

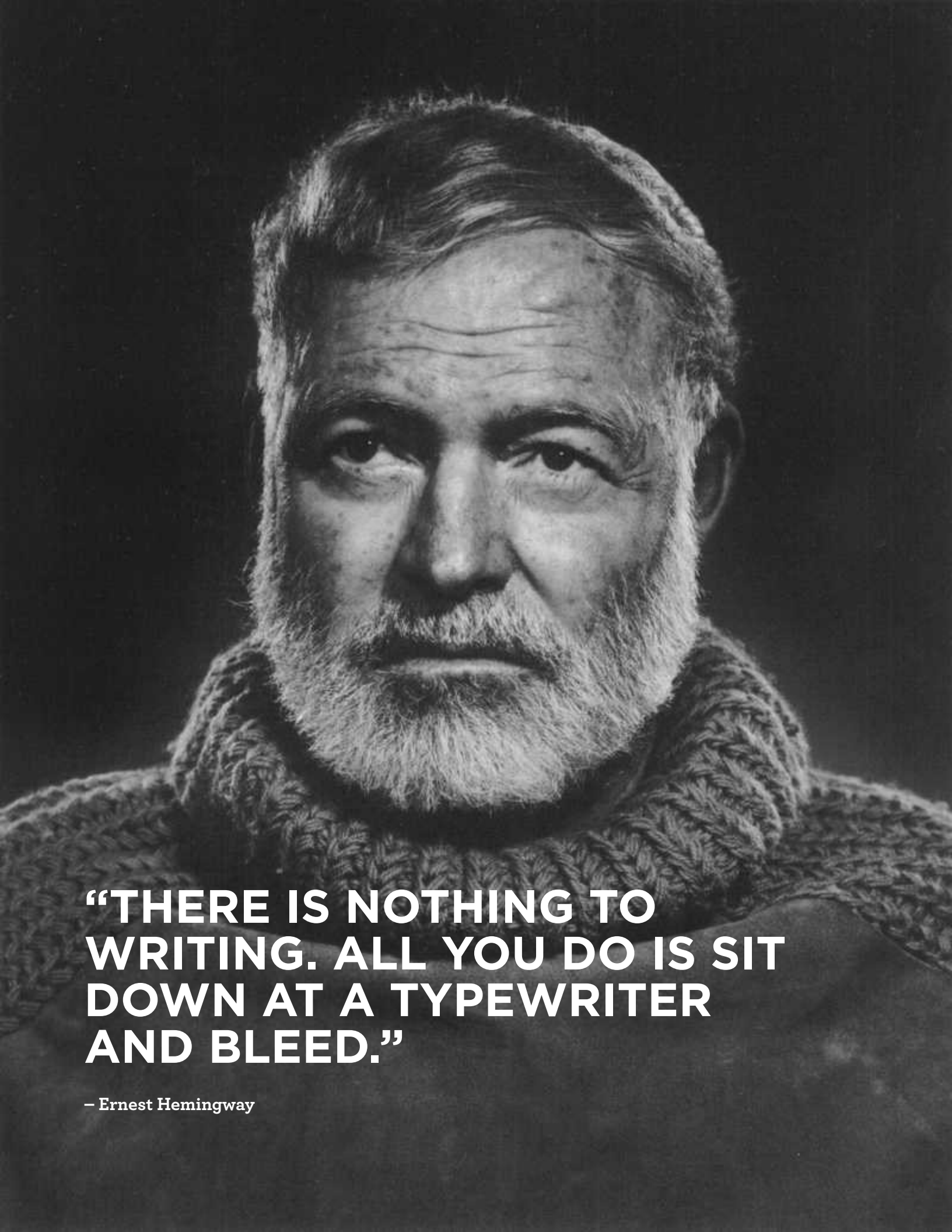
ENGLISH CURRICULUM

ACT



Contents

4	Introduction
5	Identifying parts of speech
6	Verbs
8	Nouns
10	Pronouns
12	Prepositions
15	Adjectives / Adverbs
16	Conjunctions
18	The Recommended Strategy
20	Grammar and Punctuation Questions
21	Subject-verb agreement
22	Pronoun-antecedent agreement
23	Commas
26	Colons
26	Semi-colons
27	Dashes
28	Apostrophes
30	Style and Word Choice Questions
31	Wordiness
32	Redundancy
33	Transitions
34	Misplaced Modifiers
35	Logical Comparison
36	Who vs. Whom
37	Idioms
38	Main Idea and Editing Questions
39	Function (“Delete A Phrase”)
41	Intent or Goal
42	Rephrasing or Tone
43	Additional Statements
44	Sequence of Ideas
45	Sample English Passage
49	Section Overview



**“THERE IS NOTHING TO
WRITING. ALL YOU DO IS SIT
DOWN AT A TYPEWRITER
AND BLEED.”**

– Ernest Hemingway

INTRODUCTION

The English Test is the first test of the ACT. Over the course of 45 minutes, you are tasked with answering 75 questions. While that may seem difficult, the English Test is generally considered to be the least time-sensitive test on the ACT. High school juniors and seniors who are strong readers (especially those who read often for fun) will usually score highly on this test, as the majority of answers will be obvious to students who read consistently. However, even the strongest readers will need to review grammar rules and familiarize themselves with the format if they want to ace the test.

The English test requires you to read five “passages” (essays or stories). Each passage contains fifteen questions, and each question falls into one of three categories:



Usage/
Mechanics

It's

Rhetorical Skills



Main Ideas /
Editing

IDENTIFYING PARTS OF SPEECH

There are eight parts of speech in the English language. In order to have success on the ACT English Test, you will need to be able to identify seven of them. This document contains a brief guide to locating parts of speech within a sentence. Notice that the sample questions here are not ACT English questions. They are simply questions designed to test your ability to recognize parts of speech, which is a fundamental skill needed on the ACT. This section provides background knowledge for those looking to start at square one in their ACT English Test preparation.

Beyond simply identifying the parts of speech, each of the following sections contains more advanced grammar rules that will also be crucial if you're hoping to score highly on the ACT English Test.

VERBS

Verbs are the words that explain what is happening in a sentence.

There are two main categories of verbs: action verbs and state of being verbs.

Examples of **action** verbs

RUN

Delivered

Spoke

Examples of **state of being** verbs

WAS

Is

Are

Verbs take different forms depending on their subject and their tense. For example, a verb that is being done by a singular subject (such as “she”) will be slightly different from a verb that is being done by a plural subject (such as “they”).

She **wants** to eat a grasshopper.

They **want** to be eaten by a grasshopper.

