

Introduction to ACT

The **BIG** Idea

- Why should I take a college entrance exam, the ACT, and how can I prepare?

AGENDA

Approx. 45 minutes

- I. Warm Up: Re/ACT! (5 minutes)
- II. Why and Why Now? (5 minutes)
- III. Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT (5 minutes)
- IV. Getting into the Act, with ACT (20 minutes)
- V. Wrap Up: Plan of Action (10 minutes)

MATERIALS

STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:

- Student Handbook page 45, Re/ACT!
- Student Handbook page 46, Why and Why Now?
- Student Handbook page 47, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT
- Student Handbook pages 48-49, Getting into the Act, with ACT
- Student Handbook pages 50-51, Plan of Action

- Handout with local ACT test dates, locations, and education codes. (See **PREPARATION.**)

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, the student(s) will:

- Learn that colleges require entrance exams, and the reasons that they do.
- List good reasons to take the ACT or SAT in 11th grade.
- Become familiar with the basic content of the ACT.
- Gather the practical information they need to register for the ACT.

OVERVIEW

By 11th grade, most students know that high school will not last forever, and that one option after they graduate is to go to college. They may not know, however, that planning ahead is necessary, and that many colleges require applicants to take either the ACT or SAT college entrance exam. This four-lesson unit will help students get ready to take the ACT as well as other tests they may encounter after high school.

The first lesson introduces students to both the SAT and ACT, explains why colleges require an entrance exam, cites reasons to take one of the two tests this year, provides basic information about the content, and articulates what students need to know before signing up for the ACT.

PREPARATION

- List the day's **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook page 46, Why and Why Now?**
 - **Student Handbook page 47, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**
 - **Student Handbook pages 48-49, Getting into the Act, with ACT**
- For **Activity II, Why and Why Now?**, make a t-chart on chart paper. On the left column write, "Why do colleges require entrance exams?" and on the right column write, "Why should I take a college entrance exam in 11th grade?" This chart will be used to record students' predictions before looking at **Student Handbook page 46, Why and Why Now?**
- For **Activity IV, Getting into the Act, with ACT**, research upcoming ACT test dates, locations and location codes (available on the ACT website, www.act.org), as well as registration deadlines. Please note that the registration deadlines are about six weeks in advance of the test. Be sure to select test dates for which your class will have enough time to register when you go online together in two weeks (lesson 3).
 - Create a handout with this information, and make enough copies for each student. Include the website name and URL.
 - List local test prep courses on this handout.
 - Check for current information on the cost of the test. (Students will need to enter these amounts on **Student Handbook page 48 and 51.**)
- For **Activity IV, Getting into the Act, with ACT**, talk to the school counselor:
 - Find out about local test prep options.

- Obtain “Preparing for the ACT” booklets to give out to students, or download and print these from the web: <http://www.actstudent.org/testprep/>
 - Make sure the office has enough ACT registration packets for your students who may end up filling out the paper forms. These can be ordered in quantity, on the ACT website: <http://www.act.org/aap/forms/counsel.html>
 - Discuss where to direct students who have questions about the test, or want to request fee waivers.
 - Discuss enlisting the counselor and/or host teacher’s help for lesson 3 (in two weeks), when students register for the ACT in class.
 - Discuss how to handle special education classes.
- Obtain permission from your school administrator to register students for the ACT in class. This will involve two options:**
- Online registration (much preferred), for which students are encouraged to bring in credit card information; or
 - Filling out and mailing the registration packet, for which students are encouraged to bring in a check or money order, made out to “ACT Registration.”
 - Discuss the possibility of offering a Saturday practice test at your school.
- Discuss procedures for obtaining parental permissions for bringing in social security numbers, as well as credit card information. (NOTE: To avoid identity theft or unauthorized purchases, students should NOT share credit card information with anyone. If students or family members are concerned about these issues, they may complete the online registration in class, and fill in the credit card information at home.)**
- Decide how to handle students who are reluctant to register for the ACT. Even if they aren’t planning to attend college, it’s recommended that they create an ACT online account and follow instructions so they’re familiar with the process if they change their minds later.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It’s critical that students know by fall of junior year that they will be required to take the SAT or ACT entrance exam in order to apply to college. Students who aren’t sure of their plans should also be strongly encouraged to take the test. And though most students will be familiar with the notion of a “standardized test,” many (especially if their parents didn’t attend college) won’t know that taking the SAT or ACT is different – you don’t just show up and wing it. Students need

to learn that they must prepare for this test well in advance, logistically as well as academically. They'll have registration deadlines to meet, fee waivers to apply for (if eligible), decisions to make about which tests and test options to choose. Plus, they need to recognize it's a huge advantage to be familiar with the test, and to be armed with appropriate test-taking strategies.

