

Watch the Instructional ACT Reading Video on the Homepage!

Overview

- Consists of four 800-900 word passages: prose, social science, humanities, and natural science.
- Time = 35 minutes to complete all four passages
- 10 questions per passage
- Questions are in random order

STRATEGY

Below are several effective and **timesaving** reading strategies. Not all strategies work for everyone; it is important to try each one and see what works best for you. You will need to mix it up depending on type/difficulty of passage.

Strategy 1: The Circle Method

Because the ACT requires that you focus on details, circling these details as you come across them will allow you to find them quickly later.

- i. Scan the reading quickly
- ii. As you are scanning, circle any **name, date, place, number, term or thought-reversers** (but, instead, rather, though, however, despite, although, yet—think BIRTHDAY) that you come across. Use your circles to quickly locate answers.

Strategy 2: Line references first!

- Before reading look at questions and quickly note what questions are line references. Quickly mark the #of the question next to the lines within the passage.
- Answer these questions first and do in order of the line reference, not the order of the questions (ACT questions are not in order, but SAT questions are). So, on the ACT answer a question referencing line #10 before you answer a question referencing line #45.
- There are 3 ways to handle answering the line references FIRST:
 - I. Read UP TO the paragraph with the line reference. Stop! Read question. Then read paragraph and answer question immediately.
 - II. Read TO THE END of the paragraph. Stop! Read question. Then answer immediately.
 - III. Read ENTIRE PASSAGE and answer line reference questions in order asked before the other questions.

Strategy 3: The Road Map The ACT readings are sometimes divided into bite-sized paragraphs. For these passages, focusing on topic sentences allows you to pick up the “gist” of a piece without reading every word. Once you have the main idea of the paragraph, MOVE ON! Because of time, you might have to “map” in your head rather than annotate on the side of the paragraph. Read the introduction, underline topic sentences, read conclusion. Use your “road map” to quickly find answers. If a question asks about gardens, go to the garden paragraph and skim for the answer.

Strategy 4: Think COST for narrative. Characterization, overview, structure and tone. We recommend that you read the narratives in their entirety and then answer questions. We do recommend answering line references first. Circling and mapping strategies are not that effective for the narratives.

Strategy 5: Treat the Double Passage as separate readings. For the double passage reading, read passage one and answer the questions to passage one. Then, read passage two and answer question addressing this passage. After answering the questions that relate individually to each passage, answer the compare/contrast questions. MUST find the claim for both passages and recognize the relationship between the two.

Strategy 6: X Method. Place a BIG X through the question once you answer. You do not answer the questions in order, and you do not want to waste time by re-reading questions. Putting an X through a question visually tells your brain to not re-read.

Strategy 7: Know what passage to read first. The passages do not have to be read in order! It is important that you time yourself for each type of passage and see what passages (prose, social science, humanities, natural science) are your strengths. These passages should be read FIRST, regardless of their presentation number.

Strategy 8: Skip EXCEPT and Roman Numeral Questions and answer these questions last. These questions take the longest and require scanning through the entire passage. Answering other questions will lead you to the answer for these types of questions.

Strategy 9: The Split/Zone

- The ACT readings are LONG! Split the passage into two or three sections. Read a section and answer the questions that address this section.
- This strategy does not work well with the prose passage (passage I), as the prose requires you to gain an overall understanding of plot and characterization.
- This strategy works best for dense readings with few paragraphs.

Strategy 10: Preview the questions. Skim the questions and see if anything “pops” out that you can remember while reading. For example, “How old is the narrator?” “The sister likes to play what song?” “What is the difference between the two types of spiders?” If time is a problem, do NOT use this strategy.

List of Strategies:

Circling, Mapping, Line First, Lines as Read, Preview Questions, Skimming, X Method, Zone.

TIPS:

Read intro/conclusion/topic sentences. Underline topic sentences and skim paragraphs.

- Mark line references BEFORE you begin.
- Put an X through the question every time you answer.
- Circle names, dates, weird words, italics, numbers, places, BIRTHDAY words – but, instead, rather, though, however, despite, although, yet.
- Do not do the readings in order. Do the “easiest” passage first and the “hardest” last! Most students choose to complete the PROSE passage LAST. Students like to work backwards!
- First question is often main idea – leave for last!
- Can’t find an answer and it is one of the last three questions in the passage? Look at intro and conclusion.
- Only 5 minutes left and still a passage to go? Skim the first half of the passage. Look at questions and find ones that correspond with first half. Then, do all remaining line references without reading the rest of the passage.
- MUST wear a watch!!!!