Verbs are the most commonly tested part of speech on the ACT English Test. The verbs “to be” and “to have” are tested with extra frequency. These verbs are irregular (meaning that their actual wording changes depending on their subject and tense), and thus many students have a harder time spotting when they have been used improperly.

Here is the proper wording for **to be**:

Singular

I am

You are

He/she/it is

Plural

We are

You are (plural)

They are

Here is the proper wording for **to have**:

Singular

I have

You have

He/she/it has

Plural

We have

You have (plural)

They have

In the following sentences, identify the verbs and their corresponding subjects. If one has been used improperly, identify its proper form.

1. I was eight feet tall before the Rapture.
2. That dog spoke to me in Hebrew.
3. The government are the most dangerous organization known to man.
4. Italian doctors from the ghetto often makes me recite the Declaration of Independence.
5. Banks don't have money for Teddy Bears.

Mentor Notes

**“Some of the
worst writing
around suffers
from inert verbs.”**

- Constance Hale

NOUNS

Nouns are people, places, ideas, objects, or gerunds (verbs with -ing at the end), and can always be preceded by “a”, “an”, or “the”.

Proper nouns are specific nouns that are always capitalized.

Subject Noun: is a noun that performs the action of the verb.

Object Noun: is a noun that receives the action of the verb.

Examples of **nouns**

a clown (person)
the tundra (place)
slavery (idea)
an eraser (object)
running (gerund)

Examples of **proper nouns**

Ben Franklin (person)
Mars (place)
Communism (idea)
The Rosetta Stone (object)
Saving Private Ryan
(gerund at the beginning
of a title, and thus
capitalized... yes, that's us
cheating.)

Nouns can be either the subject of the sentence or the object of the sentence. If a noun is doing something in the sentence, it is the subject; if something is being done to it, it is the object. Understanding subject and object is crucial for many different question types on the ACT English Test.

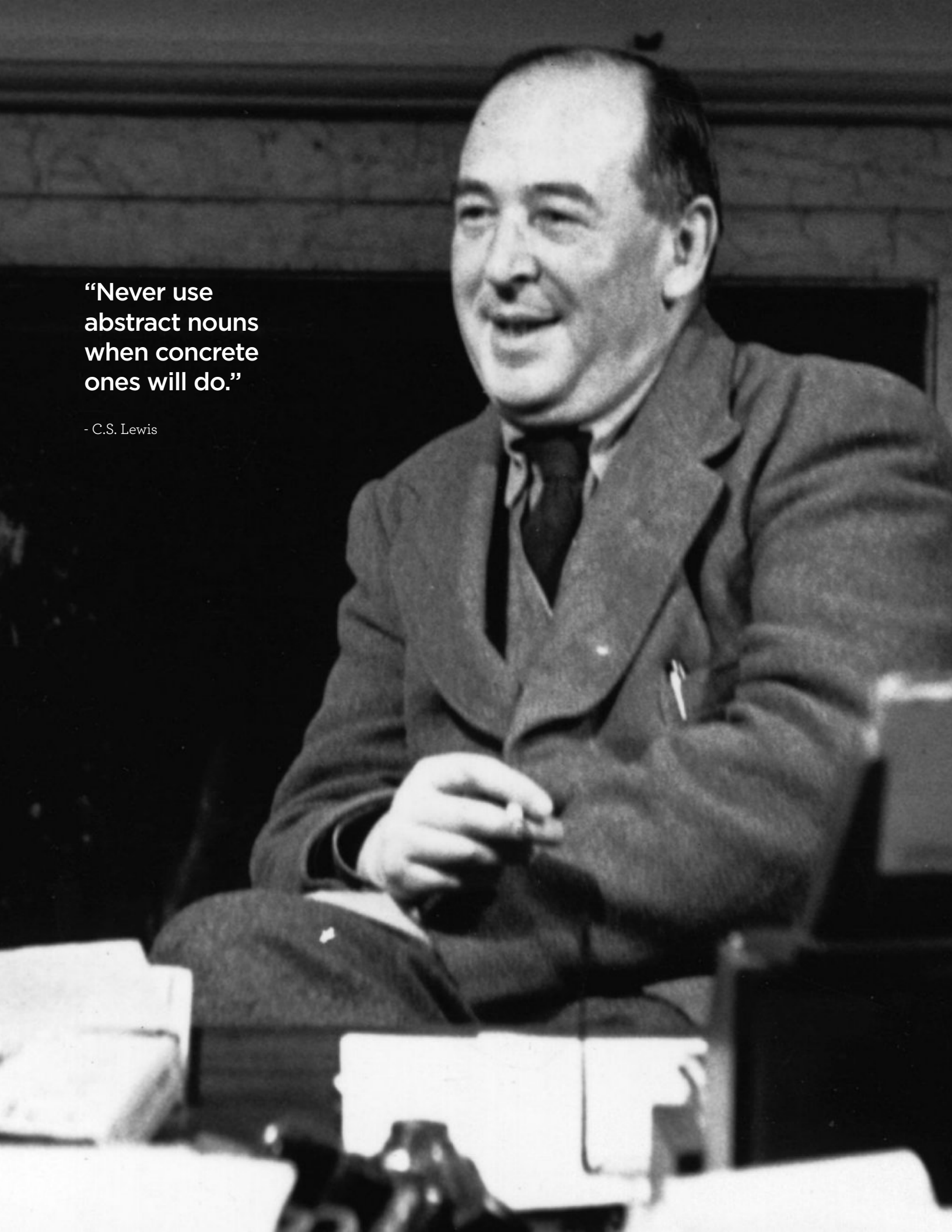
In the following sentences, identify all of the nouns, then identify which are subjects and which are objects:

1. Ducks shouldn't swim in volcanoes.
2. That hat would look better on a chimpanzee than on you.
3. I don't have any use for Communism now that I'm rich.
4. After the Elephant Scandal, South Africa decided to secede from the African Union.
5. Thomas Jefferson wrote many love letters, but only some were addressed to humans.

Mentor Notes

**“Never use
abstract nouns
when concrete
ones will do.”**

- C.S. Lewis



PRONOUNS

Pronouns are words that take the place of nouns.

Subjective pronouns: used as the subject of the sentence or as a predicate noun.

Objective pronouns: is a personal pronoun that is used typically as a grammatical object.

Possessive pronouns: indicating possession, for example mine, yours, hers, theirs.

Common Singular Pronouns

I
you
he/she/it

Common Plural Pronouns

we
you
they

After verbs, pronouns are the second most commonly tested part of speech on the ACT English Test. Like verbs, they take different forms depending on whether they are replacing a singular noun or a plural noun.