To point students in the right direction, you should motivate them to become proactive about taking the ACT. Give out test dates and locations, recommend helpful websites that post practice tests, and inform students about community test-prep resources.

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

For **Activity II, Why and Why Now?** you could structure this as a discussion, and then just point students to the **Student Handbook page 46, Why and Why Now?** for reference.

Another option for **Activity II** is to ham it up a bit, by turning this into a role-playing exercise. You would assume the role of a college admissions officer (donning a bowtie, letter sweater, or college cap) and let students ask you questions about "Why and Why Now?" Then, point them to **Student Handbook page 46, Why and Why Now?** as a summary of your answers.

For **Activity III, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**, you may choose to turn this activity into a competition. Allow students to scan **Student Handbook page 47, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**, for one minute, then ask students questions that are addressed in the handbook page. You may wish to give prizes to students who correctly answer a question.

For **Activity IV, Getting into the Act, with ACT**, you might suggest your students take notes and circle information they'll want to complete outside of class.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. WARM UP: Re/ACT! (5 minutes)

1. Direct students, as they come in, to **Student Handbook page 45, Re/ACT!** Give them three minutes to complete their responses.
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Today we start a new unit about something very important – test preparation. Specifically, the next three lessons will focus on preparing you for a college entrance exam – a *big* test you have to take if you want to get into college. Some colleges don't require it, but many do. So even if you're not sure you want to go to college, or where you're applying, it's to your advantage to take this test. (For those of you who are thinking about going to work after you graduate from high school, the fourth lesson in this unit focuses on standardized tests used in the workplace.)

There are two college entrance exams you can take: the SAT or the ACT. How many of you have heard of these tests? [Students respond.]

How many of you felt nervous when I mentioned them? [Students respond, probably most will nod, say "me!"]

I don't blame you. Most of us don't like taking tests, and we get especially nervous when we know a test will have a big impact on our future. But, just like anything scary that you haven't experienced before, the more you know, the less you fear. And when it comes to taking the SAT or ACT, the more you know, the better you'll do. So let's go over your answers on **Student Handbook page 45, Re/ACT!** to see what you know and how you feel.

Go over **Student Handbook page 45, Re/ACT!**, encouraging students to share what they know.

If the class has a large number of students who don't know anything about these tests, limit the discussion of question #6, "How do you feel about taking the SAT or ACT?", so students won't be scared off; but if most kids have friends or siblings who have taken the tests, let them express their anxiety.

II. Why and Why Now? (5 minutes)

1. Display chart paper with t-chart (See **Preparation**). Call on a volunteer to read the first question (Why do colleges require entrance exams?) aloud, and then call on

volunteers to share their predictions. Record their answers on the chart paper. Repeat this procedure with the second question. (Why should I take a college entrance exam in the 11th grade?)

2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Most 11th graders across the country are feeling the same way you are about taking college entrance tests. But colleges have very good reasons for requiring these tests. And it makes good sense to take them this year. Let's see why.

Refer students to **Student Handbook page 46, Why and Why Now?** Put the transparency of this document on the overhead projector. Call on students to read each point aloud. Spend more time covering the "Why Now?" section, allowing for questions and discussion.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: You can see why it's important for us to spend some class time preparing for the college entrance exam. You should also talk to your parents about taking the test, and it might be a good idea to include this list of **Why and Why Now?** as part of your discussion.

III. Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs. SAT (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** As you know, there are two different standardized tests, both nationally administered, that you can take: the ACT and the SAT. Traditionally, students in the coast states like California and New York have taken the SAT, students in the middle of the country have taken the ACT. Colleges accept scores from either test and do not usually have a preference. But the tests are different. In general, the ACT questions are more direct and test you on the subjects you've learned in high school. The SAT is considered more abstract, focusing on problem solving, reasoning ability and critical thinking skills. Here's a brief look at how the two compare, so you will know your options.

Put the transparency you made of **Student Handbook page 47, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT** onto the overhead projector. Give students one minute to scan the page and then read it aloud. (See **Implementation Options** for Suggestions.)

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: For future reference, you have the same information in **Student Handbook page 47, Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT**. And if you want to compare the two exams in further detail, you can find commentaries on how the tests compare online, by typing "SAT vs ACT" into your browser.

