

Tips for Taking the ACT Writing Test

Pace yourself

The ACT writing test contains one question to be completed in 40 minutes. When asked to write a timed essay, most writers find it useful to do some planning before they write the essay, and to do a final check of the essay when it is finished. It is unlikely that you will have time to draft, revise, and recopy your essay.

Plan

Before writing, carefully read and consider all prompt material. Be sure you understand the issue, its perspectives and your essay task. The prewriting questions included with the prompt will help you analyze the perspectives and develop your own. Use these questions to think critically about the prompt and generate effective ideas in response. Ask yourself how your ideas and analysis can best be supported and organized in a written argument. Use the prewriting space in your test booklet to structure or outline your response.

Write

Establish the focus of your essay by making clear your argument and its main ideas. Explain and illustrate your ideas with sound reasoning and meaningful examples. Discuss the significance of your ideas: what are the implications of what you have to say, and why is your argument important to consider? As you write, ask yourself if your logic is clear, you have supported your claims, and you have chosen precise words to communicate your ideas.

Review your essay

Take a few minutes before time is called to read over your essay. Correct any mistakes. If you find any words that are hard to read, recopy them. Make corrections and revisions neatly between the lines. Do not write in the margins. Your readers know you had only 40 minutes to compose and write your essay. Within that time limit, try to make your essay as polished as you can.

Practice

There are many ways to prepare for the ACT writing test. These include reading newspapers and magazines, listening to news analyses on television and radio, and participating in discussions and debates.

One of the best ways to prepare for the ACT writing test is to practice writing with different purposes for different audiences. The writing you do in your classes will help you. So will writing essays, stories, editorials, a personal journal, or other writing you do on your own.

It is also a good idea to practice writing within a time limit. Taking the practice ACT writing test will give you a sense of how much additional practice you may need. You might want to take the practice ACT writing test even if you do not plan to take the ACT with writing, because this will help build skills that are important in college-level learning and in the world of work.