ACT English Strategies

Five strategies for tackling the ACT English section:

**Tip 1** - When you tackle each underlined portion, **ask yourself**:
1. *Do all of these words belong here?* – (is it redundant, too wordy, or irrelevant?)
2. *Does this sound like proper English?* – (are there any obvious grammatical errors?)
3. *Does this make sense?* – (is it logical and easy to understand or is it confusing or vague?)

Answering those three questions can get you to the answer choice right away. Let’s look at an example.

Growing out of a pile of mud, we found several large mushrooms. We began to collect them for our evening barbeque.

A. NO CHANGE
B. We found several mushrooms growing out of a pile of mud.
C. Growing out of a pile of mud we found several large mushrooms.
D. We found several mushrooms, growing out of a pile of mud.

Let’s ask those three questions.

*Do all of these words belong here?*

They certainly do. We need all of the words to get the point of the sentence across; none of the words seem unnecessary or redundant. Furthermore, the sentence as a whole belongs there as well. Without it, there would be no context for the next sentence.

*Does it sound like proper English?*

It does, right? There’s nothing about it that’s making you think, “Ouch. Something doesn’t sound right.”

*Does it make sense?*

This is tricky, but check the sentence to make sure it is as clear as possible. There is a misplaced modifier here. (See the grammar review to jog your memory if you’re not sure what a misplaced modifier is). Doesn’t it sound as if the people in the sentence were growing out of a pile of mud? There is a clearer, more logical way to express this sentence. The sentence should be rearranged to make it clear that it is the mushrooms growing out of the mud, not the people collecting them. Therefore, the best answer choice is B.
If you can't answer the three questions above, that’s when you need to use some sneakier strategies.

**Tip 2** – Keeping it simple: When in doubt, take it out. On the ACT, a lot of the rules are ones you feel in your gut. No mental gymnastics. If you don't know whether an idea is redundant, it probably is, so **take it out**. If you don't know whether a certain way to say things is wordy, it probably is, so **take it out**. If you don't know whether an idea is relevant, it probably isn't, so **take it out**. If you’re not sure a comma belongs in that particular spot, **take it out**.

Jordan was furious, when he discovered his band’s video had been wrongly flagged on Youtube.

A. NO CHANGE
B. furious. When
C. furious when
D. furious—when

Not sure if the comma should be there? Take it out! Answer choice C is correct here.

**Tip 3** - If you can't solve certain questions, or don't have time for the remaining questions, **choose the shortest answer**, because the shortest answer is the correct answer about a third of the time. If one of your options is to “OMIT” the underlined portion, consider it thoughtfully. When it appears, "OMIT" has a slightly higher correct rate than any other choices.

**Tip 4** Don’t be too influenced by the answer choices. The correct answer to a question is usually not the one that has changed the most elements of the underlined phrase. Be wary of answer choices that try to trick you into overcorrecting the problem. You shouldn’t be tricked into finding additional “errors” by an answer choice that has completely made over the original.

Britney was angry and in a defiant mood when she realized how long it would take her hair to grow back.

A. NO CHANGE
B. Britney was angry and defiant when she realized how long it would take her hair to grow back.
C. Britney was angry and in a mood of defiance when she realized how long it would take her hair to grow back again.
D. Britney was angry and defiant when she realized the lengthy amount of time it would take her hair to grow back again.

Answer choice B is the correct answer here. It states the information in the original sentence clearly and concisely and does not completely overhaul the original sentence.

**Tip 5** Feel comfortable choosing **NO CHANGE**. It is the correct answer approximately 20% time (15 questions)