

## **Top 10 tips for ACT English**

### **1. THINK SIMPLE.**

As far as the ACT is concerned, the best writing uses the fewest possible number of words to convey an idea. This doesn't always mean the shortest answer is the best answer—sometimes more words are needed in order for a phrase or sentence to be grammatically correct. But in general avoid answer choices that seem wordy. The best answers are concise and clear.

### **2. TAKE THE WHOLE SENTENCE INTO ACCOUNT.**

It's easy to read just the underlined portion the question asks about, or maybe just the clause that the underlined portion is a part of. However, many times the other clause or clauses in the sentence can affect your answer. For example, if the other clause is an independent clause, you will need to make sure that the underlined portion does not create a comma splice with another independent clause. Read the whole sentence to yourself and you will be less likely to overlook an error.

### **3. BE AWARE OF CONTEXT AND MEANING WHEN NECESSARY.**

It may seem like the meaning of the passage is unimportant since these are grammar questions. However, there are many questions where context must be considered. Some examples are transition word questions and questions that ask you about the proper placement of a sentence in a paragraph. For a question that asks you to choose the best closing sentence, you will need an understanding of the main idea of the entire passage.

### **4. LOOK FOR CONSISTENCY.**

Generally, you want to keep things such as verb tense and voice consistent. So if you're picking the tense for a verb, look at the surrounding sentences and see what tense they are in. There will be exceptions, like when a certain clause refers to a past event in a paragraph that is otherwise in present tense, but this is a good general rule to follow.

### **5. AVOID REDUNDANCY.**

If something has already been stated or implied, don't state it again. There's no need for two adjectives that mean the same thing, or any other type of redundancy. This rule also falls under keeping it simple and taking the whole sentence into account. If you just read the underlined portion, you might miss that the same idea is already present elsewhere in the sentence.

### **6. KEEP THINGS PARALLEL.**

Parallelism is a grammatical principle that becomes easier to spot the more you see it and get familiar with it. For a sentence to be parallel, the clauses within it must have matching structure. Here's an example of a sentence that isn't parallel:  
My favorite things to do are running, swimming, and to read.

The first two items in the series are in gerund form (running and swimming), and the third item is in infinitive form. To make this sentence parallel, change “to read” to “reading.”

### **7. WATCH OUT FOR RUN-ON SENTENCES.**

Comma splices are common mistakes in everyday writing, so they may not jump out at you as mistakes in an ACT English passage. A comma splice is a type of run-on in which two independent clauses are joined together with just a comma. An independent clause is a clause that could stand on its own as a complete sentence. A comma splice can be fixed by adding a conjunction, making one of the clauses dependent, or changing the comma to a semi-colon.

### **8. MAKE SURE THE SUBJECTS AND VERBS AGREE.**

Plural subjects need plural verbs, and singular subjects need singular verbs. Subject-verb agreement errors are usually easy to spot if the subject and verb are right next to each other, but often they are not, and that’s when it gets tricky. If there are any prepositional phrases in between the subject and verb, take them out and then read the subject and verb together. Do not make the mistake of thinking that the object of the prepositional phrase is your subject.

### **9. LOOK FOR PRONOUN-ANTECEDENT AGREEMENT.**

The antecedent is the noun that a pronoun replaces or refers to. You can draw an arrow from a pronoun back to its antecedent and then check to make sure they agree in number and gender. For example, the plural pronoun “they” must have a plural antecedent such as “students,” and the plural pronoun “her” must have a singular, feminine antecedent such as “Jane.”

### **10. CHECK THAT TRANSITIONAL SENTENCES INCLUDE IDEAS FROM THE CURRENT AND PREVIOUS/FOLLOWING PARAGRAPH.**

Often you will have to pick the best opening or closing sentence of a paragraph. The best choice will almost always create a smooth transition by including ideas from both the current paragraph and the previous or following one (depending if it is an opening or closing sentence). By including ideas from both paragraphs, the two ideas are connected, creating a smoother transition.