ACT Reading Strategies

How to best prepare for the ACT reading section

- Read, read, read!! Newspapers, novels, magazines, etc. Since the reading section tests reading comprehension, it makes sense that there is no better way to prepare than to do a lot of reading before test day. Try to find the perfect pace for your reading—a pace at which you read very quickly, but understand the author’s main points.

- Make sure to pay attention to the passage and question type review sheets for some great strategies for reading passages and tackling questions.

- Take practice tests, even just for the reading section. Why?

  1. First of all, pacing is everything on the reading section. You need to have lots of practice tackling four boring passages and forty questions in only 35 minutes.

  2. Taking practice tests can help you really streamline your pacing strategy in another crucial way. With practice, you will know which passages you feel more comfortable with and which question types you have an easier time answering. You need to use this information!! How?

This brings us to the next section: pacing strategies

Pacing Strategies

- On the reading section, NEVER read the passages in order (unless that happens to be your order of preference). If you begin with the types of passages that are easiest for you and know which question types are easier for you:

  1) You’ll be able to read the passages more quickly
  2) You’ll be able to move through the questions more quickly, and
  3) You’ll spend time on questions that you have a better chance of answering correctly.

But you’ll only know the best passage order for you if you’ve taken several practice tests before test day.

- If you are aiming for a score close to a 23, you may want to experiment with only reading three out of the four passages and guessing entirely on the fourth passage. Think about it. If the passage you guess on is your least favorite, that means that once you don’t have to worry about it, you are going to have a lot more time to answer questions on passages
that are easier for you anyway. And according to the laws of probability, you should get 2-3 correct on the passage you skipped, just by guessing.

- Always read the passage **before** you look at the questions. Sometimes students ask if they should read the questions before reading the passage so they know what to focus on in the passage. While this strategy sounds like it could work well, it actually works terribly in high-stress situations. Think about it—you need to try to remember what 10 questions asked while reading a long, boring, and unfamiliar passage, all while trying to get the gist of the passage and looking for possible answers to the questions at the same time. And you’ll have to reread the questions as you answer them. This is a total time-waster!