IV. Getting into the Act, with ACT (20 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Since most of you will take the ACT, for the rest of today's lesson, and for the next two lessons, we're going to focus on preparing you for that test. So, let's get into the act, with ACT!

Ask students to turn to **Student Handout pages 48-49, Getting into the Act, with ACT**, while you display this document on the overhead projector.

2. **Registration Dates**

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Today we're going to make sure you have all the information you need to be ready to register, which we'll do together in class, two weeks from now. Of course, you can register at home with a parent, too, but you'll leave today knowing what to expect.

We'll start with the first thing you need to do in order to register, which is to select a date to take the test. I checked the ACT website, and created this handout listing upcoming test dates.

Hand out the information sheet you prepared with up-to-date information about when and where the ACT will be offered, and the registration deadline for each date. Read the dates out loud. Point out the difference between the registration deadline and the actual test date.

3. **Reporting scores to colleges**

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: Next on your list is to look up when each college or scholarship agency you're interested in applying to needs to have your ACT scores, so you can be sure to pick a test date that gives you time to meet their deadlines. But what if you don't know what schools you want to apply to? Or if you don't know which scholarships might be right for you? Are any of you thinking this now? [Students respond.]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: This is perfectly fine; most 11th graders don't know these answers yet. So think about it a bit, and investigate some possibilities. If you decide to take this test during your senior year, you may want to think when your scores would be delivered. Visit some college websites, see when they want scores. Do the same with scholarship agencies. Your ACT scores are typically mailed four to five weeks after the exam, so get out a calendar and make sure the test you sign up for gives you *plenty* of time to meet any possible deadlines.

Another question you might have is: what if my scores are bad, and I don't want colleges to see my first try? Don't worry. With the ACT, you can choose to send scores for the test dates you want. You can sign up to send your scores to specific schools for free when you register, or you can send them later, for a fee.

Saturday testing

One thing you should know is that the only acceptable reason NOT to take a test on a Saturday is for religious reasons. If that's the case for you, see the school counselor to investigate your options. If you work on Saturdays, you'll have to get permission to have this time off. You'll need about four to five hours on the test day, from the time you arrive to sign in, until you leave. Most bosses will understand how important it is for you to take the test. But if you need help convincing him/her, ask your parents, or school counselor, for help.

Disabilities

If you have a diagnosed disability and qualify for extended time accommodations in school, you may be eligible for the same on the ACT. Check for the requirements and application process with your school counselor, or look in the ACT registration booklet. This information is also available on the ACT website: www.actstudent.org.

Writing Test

Once you've chosen a test date, you'll have to decide which "Test Option" to check. The basic ACT test is the "ACT Assessment," and includes the four multiple choice tests: English, math, science, and reading. If you want to take the writing portion, you will choose the option called "ACT Assessment Plus Writing." This will give you two additional scores to report to colleges: a writing test score for your essay, and a combined English/writing score.

Let's talk for a minute about whether or not you should take the writing portion? Any ideas how to decide? [Students respond]

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The basic advice on the ACT website is to check with your colleges to see if they require the writing test. Some do, others don't.

Checking requirements is usually simple. Go to an individual college's website, click on "Admissions." Or, sign in to RUReadyND.com, choose College Planning, and go to Explore Schools. Use any of the college search tools such as the School Finder or Find Schools by Alphabetical List. Click into the **School Profile**, and then click the link for

the school's official website and click on "Admissions." There should be a tab for something like "undergraduate admission requirements."

If for some reason you can't find the requirements on the web, you can always call the admissions office. A contact number will be on the website.

Another reason you might want to take the writing test is to show off your ability if you are a strong writer. Also, if you take the writing test, your scores might be used by colleges for course placement.

Please note, as you'll see on your handout, that the ACT Assessment Plus Writing takes longer to grade, so be sure to allow extra time for your scores to reach colleges that need them.

Next on your handout, you'll see the costs for the ACT. It's \$35 for the basic test, \$50.50 with the writing section [NOTE: These are prices for the year 2012-2013. Future prices may be subject to change.] Fee waivers are available if you're eligible; see your guidance counselor for the details. But don't wait until the last minute! You'll need this information to register in two weeks.

Preparation

So, where can you go to get some good, solid preparation for the ACT? Several online options are listed on **Student Handout pages 48-49, Getting into the Act, with ACT**. Local test prep options are listed on the handout with local test dates. Definitely visit the ACT website. Download the "Preparing for the ACT" booklet, or ask your guidance counselor for a copy.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE: The more you look at ACT prep materials, the more you'll know what to expect. You'll be able to identify subjects you learned but need review again. And you'll be able to target areas you need to work on the most.