Identify all of the pronouns in the following sentences. If one is used improperly, identify its proper form:

1. Eskimos are fearless. They attack anything with eyes.
2. My hamster is growing. Soon it will be bigger than you.
3. Ford is Ashley's favorite car company. She met their founder when she went back in time.
4. There is only one Batman. He reminds me of my grandmother.
5. For me, purple is an awful color. We shouldn't wear it.

As with nouns, pronouns can be either subjects or objects, and you must be able to tell the difference on the ACT English Test.

Examples of Subjective Pronouns

I	we
you	you
he, she, it	they

Examples of Objective Pronouns

me	us
you	you
him, her, it	them

Pronouns that show possession are called possessive pronouns. They can either be used as nouns that act alone or as possessive adjectives that describe a noun.

Mentor Notes

Examples of Possessive Pronouns (Nouns)

mine	we
yours	you
his, hers, its	they

Examples of Possessive Adjectives

mine	our
your	your
his, her, its	their

In the following sentences, identify the pronouns. If one is being used subjectively when it should be used objectively (or vice versa), correct it:

1. He likes to eat sloppy joes in her apartment.
2. They were howling at either us or the moon, though I'm not sure which.
3. The band came out late, but they really blew Alex and I away.
4. With whom do you want to look at monkeys?
5. Liza and I like to pickpocket tourists who have nice shoes.

PREPOSITIONS

Prepositions indicate where a noun is or when a noun happened.

The most common prepositions

Of
to
on
in
for
at
from
with
as
about
into
by
through
after
before.

On the ACT, prepositions will usually be tested in how they pair with a particular verb. You will have to study these pairings and then rely on your instincts when you don't recognize a pairing on the test. Here is a table with many of the most common preposition-verb pairings used on the ACT. Note that some words can properly be matched with several prepositions.

angry at	absorbed in	hide from
arrive at	engrossed in	differ from
stare at	believe in	protect from
accuse of	interested in	escape from
afraid of	participate in	recover from
approve of	succeed in	different from
capable of	trust in	discourage from
consist of	disintegrate into	discriminate against
approve of	able to	insist upon
hatred of	according to	rely on
love of	agree to	count on
opinion of	attribute to	depend on
in charge of	respond to	argue with
ask for	prefer [one thing]	familiar with
apologize for	to [another thing]	popular with
blame for	subscribe to	ask about
desire for	compare to	care about
excuse for	complain to [someone]	complain about
hope for	object to	happy about
need for	equal to	talk about
pray for	encourage to	think about
sorry for	introduce to	
abide by	regard as	

In the following sentences, identify the preposition. If it is incorrect, replace it with the correct preposition.

Mentor Notes

1. Sarah was accused of being too high maintenance.
2. Edgar insisted on throwing a house party.
3. Dante proved capable in writing a complete sentence.
4. Marco was discouraged in joining the hockey team.
5. You cannot escape against Emilia's dungeon.

Outside of testing for correct prepositional usage like in the sentence above, there's another common way that prepositions are involved in the ACT English Test: as a distraction. Consider the sentence:

The monkeys sit in the tree.

"In" is a preposition in this sentence, and it can be said that "in the tree" is a prepositional phrase in this sentence. On the ACT, prepositional phrases are often used to distract you from other errors in the sentence. Consider:

The monkeys in the tree likes when it rains.

The prepositional phrase is the same: "in the tree". However, it's now separating the subject of the sentence, "monkeys", from the verb in the sentence, "likes". And since "monkeys" is plural, the verb needs to be plural- "like" is correct. Some students may see "tree", a singular noun, and think that it is the subject of the sentence, which would make "likes" correct. But "tree" is part of the prepositional phrase, and a prepositional phrase can never be the subject of a sentence.

In the following sentences, identify the prepositional phrase, the subject, and the verb. If there is an error in the sentence, correct it. Don't be distracted by the prepositional phrases!

1. The rocks on the seashore is really slippery.
2. Andre from the Hawaiian Islands blew up a factory farm last week.
3. The wolverines in Lake Michigan are ruining everyone's fun.
4. The criminals on my street makes everyone lock their doors at night.
5. Mike Tyson, the best interviewee in the world, likes to nibble on earlobes.



**"A preposition is
a terrible thing to
end a sentence
with."**

- Winston Churchill

ADJECTIVES

Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns.

On the ACT, you will be tested on your ability to identify whether a word should be used as an adjective or as an adverb.

The big, dumb dog slept on the train tracks.

Your mother's cooking is delightful.

She's amazing but infuriating.

ADVERBS

Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs. They almost always end in -ly.

He speaks loudly and carries a small stick.

The bomb is amazingly small, considering how much damage it does.

Beaver meat is delectable, but only when it's extremely carefully cooked.

I don't hear well.

Mentor Notes

That last example is one of the few adverbs that doesn't end in -ly. You've probably had people correct you before on your usage of "good" vs. "well", and now you know why: "good" is an adjective, while "well" is an adverb (usually).

In the following sentences, circle all adjectives and underline all adverbs. If one is improperly being used as the other, correct it.

1. There are a shocking small number of green pigs in the world today.
2. That humongous pizza delivery man is rapidly confused.
3. Tiger Woods has a large golf bag, but his shoes are incredible undersized.
4. I write hastily whenever I have a horrible idea in my head.
5. He plays well defense because he moves his feet good.
6. Most smartly students will quick see the glaring obvious issues with this sentence.

CONJUNCTIONS

Conjunctions indicate relationships between words, phrases, and clauses (parts of sentences).

There are two main kinds of conjunctions: coordinating conjunctions, which usually occur in the middle of a sentence, and subordinating conjunctions, which can occur at the beginning or in the middle of a sentence. The main grammatical difference is that a coordinating conjunction is used to relate two independent clauses (sentences that could stand on their own). Subordinating conjunctions provide a transition between the ideas of a dependent (or subordinate) clause and an independent clause. The dependent clause usually provides more information about the independent clause, such as the time, place, or the cause of an effect.

Examples of Coordinating Conjunctions (remember “FANBOYS”)

for	or
and	yet
nor	so
but	

Examples of Subordinating Conjunctions

after	once	until
although	rather than	when
as	since	where
because	than	wherever
even though	though	while
if	unless	why

Conjunctions are generally tested based on their logic on the ACT. For instance, consider:

Mentor Notes

The boys chose to wear the same t-shirt, although they had different styles.

The boys chose to wear the same t-shirt, although they had the same style.

The second sentence doesn't make logical sense, because the conjunction "although" indicates that there should be a contradictory relationship between the two parts of the sentence. The first sentence is properly includes two contradictory parts, joined by "although".

