraphrase the question.
- Step 4:** Answer before you answer.
- Step 5:** Look at the choices.

In reading through the section, we encourage you to memorize the steps as well as learn the actual process. The reason for this dual approach is that while we would like you to master our strategies, we also realize that during stressful times, such as at the actual test, you might feel flustered and confused about your process. However, chances are good that you'll be able to remember a few key words. By keeping the steps in mind you will have an easier time recalling the process—it's like a cheat sheet for your brain.

Once you've understood the steps, can recall them easily, and have read over the process, you should put everything into practice. Following each section we provide you with a few guided practice problems. With these problems we lead you through our process step-by-step. Try not to jump ahead and solve the problems on your own; instead, focus on how to apply the steps to find the solution.

Finally, you'll encounter the Quiz portion of the section. Here your goal is to apply the steps and process to ACT-like questions. We urge you to work through these problems carefully while maintaining an awareness of the process involved. If you notice that you're struggling with a particular type of problem, make sure to plan on doing additional practice. Again, the most important function of these practice problems is to rehearse the steps!

Once you've worked through all the sections of the test, you will have learned the content of the exam and started looking at testlike questions. Then it will be time to put it all together. The ACT is difficult because it is a long exam that requires you to concentrate on several different types of material. Therefore, practicing the test as a whole is extremely important. In the Practice Tests section, we provide you with three full-length tests. The purpose of these tests is to give you the opportunity to practice and to hone your full-length strategies. The first test serves as a "Test Taker's Compass"—you'll complete an example and follow a guide to determine what types of strategies you should use. Study these strategies carefully, and adapt the appropriate methods to your test-taking style. Then, once you feel confident about your "Compass," take the next two tests. Remember to create a testlike environment—wake up early, select a quiet space, and time yourself.

The final section of the book is the appendix. Here you'll find some reminders from us as well as pages where you can write notes to yourself. Our reminders, along with the Keep in Mind sidebars throughout the book, are essentially lists of the errors that we see students making most frequently. Read our Keep in Mind sidebars so that you can avoid falling for common ACT traps. The logs in the appendix should be used to make final notes to yourself. This is not the area where you should take notes on the book. Instead, use the logs to write any ideas, suggestions, and strategies that you'll want to look over before the test—anything important that keeps slipping your mind, a mistake you make frequently that you want to avoid, or a helpful tip or mnemonic.

Creating a Schedule

Now that we've introduced you to *ACT DeMYSTiFieD*, you're ready to make a

working plan. Just as you would with any large project, making a prep plan for the ACT is integral to your ultimate success. The best way to prepare for the ACT is at a consistent pace and over several months. We encourage you to create a schedule based on your test date, volume of schoolwork, and extracurricular activities. Remember, if you plan ahead, you'll have plenty of time to get ready for the test day.

We recommend that you set aside 18 weeks to work through the book to prepare for the test. If you feel that you need to move through the preparation more slowly, add a few extra weeks. You'll also notice that we left a few "flexible" weeks in the event that you need to make an adjustment. If you find that you have a particularly tough week at school or need an extra few days to go over some material, you won't get off track.

In working through the prep, we have found that you will need to spend about 1 hour each on learning the steps and process for each section (so approximately 2 hours total—1 hour for English [reading, writing, or English] and 1 hour for Math or Science). We suggest setting aside an "English" day and a "Math" day and planning on reading, memorizing, and practicing the steps for each section. We also recommend that you keep your ACT prep consistent from week to week. This means you should block out the time on your calendar and plan for it just as you would do for sports practice, school commitments, and extracurricular activities. In addition to your "lesson" time, you will need anywhere from 1 to 4 hours per week to complete the homework. The time will vary from chapter to chapter. For example, the homework following the first lesson may be more of a review and thus take less time than the homework you will be doing at the end of the guide, which involves taking a full-length test. You'll want to do the practice carefully and thoroughly—remember, we won't know if you're rushing through the homework, and if you are, you'll only be cheating yourself of the high score you deserve.

Use the chart below to help you plan out a calendar. We've divided up the chapters in the book. Keeping in mind when your test date will be, fill in the dates for the corresponding lessons and homework.

Date	Chapter to Study	Homework	Notes
	Introduction	Make your schedule	
	Math: Numbers	Quiz: Numbers	
	Math: Algebra	Quiz: Algebra	
	Math: Measure of Central Tendency, Probability, and Sequences	Quiz: Measure of Central Tendency, Probability, and Sequences	
	Math: Coordinate Geometry	Quiz: Coordinate Geometry	
	Math: Geometry	Quiz: Geometry	
	Math: Proportions	Quiz: Proportions	
	Math: Functions	Quiz: Functions	
	English: Grammar rules and tackling the English section	Quiz: English	

	Review English section		
	Optional Essay section	Quiz: Writing	
	Review Essay section		
	Reading: Comprehension passages	Quiz: Reading	
	Review Reading section		
	Final review: Go over all your steps to prepare for the first practice test.	Test I: Compass Test	
	Grade Test I: Compass Test	Test II	
	Grade and review Test II	Test III	
	Grade and review Test III	Go over appendix reminders	
Test date: _____			Good luck!

chapter 2

About the Test

Layout of the Test

The test is divided into five sections—English, Reading, Math, Science, and an optional Writing assessment. Here’s a chart of what you can expect from each section.

