

SAT / ACT Independent Practice: Hints For Practice and Time Management



The most important thing is to make a plan and not worry. You already know how to study for a test! Start early and dedicate a set amount of time each week. Maximize your strengths and work methodically through your weaknesses. Have confidence in your abilities and your plan. Good luck!

For more help, look at “Getting the Most Out of Khan Academy and the College Board Book” and “Techniques for Common Questions” under [TIPS and TRICKS](#) on www.yourstepstocollege.com.

1. Make practice like the real test.

Sit at a desk, not on your bed or the floor.

Use a bubble sheet. You don't want to fine-tuning your timing in practice without one and then get thrown off when you get to the real test and have to use one.

Keep track of your time during the sections with a watch and not your cell phone or a timer. You won't be allowed to use those on the real test. For the ACT, practice using a watch with a dial hand. Occasionally ACT proctors tell students to put away their digital watches.

Practice with the calculator you'll be using on the test. All of the TI calculators with a number (like TI-84) are allowed on both tests. The SAT allows any TI-Nspire calculator, but the ACT does not allow the TI-Nspire with the letters CAS in the upper right corner.

2. Decide how many questions you need to finish.

Unless you need a near-perfect score, do not assume you need to finish all of the questions. Instead, do fewer and take more time on each to avoid careless errors. For example, to get a 26 on ACT math, you need 45 questions right. Do just 50-55 out of the 60 questions, and be more accurate. If you're not sure how many questions you need to get right to achieve your goal score, Google “SAT or ACT Score Conversion Chart.”

3. Figure out how fast you should go.

NOTE: these guidelines assume you're trying to finish all the questions. Adjust your timing if you don't need to finish all the questions, or you have an extra-time accommodation for the test.

SAT Timing

- Reading - 12 minutes on each single passage, 16 minutes on the double passage
- Writing - 11 minutes per passage

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- Math - Average one minute per question on the easy and medium questions in the beginning and middle, then two minutes per question on the hard ones at the end. The questions go from easy to hard in the multiple-choice and then from easy to hard again in the free response. (Guess on two or three of the last six multiple choice questions that look hard or long. Then go back to them if you have time left after finishing the other questions you know how to do.)

ACT Timing

- English - 25 questions in 15 minutes
- Math - Average 30 seconds on the easy questions at the beginning, 60 seconds on the medium ones in the middle, and 90 seconds on the hard ones at the end. (When you get to #51, guess randomly on the last 10 questions. Then go back and do the easiest ones first.)
- Reading - 9 minutes per passage (Do seven questions and check the time.)
- Science - 5 minutes per passage

4. Practice the timing by breaking the subjects into the sections listed above.

It's easy to get sucked into material and not realize how fast you are or aren't going. Divide the subjects into parts per the timing above (or your adjusted timing) to practice the right pace. For example, doing 25 ACT English questions in 15 minutes will give you a better sense of the correct speed than trying to finish 75 questions in 45 minutes.

5. Look for a more efficient method on question types that take you a long time.

Don't automatically solve the whole problem. Do 75% of the calculation and jump to the answers or look at the answers first and use process of elimination (especially if the question says "which of the following"). If you're confused, just try to figure out which answer is most likely correct.

On algebra and geometry problems, draw a picture and estimate the answer by eye. If the equation in the question is simple, test the answers. In each reading passage, do the line reference questions first and the main idea questions last - if you're running out of time, you have a better chance to get a main idea question right with an educated guess. On ACT Science passages with graphs or tables, go right to the questions without reading any text. Look for the answer in the figures first. On questions that say "most likely," you are supposed to make an educated guess.

NOTE: It's hard to find shortcuts when you're going quickly. So do a section without the timer, and challenge yourself to find the fastest solution to each question. Try multiple approaches.

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6. Know the material.

Don't take too long on a quadratic formula question because you have to think about what the quadratic formula is. Memorize it in advance. Use your search engine to look up concepts you don't remember. Khan Academy's SAT videos include many ACT concepts. Keep a list of question types you're missing and research them or ask for help.

7. Get help.

The world is full of people who are good at English, reading, math, and science. Ask friends, neighbors, parents, and co-workers as well as teachers and tutors. Even people who are not testing experts can explain material and brainstorm about ways to improve. Also, try Googling "Saving Time on the SAT" or "ACT Time Management."

8. Keep track of your progress.

Keep a list of how many questions you're getting right on each of your timed practice sections. Make the number is increasing. If not, work on the previous steps.

I'd wish you "good luck," but I don't think you need it. You can do this!