In the following sentences, identify the conjunction. If the conjunction is being used illogically, identify a conjunction that would be more appropriate:

1. The astronauts were anxious about takeoff, because everyone assured them it was ok.
2. While I like Sundays, I don't like going to church.
3. The sun was extremely bright, however I wore my sunglasses while driving.
4. Everyone thinks she's beautiful, yet I think she's too manipulative.
5. There are hundreds of people like me at my school, so I'm still a loner.

THE RECOMMENDED STRATEGY

Now that you have familiarized yourself with the seven parts of speech tested on the ACT, let's take a look at the strategies you should use when you approach any ACT English question.

There are three rules that you should follow to begin every question on the English Test:

1. Read to the end of the sentence.

Don't stop reading at the end of the underlined portion, as the meaning of the sentence could change. This is true even when a sentence has two underlined portions. In fact, some questions may require you to read the sentence before and/or after the underlined portion in order to determine the correct answer.

[2] It seems that it came down to
the perceptions in
7

7. A. NO CHANGE
B. perceptions of
C. perceptions to
D. perceptions which

In this example, you may be tempted to stop reading at the end of the underlined portion, or at the comma. However, this isn't enough to answer the question. All options are grammatically correct, so we must read to the end of the sentence to figure out which answer choice is best.

[2] It seems that it came down to
the perceptions in the leadership board at the
7
National Association for the Advancement of
Colored People (NAACP).

7. A. NO CHANGE
B. perceptions of
C. perceptions to
D. perceptions which

Reading to the end of the sentence reveals that answer choice B is correct. We are dealing with the "perceptions of" the NAACP.

2. Use the answer choices to anticipate what English knowledge the question is testing you on.

For Usage/Mechanics questions, identifying which part of speech or grammar rule is being tested can be a huge help to determining the correct answer. Once you know that a question is testing your ability to use a comma correctly, for instance, you're much more likely to remember your comma rules and choose the right answer than you would be on a question where you're unable to tell what is being tested. If you recognize that two different grammar rules are being tested in a question, you should start by evaluating the easier grammar rule and then eliminating the answer choices that incorrectly follow that rule.

Students shouldn't spend much time attempting to exactly pinpoint what category a question falls under. However, it is useful in helping students identify what skills they need to use to answer a question correctly. With enough repetition and practice, this recognition will become second nature.

3. If there's an actual question being asked, pay close attention to it.

Take a look at these two English questions:

- At just the age of 15, she
- stood up to not only a white bus driver and police
officer, and the entire system of racial segregation.
5
- Furthermore, though within a year the Montgomery
Bus Boycott would be in full swing, she acted alone,
bravely facing an injustice that she knew needed to
6
be eliminated.
5. A. NO CHANGE
B. officer. Also
C. officer, but also
D. officer but also
6. Which of the following choices most closely maintains the style and tone of the essay?
F. NO CHANGE
G. saying "no thanks" to
H. channeling the power of God to destroy
J. going kamikaze against

Notice anything? Question 5, like all Usage/Mechanics questions, is composed of an underlined portion of text and four answer choices. Question 6, like all Rhetorical Skills questions, asks an actual question and then offers four answer choices. When working with the latter, you must pay close attention to what the question specifically tells you to look for. test will often try to throw you off by asking you to choose the answer that is NOT correct rather than the best answer. Students who don't pay attention to the question itself will often find themselves making silly mistakes.

If after reading the question and eliminating bad answer choices the correct answer doesn't jump right out, students should make their best guess based on all of the critical thinking they've done. Remember, there's no guessing penalty on the ACT. Students should never leave any question blank.

4. Know when you need to read more than just the sentence with an underlined portion.

Questions involving verb tense often require reading the sentences before or after to see if the events occurred in the past or will occur in the future. Pronoun use is another time you may have to read another sentence; if you can't find which noun the pronoun is replacing in the current sentence, you need to read the sentence before. Another time you may have to read more than just the sentence with the underlined portion would be if the question or an answer choice involves another part of the passage such as the context of a paragraph, scope, or conclusion. For example, if one of the answer choices in the middle of the passage is "foreshadowing of the conclusion", you cannot correctly answer that question until you finish reading the passage.

Now, let's talk more in-depth about what grammar and punctuation rules you will have to know so that you can correctly answer the vast majority of questions on the ACT English Test.

GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION QUESTIONS

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

The Problem: The number of a verb does not match up with the number of the subject to which it refers.

The Solution: Identify what subject the verb refers to, and then ensure that the verb is in the right form. This means matching a singular verb with a singular subject, and a plural verb with a plural subject. Note that unlike plural nouns, plural verbs do not often have an 's' on the end. In contrast, singular verbs do often have an 's' on the end.

For the first time in my life, the challenges of high school was not the focus of my daily energy.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. were not
- C. was never
- D. were never

The correct answer is B. The subject of the second half of the sentence is “challenges”, which is a plural noun. Therefore, the verb of the sentence must also be plural: “was not” should be changed to “were not”. Note that the prepositional phrase in between the subject and the verb “of high school” works to distract you from the true subject at hand.

Try It Out!

Each of my friends dances like a fool on New Year’s Eve.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. dance
- C. dancing
- D. to dance

PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT

The Problem: The pronoun does not agree with its antecedent (the noun that the pronoun is taking the place of).

The Solution: First, identify which noun the pronoun is taking the place of (this may require you to look at previous sentences in the paragraph). Then, determine what the correct pronoun should be. Remember that, like a subject verb agreement question, a plural pronoun must take the place of a plural noun, and a singular pronoun must take the place of a singular noun.

The frustrating thing about wizards is that he doesn't always use magic on the correct frog.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. he don't
- C. they don't
- D. they doesn't

The correct answer is C. First, you must observe that “he” is a pronoun. Next, you must identify the antecedent: “wizards”. This is a plural noun, so you must use a plural pronoun. “They” is appropriate. Answer choice D is incorrect because it establishes a subject-verb disagreement.

Try It Out!

King Arthur ruled the realm with an iron fist. Despite this, people loved him.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. it
- C. them
- D. us

COMMAS

The Problem: Proper comma use is probably the most difficult question type on the ACT, simply because it involves so much knowledge. There are many different ways a comma can and should be used, and students will have to understand at least five if they want to ace the ACT English Test.

Comma Problem 1: Descriptive Phrases

The Solution: Descriptive or introductory phrases (that could not be a complete sentence on their own) need to be separated from the rest of the sentence by a comma.

In the shadows of the city he watches over us all.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. In, the shadows of the city, he
- C. In the shadows, of the city he
- D. In the shadows of the city, he

The correct answer is D. “In the shadows of the city” is an introductory phrase that is dependent on the second half of the sentence, “he watches over us all”. Therefore, we need a comma between the two halves of the sentence.