English Section	
Time	45 minutes
Number of Questions	75
Question Types	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Usage and mechanics<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Punctuation, grammar, sentence structure▪ Rhetorical skills<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Strategy, organization, style▪ Optional Writing section

Reading Section	
Time	35 minutes
Number of Questions	40
Topics Tested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Nonfiction and fiction reading comprehension▪ One passage each of prose, humanities, social science, natural science

Math Section	
Time	60 minutes
Number of Questions	60
Topics Tested	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Prealgebra▪ Elementary algebra▪ Algebra▪ Geometry (coordinate, plane, solids)▪ Trigonometry

Science Section	
Time	35 minutes
Number of Questions	40
Topics Tested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comprehension of data and research

ACT Ground Rules

We will get into the specific strategies for the test as we move through the prep. In addition, our Compass Test (Practice Test I) will help you tailor the strategies to your strengths and weaknesses. Here we will introduce the general test approaches that you should keep in mind as you work through the chapters. As you go through each section of the review, you will learn how to apply these, and more specific strategies, to the test. For now, we lay out the ground rules.

Time Management Tactics

The ACT tests not just your knowledge of math, English, and science but also how well you can manage your time. You'll need to consider various strategies to make the most of the time given to complete the exam.

Stamina

The ACT is a *long* test. You'll be sitting in that one chair with that one booklet for several hours. Not only is the test long as a whole, but getting through the individual sections sometimes feels like it takes forever. In many ways, the exam is not just a test of your knowledge but also a test of your endurance. It is important to consider the length of the test as you're working through your prep. You'll want to not just practice problems but also rehearse sitting and working at problems for a few hours in a row. If you find that you're easily distracted or have a hard time staying focused then part of your preparation should be to build up your stamina. Start by setting aside 30 straight minutes of practice and gradually work your way up. Training for the length of the test will help you be ready on test day.

Grouping

One of the most challenging aspects of the ACT is the time limitations. You are tested not just on how well you know your stuff but also on your ability to manage time. On most tests you take in school, you start with question 1, work through the question, go on to question 2, and so on. This method is not always effective for the ACT exam. Because of the limited time on the exam, you may benefit from skipping around and securing points.

For the ACT, you need to use a technique we call *grouping*. Scan the questions for each section, and start with the questions that are easiest for you. Complete all the easy

items first, skip and circle anything that seems difficult, then go back and do all the medium questions, and finally attempt the hard questions. *Anything that you cannot solve, just guess and bubble.*

Time Investment

As we have discussed, this test is part knowledge and part time management. In answering the questions, you want to work based on your level of difficulty. You should also consider time investment per question. Some questions will require you to just look at one question or piece of data while others will be more cumulative in nature. Do not get stuck answering the “time trap” questions first. We will review this concept in detail as we introduce the sections of the test.

Confidence

Answering questions that are “easy” will build your confidence. This is not a point to take lightly. Once you’ve answered the easier questions, you will feel more comfortable with your skills, and you will get into a helpful test-taking rhythm.

Cutting Your Losses

Each question on the test is worth 1 point. That means the easy questions and the hard questions are all worth the same number of points. You will not get bonus points for spending 5 minutes on a difficult question.

You should spend 1 to 2 minutes on each question, or less time if the question is easy. Don’t worry about keeping a timer; just keep it in the back of your mind. If you feel like you have spent more than 2 minutes on a question, consider cutting your losses by

- skipping the question and coming back to it later (time permitting)
- eliminating impossible answers and guessing
- just guessing

Remember, there is no guessing penalty on the ACT. If you’re stuck or you are running out of time, you should guess and move on.

Accuracy Component

Now that you have learned to manage your time efficiently, let’s look at the other part of the equation: accuracy.

Answer the Question Before You Answer the Question

Multiple-choice answers have built-in tricks. For every four (or, in the Math section,

for every five) answer choices, three are distracters. These incorrect choices are meant to sound good—really good—so that the answer options guide your choices. Don't fall into the trap, and make sure to answer the questions *before* you look at the choices. We will work on steps to make this concept easier for you.

Educated Guessing

You are probably thinking about all those times you made bad guesses. As we said before, the ACT does not have a guessing penalty. The exam doesn't expect you to know the answer to every single question. What it does expect is that you will make educated decisions.

Educated guessing can earn you a heck of a lot of points. Every time you eliminate even *one* answer choice and guess from the remaining, you are raising your score. Without even knowing the correct answer, you can eliminate incorrect choices, guess, and rack up the points. By not guessing, you put a ceiling on your score potential.