

Think Fast

*A standardized test
that's a sprint to the finish.*

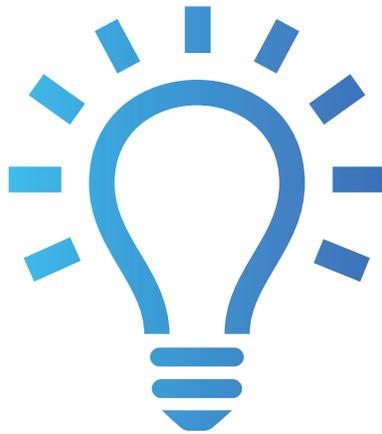


By: Evan Wessler

What's Inside?

Join Method Test Prep's Vice President of Education, Evan Wessler, as he discusses the ACT, the standardized college admissions exam administered to millions of high school students every year. In this eBook, he shares his reflections of the experience, focusing on the speed and strategy necessary for excelling on the ACT. Open our eBook to read about insights that are essential to consider while preparing for the test!





In the real world, we tend to make important decisions deliberately. Especially when we're doing things that may be considered "academic" – like figuring out the amortization on a mortgage or reading through the terms of an automobile lease agreement – we are encouraged to do so with careful thought, and for good reason. Do we want to agree to terms we haven't fully processed? Should we make financial decisions based on first-time, blitz-like math calculations? Certainly not. Yet there is one roughly four-hour period in many **high school students'** lives that demands the sort of rapid-fire, no-second-thoughts action that, by and large, is discouraged in life after school.





This Is the ACT, The Standardized Test That Takes No Prisoners.

I remember the last time I sat to take the ACT, it was at Bay Shore High school, located in Long Island, NY. I had taken the test before: once as a senior in high school, and twice more in my present position as Vice President of Education at Method Test Prep. Moreover, I have had extensive experience with the test through my work tutoring students for the exam. Based on my former scores, my familiarity with the test, and the feedback I get from students, I would (and do) go so far as to call myself an ACT expert. Still, every time I take the exam, I am struck by how fast-paced and unforgiving a gauntlet the ACT truly is. This Saturday's experience was no different.





Never mind: bubble and get going, because all the while, the second hand on my watch has covered three-quarters of the clock face, and it's time to move.

Each time, it goes something like this. I read a question and immediately start thinking about technique. Where have I seen this before? Which **strategy** is most effective for solving a problem like this? Are there hints in the answer choices that reveal further insights into the question? Am I reading carefully? Did I miss something? Am I solving for the correct variable, or properly interpreting the meaning of a word? There, I've got the answer. Am I 100 percent confident? Maybe 99 percent. I might have made a mistake. Maybe, but is that likely? Who knows? Never mind: bubble and get going, because all the while, the second hand on my watch has covered three-quarters of the clock face, and it's time to move.



Sound Stressful? IT IS.



Doing well on the ACT demands that you hit the ground running immediately when you finish reading a question, and that you are confident enough in your approach that when you arrive at an answer, you can mark it and forget about it. The time you waste actually thinking about what to do is time that slips away incredibly easily, and time you're not likely to make up. Fortunately, I'm good at this sort of thing. I'm familiar enough with the test structure, content, and style of questions to know what I need to do almost instantly. But this isn't about me; it's about students, and how I can get their abilities in line with what's necessary to succeed on the test.



So What Are Those Requisite Skills Students Need To Defeat The ACT?

1

First And Foremost Is Familiarity. Recognizing the mere appearance of a math problem or the very wording of the answer choices in an English question can make all the difference between hesitation and action, and thus between getting left in the dust and finishing. Familiarity means consistent, diligent, timed practice with authentic **ACT material**. Without that triumvirate—consistency, diligence, and timing—a student’s path toward meeting his or her ACT potential is a lost cause.

FAMILIARITY



INSIGHT

Second Is Insight. Most students know they have weaknesses, but aren't aware of what those weaknesses are, exactly. One thing we can always bet on is the standardized part of "standardized test": because the ACT needs to test the same fundamental skills each time it is administered, the exam must present the same question types and roughly the same content every time. Recognizing particular weaknesses and aggressively smoothing them out is the only way to make sure students don't repeatedly fall prey to the same mistakes and misunderstandings.



WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE

3

Third Is A Willingness To Compromise. For many students, finishing all or even one of the ACT sections within the allotted time is a nearly impossible feat. That's okay. With proper guidance and practice, students can learn to pick their battles and sacrifice some questions for the greater good of their scores.



4

ANTICIPATION.

Fourth Is Anticipation. It continues to surprise me how much of the ACT is simply about careful reading and foresight. This is what I call conscious test-taking. When students think passively—that is, when they read the text of a passage or question and expect an epiphany to arise automatically—they invariably fail to take advantage of a complete skill set that resides in all students’ brains. Much of a student’s **potential to improve** his or her ACT score depends on using the one-two punch of previous knowledge and anticipation to maximum effect. For example, spotting punctuation in the English section should raise certain cognitive red flags; observing particular ratios in triangles in the Mathematics section should raise others. The more alert and proactive a student is with questions, the more likely it is that he or she will get more of them correct.



All of this, of course, is contingent upon one thing: perseverance. Yes, the ACT, to some extent, does test many facets of a student's cognitive capability: reasoning, absorption, recall, comprehension, and the like. But does this mean that students are stuck to their initial scores? Hardly. As difficult as the ACT may seem, there is one way to break it down: hard work.

As Difficult As The ACT May Seem, There Is One Way To Break It Down

HARD WORK!



Synopsis:

The ACT is more than the sum of its parts. With four sections all longer than their SAT counterparts, the ACT is sometimes called the “easier” of the two exams. Don’t be fooled: the ACT is a serious exam, requiring comprehensive preparation, intense focus, and a willingness to push through the challenges of timing and content. But never fear! If you decide the ACT is the right standardized test for you, Method Test Prep is [here to help](#).





About The Author

Evan Wessler

Evan graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from Bucknell University in 2009. After starting a graduate program in the biomedical sciences at Harvard University, he decided instead to pursue a tutoring and management opportunity with Method Test Prep. Since coming aboard, Evan's responsibilities have included developing educational content and curriculum, teaching, training and hiring tutors, expanding the reach of Method Test Prep's private tutoring services, helping to develop and coordinate Method Test Prep's in-school prep courses, and managing Method Test Prep's team of instructors. Evan still takes both the SAT and ACT once per year in order to learn as much as he can about the tests' content and about the overall test-taking experience. In doing so, he has earned perfect scores on both exams.

When not dissecting standardized tests, Evan enjoys reading, writing, playing tennis, running, listening to jazz, and playing his guitar.

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