Try It Out!

My Spanish teacher is scary. His nose, by far the longest facial feature I've ever encountered points to the left of where he's looking.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. His nose by far the longest facial feature I've ever encountered, points
- C. His nose, by far the longest facial feature I've ever encountered, points
- D. His nose by far the longest facial feature I've ever encountered points,

Comma Problem 2: Conjunctions

The Solution: Two parts of a sentence that could stand alone as sentences on their own need to be separated by a comma followed by a conjunction (remember “FANBOYS”).

Michael Jordan was an amazing basketball player, but lately his reputation as a businessman has been called into question.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. Michael Jordan was, an amazing basketball player, but lately
- C. An amazing basketball player, Michael Jordan, but lately
- D. Michael Jordan was an amazing basketball player but lately

The correct answer is A. The original sentence correctly separates two independent clauses (“Michael Jordan was an amazing basketball player” and “Lately his reputation as a businessman has been called into question”) with a comma and a conjunction (“but”).

Try It Out!

I'll have to give up on my dreams of becoming a football player for my brain injuries are too severe.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. player; for
- C. player, for
- D. player. For

Comma Problem 3: Lists

The Solution: Items in a list of three or more need to be separated by commas.

The three things that I hope to do on vacation are to eat to sleep and to read.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. is to eat, to sleep, and to read.
- C. are to eat; to sleep; and to read.
- D. are to eat, to sleep, and to read.

The correct answer is D. We must separate each of the items in the list with a comma. B correctly uses the commas, but creates a subject-verb disagreement (“things” and “is”).

Try It Out!

My first boss, though a great man, always seemed to think that he was landing a big contract, going out of business or both.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. he was: landing a big contract, going out of business, or both.
- C. he was landing a big contract going out of business or both.
- D. he was landing a big contract, going out of business, or both.

Comma Problem 4: Dates and Locations

The Solution: Dates and locations need to have their parts separated by commas. For instance: I went to Albany, New York in January, 1946.

George Washington's famous crossing of the Delaware River began on December 25 1776.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. began, on December 25 1776.
- C. began on December 25, 1776.
- D. began, on December 25, 1776.

The correct answer is C. No comma is necessary after “began” - a good way of knowing this is to recognize that “on” is a preposition, and we never have a comma directly before or after a preposition. Answer choice C also correctly separates the day and year with a comma.

Try It Out!

On February 4, 1902 in Atlanta, Georgia, Elroy Simpson was shot dead after a dispute over a broken saxophone.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. On February 4 1902, in Atlanta Georgia,
- C. On February 4 1902 in Atlanta Georgia
- D. On February 4, 1902, in Atlanta, Georgia,

Comma Problem 5: No Comma Needed

The Solution: On top of all four of those rules, there are many ACT English problems that test your ability to recognize when no comma is needed. If the sentence doesn’t fall under one of the first four categories, you can be confident that it does not require a comma.

For more practice on commas and other types of punctuation, please review the “ACT Punctuation Tips” and “ACT Punctuation Quiz” with your mentor

SEMI-COLONS

The Problem: Knowing when to use a semi-colon instead of a period, comma, or colon.

The Solution: Grammatically, semi-colons function the same way as periods. They separate two complete thoughts. Stylistically, semi-colons imply an added level of connection between the two thoughts as compared to just using a period. Commas cannot connect two complete thoughts on their own - remember that they need to partner with a conjunction to do so. Note that on the ACT English Test, students will never be asked to choose between these three grammatically correct options (a semi-colon, a period, or a comma with a conjunction). Only one grammatically correct option will be present. You can also use a colon in between independent clauses if the independent clause after the colon is directly describing or elaborating upon something mentioned in the independent clause that precedes the colon.

If the guys on the soccer team were nervous about playing in the championship game, they didn't show it, they played flawlessly and patiently, like a well-oiled machine.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. it;
- C. its,
- D. its;

The correct answer is B. The clauses before and after "it" are both independent. Therefore, we have the choice of separating them with a period, a semi-colon, or a comma with a conjunction. Only the semi-colon is given as an answer choice.

Try It Out!

My mother was of a long line of scientists; the fact that she became so religious never sat well with my grandparents.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. Being of a long line of scientists; my mother became religious, which didn't sit well with my grandparents.
- C. Not sitting well with my grandparents, my mother became religious; despite being from a long line of scientists.
- D. Despite being from a long line of scientists; the fact that my mother became so religious never sat well with my grandparents.

DASHES

The Problem: Knowing when to use a dash or dashes instead of commas, a colon, a period, or a semicolon.

The Solution: The dash is one of the most versatile marks of punctuation in the English language. Two dashes can be used like two commas or parentheses to set off a nonessential clause or phrase. Always keep your punctuation marks consistent—if you begin a nonessential clause with a comma, a dash, or a parenthesis, then you must end the nonessential clause with the same punctuation mark.

One dash can be used as a less formal alternative to a colon when separating an independent clause and another idea or list. Like colons, a dash can separate independent clauses if the second independent clause is directly related to the first.

An easy way to remember how to use a dash is:

One dash = One Colon

Two dashes = Two Commas

Michael Jordan—the second greatest basketball player of all time, was recently featured in the ESPN documentary *The Last Dance* along with his teammates on the 1997-1998 Chicago Bulls.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. time was
- C. time—was
- D. time was,

In the above sentence, a dash is used to begin the appositive phrase, so it must be used to end the appositive phrase. The correct answer is C.

In the documentary, Michael Jordan constantly lambasted his teammates—Scottie Pippen, Steve Kerr, and, most notably, Scott Burrell.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. teammates: Scottie Pippen
- C. teammates, Scottie Pippen
- D. teammates; Scottie Pippen

Here, an independent clause is followed by a list that elaborates on the word teammates. A colon or a dash can be used to separate an independent clause from a list, so you can eliminate answers C and D. B does not have a comma between the first two items of a list, so the correct answer choice is A.

Try It Out!

Five former presidents of the United States, William Howard Taft, Gerald Ford, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush—have attended Yale University as either undergraduate or graduates.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. United States—William
- C. United States (William)
- D. United States: William

APOSTROPHES

The Problem: Knowing how to correctly use an apostrophe to designate ownership of one noun over another.

The Solution: Know when and how to use apostrophes. The ACT English Section tests two types of apostrophes: to show the possession of a noun and contractions. To determine if the apostrophe is possessive, ask yourself: “does (blank) belong to (blank)?” If so, then an apostrophe is required.

For possessive apostrophes, follow these rules:

1. If the owning noun is singular, add ‘s (even if it ends in s)

the girl's purse
the bass's lake

2. If the owning noun is plural but doesn't have an s at the end, then you add 's.

women's soccer team
children's toys

3. If the owning noun is plural and already has an s at the end, then you only need to add an apostrophe after the s.

Two dogs' tails
The companies' employees

Some possessive pronouns do not use an apostrophe at all, so be careful with these!

her
his
their
its
whose

Apostrophes are also used to show where a letter was omitted from a contraction. To check if it's a contraction, try to replace the contraction with the two words that make up that specific contraction. The ACT loves to test students on the difference between its/it's, whose/who's, their/they're, so make sure you know the difference! Let's look at an example problem:

My cats' tongue feels like it's made of hardened mashed potatoes.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. cats
- C. cat's
- D. cat

The correct answer is C. “Tongue” belongs to “cat”, so we know that we need an apostrophe. Furthermore, we can tell that the sentence is referring to only one cat by looking at the verb; “is” is singular, so A must be incorrect.

Try It Out!

We'll be spending the afternoon in James dad's secret treehouse.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. James dads'
- C. James's dads
- D. James's dad's

STYLE AND WORD CHOICE QUESTIONS

WORDINESS

The Problem: Some sentences or answer choices contain extra words that make the meaning of the sentence hard to understand.

The Solution: Choose the answer that is the most clear. Avoid flowery or redundant language. Note that the correct answer to a “wordiness question” will almost always be the shortest answer. plural verbs do not often have an ‘s’ on the end. In contrast, singular verbs do often have an ‘s’ on the end.

My brother has been a police officer for an indescribably long time.
over 40 years, what an accomplishment.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. what an accomplishment - over 40 years
- C. an indescribably long 40 years.
- D. over 40 years.

The correct answer is D. The other three answer choices all contain extra words that don’t add to the meaning or clarity of the sentence.

Try It Out!

Astronomers have been staring out at the wide, empty and beautiful
sky for centuries, wondering what distant stars may hold.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. the expansive sky
- C. the endless sky
- D. the sky

REDUNDANCY

The Problem: There is a redundant phrase in the sentence.

The Solution: Identify the redundant phrase, and change the sentence to eliminate it. Often, the correct answer choice for a redundancy problem will be to “OMIT the underlined portion”.

Annually, more than 1,000 monkeys are killed by poachers who want to sell their fur every year.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. each year.
- C. every 12 months.
- D. OMIT the underlined portion and insert a period after “fur”

The correct answer is D. “Every year” is redundant because the sentence has already said “annually”.

Try It Out!

The bomb exploded with an explosive force greater than that of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. a concussive force
- C. a destructive force
- D. a force

TRANSITIONS

The Problem: A transitional word or phrase is ineffective or inaccurate. This transition can occur between two sentences or between two paragraphs.

The Solution: Because Transition questions always occur between two entities (either two sentences or two paragraphs), it's very important that students understand the main idea of each entity. Carefully read both sentences and determine their relationship - are they agreeing with each other? Disagreeing with each other? Seemingly unrelated? - and use that knowledge to choose the right transitional word or phrase.

Astronauts know that when they leave the Earth's surface, they may never return. However, there have been multiple examples of fatal space accidents.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. Indeed,
- C. Contrastingly,
- D. On the other hand,

The correct answer is B. By carefully reading both sentences, we can tell that the second sentence is confirming an idea presented in the first sentence. Therefore, "indeed" is appropriate. All of the other answer choices are contradictory.

Try It Out!

I haven't seen my family since I left for college, so I'm very excited to go home for Thanksgiving.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. yet
- C. but
- D. for

MISPLACED MODIFIERS

The Problem: A phrase is misplaced within the sentence, making it unclear what the phrase is intended to modify.

The Solution: Choose the proper placement for the modifying phrase. Often, these questions will have you consider what word the phrase should be placed after. Remember that the subject must always follow the introductory or modifying phrase.

Rolling around in the mud, I just shook my head as my dog looked up at me with a goofy smile.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. I smiled as my dog shook his head at me
- C. my dog, smiling at me, and I just shook my head.
- D. my dog looked up at me with a goofy smile, and I just shook my head.

The correct answer is D. It's clear that the dog is rolling around in the mud, not the narrator. Therefore, the first subject after the modifying phrase ("rolling around in the mud"), needs to be the dog. That leaves either C or D, but C presents a verb tense error.

Try It Out!

Snowboarders use their lower bodies while avoiding rocks and trees to glide through the snow.

The best placement for the underlined portion would be:

- A. where it is now
- B. after the word snowboarders
- C. after the word bodies
- D. after the word while

LOGICAL COMPARISON

The Problem: things being compared must be similar entities. It's the classic 'apples and oranges' scenario.

The Solution: Whenever you see comparison key words such as "like" or "than", make sure that the two things being compared are actually comparable. Note that this is one of the few question types that often result in a longer answer choice being correct.

Many scientists say that we know less about the ocean floor than we know about the moon.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. the surface of the moon.
- C. the lifeforms on the moon.
- D. the craters of the moon.

The correct answer is B. Though you can probably tell what is being compared, the sentence needs to be clarified. It does not make sense to compare an entire moon to the "ocean floor". It makes sense to compare one surface to another.

Try It Out!

Selling a work of art that you made is like a person selling a part of your body.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. someone
- C. an artist
- D. OMIT the underlined portion

WHO VS. WHOM

The Problem: Identifying whether to use who or whom in a sentence.

The Solution: While this is a rare question on the ACT, it does come up occasionally. Students must identify whether the word that who/whom is taking the place of is the main subject of the sentence. If it is, use “who”. If it is not, use “whom”. For more, see the pronouns section of ACT - Parts of Speech.

The Mario Brothers, whom have come under fire recently for their treatment of endangered turtles, remain steadfast in their plea of not-guilty.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. which
- C. that
- D. who

The correct answer is D. The underlined portion is taking the place of “Mario Brothers”, which is the subject of the sentence. Therefore, “who” is the correct pronoun.

Try It Out!

If you could meet anyone, dead or alive, whom would you choose?

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. which
- C. that
- D. who

IDIOMS

The Problem: “Idioms” deal with the proper way of saying a phrase. More specifically, they deal with matching the correct preposition with a verb.

The Solution: This is a problem where students will do best to trust their ear. If it sounds right, it probably is. For more practice, see the prepositions section of ACT - Parts of Speech. “whom”. For more, see the pronouns section of ACT - Parts of Speech.

Though I’ve always admired thrill seekers, I’ve always had a deathly fear in skydiving.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. fear of
- C. fear with
- D. fear for

The correct answer is B. “Of” is the proper preposition to match with “fear”.

Try It Out!

We hadn’t seen each other in years, yet as soon as we were together we slipped into our familiar habits, talking about old friends and making jokes about our hometown.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. fell upon
- C. slipped on
- D. fell in

MAIN IDEA AND EDITING QUESTIONS

FUNCTION (“DELETE A PHRASE”)

The Problem: These questions ask whether or not the author should delete a phrase, sentence, or paragraph.

The Solution: Determine how the phrase, sentence, or paragraph functions within the passage as a whole. Then decide whether or not it should be kept or deleted, and why. This is a great question type on which to anticipate the correct answer before reading the choices.

If scientists are able to devise a plan to send a rover to Europa, one of the largest moons of Jupiter, they have reason to believe that they may find liquid water and signs of life deep under its icy crust.

The writer is considering deleting the phrase “one of the largest moons of Jupiter,” from the previous sentence. Should this phrase be kept or deleted?

- A. Kept, because knowing that Europa is a moon of Jupiter is relevant information for evaluating how difficult the mission would be.
- B. Kept, because Europa is one of the largest moons, but not the largest moon, of Jupiter.
- C. Deleted, because knowing that Europa is a moon of Jupiter is not relevant information for evaluating how difficult the mission would be.
- D. Deleted, because Europa is one of the largest moons, but not the largest moon, of Jupiter.

The correct answer is A. Note, however, that this assumes that the main idea of the passage is the mission. If this were a totally unrelated anecdote in the passage, then the answer would probably be C, or something different. Context matters a great deal on these questions.

Try It Out!

Christopher Columbus, though long celebrated in America for his famous voyage, has lately come under greater scrutiny. His actions against the native populations of the Americas have led many people to believe that he was an imperialist, racist murderer. Some have gone so far as to call for an end to celebrating Columbus Day.

The writer is considering deleting the phrase “His actions against the native populations of the Americas have led many people to believe that he was an imperialist, racist murderer” from the previous paragraph. Should this phrase be kept or deleted?

- A.** Kept, because the writer might believe that this is true.
- B.** Kept, because it provides information on why Columbus has come under scrutiny.
- C.** Deleted, because it does not consider the views of his defenders.
- D.** Deleted, because it is impossible to know if any natives were murdered by Columbus or not.

INTENT OR GOAL

The Problem: We are told that the writer has a goal he or she is trying to accomplish, and we must determine which answer choice best accomplishes that goal.

The Solution: Pay very close attention to the specific goal. Keeping that in mind, eliminate answer choices that do not accomplish the goal or only connect to it tangentially.

By the end of the opening speech, I was feeling poorly about my choice to attend the week-long seminar.

The writer is attempting to indicate that at this point she felt extremely bad about attending the seminar. Which of the following choices best accomplishes the writer's goal?

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. horrified by
- C. unsure about
- D. non-committal regarding

The correct answer is B. The goal is to use language that shows that the narrator is feeling “extremely bad”, and “horrified by” accomplishes this the best.

Try It Out!

The World Cup draw is actually one of the most exciting parts of the tournament. Slowly, teams are drawn from different categories in order to construct the final eight groups that will face off in the upcoming tournament.

The writer would like to give a sense of the drama involved in the World Cup draw. Given that all of the following choices are true, which best accomplishes the writer's goal?

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. yet
- C. but
- D. for

REPHRASING FOR TONE

The Problem: Determining what version of the sentence or paragraph fits with the overall tone of the rest of the passage.

The Solution: These problems require the student to pay close attention to what style of writing is prevalent in the essay. Is it a personal narrative, written in a casual tone? Is it a scientific article, written in a formal tone? Or somewhere in between? Choose the version that most closely matches the rest of the passage.

These questions cannot be taken out of the context of the passage, but here is an example of a question you might encounter:

Which of the following choices most closely maintains the style and tone of the essay?

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. saying “no thanks” to
- C. channeling the power of God to destroy
- D. going kamikaze against

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

The Problem: Students are tasked with deciding whether or not an additional statement should be added to the passage.

The Solution: These questions almost always require a significant amount of reading around the area in question. Pay close attention to the main idea of the surrounding sentences.

These questions cannot be taken out of the context of the passage, but here is an example of a question you might encounter:

At this point, the author is considering adding the following true statement:

Her mother went so far as to slap her across the face when she found Claudette holding hands with a white child at a department store.

Should the writer include this sentence?

- A. Yes, because child abuse is a serious issue.
- B. Yes, because this story illustrates how engrained racial segregation was in Montgomery.
- C. No, because this story has little to do with Claudette's childhood.
- D. No, because this story is not related to the Civil Rights Movement.

SEQUENCE OF IDEAS

The Problem: These questions require students to identify the correct sequence of a series of sentences or paragraphs.

The Solution: Pay close attention to the main idea of each sentence or paragraph. Choose the answer choice that presents the main ideas in the most logical order. Note that these problems will require a good deal of reading around the area(s) in question.

Pronouns are also a great way to help locate the correct placement for a sentence. If the sentence contains a pronoun, figure out what its antecedent should be based on your knowledge of the passage, and then find the answer choice that places the sentence after the mention of that antecedent.

These questions cannot be taken out of the context of the passage, but here is an example of a question you might encounter:

What is the best placement for sentence 5 in the paragraph above?

- A. Where it is now
- B. Before sentence 1
- C. Before sentence 3
- D. Before sentence 4

SAMPLE ENGLISH PASSAGE

Claudette Colvin: Unknown Hero

On March 2nd, 1955 in Montgomery Alabama, an African-
¹
American woman refused to give her seat on a public bus
to a white passenger. After a minor confrontation with
the bus driver and police, the woman was arrested. Her
resistance added fuel to the Civil Rights Movement that
was rapidly expanding in 1950's America. You'd be forgiven
for thinking that this is the story of Rosa Parks. However,
²
Rosa Parks wouldn't have her confrontation with the police
for another nine months. Instead, this is the story of a
brave 15-year-old girl named Claudette Colvin.

Claudette Colvin, adopted daughter of C.P. and Mary Anne
Colvin, were born in one of the poorest neighborhoods
³
of Montgomery. From an early age, the realities of racial
segregation were apparent to her. She recalled that
one of her earliest memories was of her mother telling
her that she couldn't spend time with white children. ⁴
In Montgomery, racial segregation ran deep: African
Americans had to eat at different restaurants, attend
different schools, and even drink from different water
fountains.

- 1 **A.** A. NO CHANGE
 B. On March 2nd, 1955 in Montgomery,
 Alabama,
 C. On March 2nd 1955 in Montgomery
 Alabama,
 D. On March 2nd, 1955, in Montgomery,
 Alabama,

- 2 **A.** NO CHANGE
 B. Indeed,
 C. Accordingly,
 D. J. Against popular opinion,

- 3 **A.** NO CHANGE
 B. born
 C. being born
 D. was born

- 4 At this point, the author is considering adding
 the following true statement:

Her mother went so far as to slap her across the
face when she found Claudette holding hands
with a white child at a department store.

Should the writer include this sentence?

- A.** Yes, because child abuse is a serious issue.
B. Yes, because this story illustrates how
engrained racial segregation was in
Montgomery.
C. No, because this story has little to do with
Claudette's childhood.
D. No, because this story is not related to the
Civil Rights Movement.

Despite growing up in such a harsh environment, Claudette was an ambitious and intelligent child. She spoke about becoming President someday. Perhaps it was that inherent pride that led her to her fateful confrontation on the bus. At just the age of 15, she stood up to not only a white bus driver and police officer, and the entire system of racial segregation. Furthermore, though within a year the Montgomery Bus Boycott would be in full swing, she acted alone, bravely facing an injustice that she knew needed to be eliminated.

[1] Considering Claudette's amazing story and Rosa Parks' fame, why is it that so few people know Claudette's name? [2] It seems that it came down to the perceptions in the leadership board at the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). [3] At the time of Claudette's individual protest, they may not have been ready to act against the Montgomery bus system. [4] Another factor that likely prevented Claudette from becoming a figurehead was her age, when the NAACP considered whom they could use as the face of its movement, it was less comfortable with the idea of a rebellious 15-year-old

- 5 **A.** NO CHANGE
 B. officer. Also
 C. officer, but also
 D. officer but also

- 6 Which of the following choices most closely maintains the style and tone of the essay?

- A.** NO CHANGE
B. saying "no thanks" to
C. channeling the power of God to destroy
D. going kamikaze against

- 7 **A.** NO CHANGE
 B. perceptions of
 C. perceptions to
 D. perceptions which

- 8 **A.** NO CHANGE
 B. she
 C. we
 D. it

- 9 **A.** NO CHANGE
 B. age, yet when
 C. age; when
 D. age when

than a seasoned 42 year-old. [5] This group was extremely
10 influential in organizing the protest movement that
brought about the end of legalized racial segregation. 11

Regardless of the reason behind her lack of fame at the
time, we should all now know the name of Claudette
12 Colvin. She should serve as a reminder of the countless
heroes whom risked their personal safety to combat the
13 oppressive system of racial segregation in America.

It's time that we remember these heroes.
14

- 10 A. NO CHANGE
B. than it was with the idea of
C. compared to
D. like it felt about
- 11 What is the best placement for sentence 5 in the paragraph above?
A. Where it is now
B. Before sentence 1
C. Before sentence 3
D. Before sentence 4
- 12 A. NO CHANGE
B. the unforgettable name of
C. the beautiful and inspiring
D. the one, the only,
- 13 A. NO CHANGE
B. who
C. which
D. that
- 14 A. NO CHANGE
B. These heroic heroes were amazing
C. How could we forget these heroes?
D. OMIT the underlined portion

Question 15 asks about the preceding passage as a whole.

- 15 Suppose the writer's goal had been to write an essay illustrating the importance of the Montgomery Bus Boycott to the American Civil Rights Movement. Would this essay accomplish this goal?
- A. Yes, because the essay discusses the founder of the Montgomery Bus Boycott
B. Yes, because without Claudette Colvin, the Montgomery Bus Boycott never would have been successful.
C. No, because the essay focuses on the actions of Claudette Colvin.
D. No, because the essay never mentions the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

BASICS:

5 Passages and 75 Questions
Time – 45 minutes
Average time per passage – 9 minutes
Average time per question – 36 seconds

Question Types:

Usage/Mechanics (~40 questions) – deal with grammar, punctuation and sentence structure

Rhetorical Skills (~35 questions) – deal with writing strategies, style and organization

KEY RESOURCES:

[ESM ACT English Curriculum](#)
[ESM ACT Punctuation Tips](#)
[ESM ACT Punctuation Quiz](#)

GENERAL STRATEGY:

1. Read the ENTIRE passage, but stop to answer a question after fully reading the sentence in which it is located.
2. Use the answer choices to determine which grammar rule is tested.
 - a. If two or more rules are tested, start by evaluating the easiest one.
3. Eliminate wrong answer choices based on the rule or rules tested.
4. If you can't eliminate three answer choices, then read the sentence with each remaining answer choice and select the one that sounds the best to you.
5. If you are unsure of the answer choice you selected, circle the question and MOVE ON! If you reach the end of the test and have time remaining, review all of the Rhetorical Skills questions and then check over any question that you circled.

EXTRA TIPS:

1. Take your time! This is the one section of the ACT that most students finish with time remaining, but it is very hard to catch mistakes when reviewing questions at the end of the section.
 - a. If you are finishing your practice tests with more than 5 minutes remaining, try to:
 - i. Read each passage more carefully for its content – this will help you increase your accuracy on Rhetorical Skills questions, which are some of the hardest on the test.
 - ii. Commit to Step 4 of the Basic Strategy!
2. Use your leftover time wisely by:
 - a. Reviewing every Rhetorical Skills question.
 - b. Reviewing any questions that you circled in your booklet.
 - c. Thinking about math formulas in your head to get ready for the next section!
3. Read extra sentences surrounding the sentence of the question when the question is testing:
 - a. Pronoun Usage
 - b. Verb Tenses
 - c. Transition words
4. If two or more answers to a question are grammatically correct, the question is probably testing wordiness or redundancy.
 - a. When in doubt, go with the shortest answer!
5. NEVER choose an answer choice with the word “being”, and be very careful when choosing “having”!
 - a. These cannot stand alone as verbs, and are used incorrectly 99% of the time.
6. For questions testing punctuation usage, evaluate the answer choice that contains a semi-colon first.
7. For comma usage questions, take a long pause when reading a comma in an answer choice. This will help you determine if a break in the sentence is necessary.
8. Memorize “there” vs. “their”, “who’s” vs. “whose”, “its” vs. “it’s”, “who” vs. “whom”, and “could of” (NEVER correct) vs. “could have”. These are quick and easy points!
9. For questions that ask you to re-arrange or insert additional sentences, use pronouns and/or words that are repeated in sentences to help you locate their correct place in the passage.
10. Words such as and, or, also, and then, as well as sentences that contain a list of different actions, often indicate that parallel structure is needed. Make sure that you keep verb and noun forms consistent!
11. If two answer choices are grammatically identical, then neither of them can be the correct answer.