V. WRAP UP: Plan of Action (10 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Congratulations! You are now well on your way to taking the ACT. Next week, we'll go over some sample questions from an ACT exam. And the following week, we'll go online to actually register for the test. So, you have a number of things to take care of between now and then, which are listed on **Student Handbook pages 50-51, Plan of Action**. [Tell students to turn to that page.]
 - Visit the website to get familiar with the ACT information (www.actstudent.org).

- Select a test date and location.
- Decide if you're taking the ACT Assessment with or without the writing test.
- Get fee waiver information from the guidance counselor; if you're eligible for free or reduced lunch, you may be excused from paying this fee.
- Get credit card information from your parent or guardian, and plan to register online. If this is not an option, get a check or money order and plan to fill out the form in class.
- And last but not least – relax! By the time the test date arrives, you will be prepared and ready to give it your all.

Now, who has questions? I'll answer as best I can, and if there's something I don't know, we'll generate a list for the guidance counselor, and I'll report back to you on them next week.

[Field questions, and ask a student to write down unanswered questions. Bring the list of questions to your school counselor so that you can report back to the students next week.]

Re/ACT!

Directions: Answer the questions below.

1. What is the purpose of the SAT or ACT?

2. What have you heard about these tests?

3. Did you take the ACT Plan? If so, how did you feel before you took it? After?

4. Do you have friends or siblings who have taken the SAT or ACT? If so, which test?

5. How do you feel about taking the SAT or ACT? Check off all that apply:

- Nervous
- Excited
- Clueless
- Worried
- Ready for the challenge
- Unsure what to expect
- Competitive
- Afraid
- Eager to prove yourself
- Like hiding

Why and Why Now?

Why do colleges require entrance exams?

- The tests show your mastery of the material colleges expect you to learn in high school.
- The tests help colleges compare students from different kinds of high schools.
- The tests show how well you analyze, reason, problem solve and communicate.
- The tests show your readiness for the demands of a specific college.

Why should you take a college entrance exam in 11th grade?

- If you're in a college prep program in high school, much of the material you've been studying will correspond to the content and be fresh in your mind.
- Your test scores can help you decide what areas you need to strengthen.
- Your test scores can help you decide on coursework to take senior year, or during the summer.
- Some colleges are more difficult to get into than others. Knowing your score will help you find a college that's a good match.
- When considering where to apply, you'll be able to compare your test scores with those of typical students at the colleges you're considering. This will help you see if the school is a good choice for you. For example, in 2011 the North Dakota State University expected a minimum score of 23 on the ACT; whereas Williston State College in North Dakota expected between a 19 and 22.
- Colleges who get your test scores this year will be able to contact you about their academic programs, scholarships, special programs and/or visiting days. (You get to decide where to send your scores.)
- Some colleges and scholarships have application deadlines for which you might need scores soon, or in the early fall.
- You'll be able to take the test again next year if you feel you can do better.

Sizing up the Heavyweights: ACT vs SAT

	ACT	SAT
Subjects Tested	Math, Science, English, Reading Writing is optional (though required by some colleges)	Math, Writing (includes an Essay), Critical Reading (Note: no science)
Scores	Each subject scored: 1-36 Composite score created (out of 36) Separate score for Writing: 1-12	Each section scored: 200-800
Length of Test	2 hours, 55 minutes Including Writing: 3 hours, 25 minutes	3 hours, 45 minutes
Questions	215, all multiple choice	Essay, plus multiple choice questions, some math requires showing work
Math Content	Pre-algebra, Elementary Algebra, Intermediate Algebra, Coordinate Geometry, Plane Geometry, Trigonometry	Algebra II, Basic Geometry
Penalty for wrong answers	None	$\frac{1}{4}$ point off for each wrong answer
Score History	You decide which to send (easier to hide bad scores)	Entire score history reported automatically, colleges generally consider the best score

Getting into the Act, with ACT

1. Registering—Selecting a Test Date

- Find out when the test is being offered, and where. This information can be found on the ACT website (www.actstudent.org).
- Look up when each college or scholarship agency you're interested in applying to needs to have your ACT scores. Scores are typically mailed three to eight weeks after the exam.
- If you need to take the test on a day other than a Saturday because of religious reasons, you'll have to pay special attention to the dates and locations (there are fewer options, but they do exist).
- If you have a diagnosed disability and documentation of extended time accommodations in school, you may be eligible to test on national test dates with extended time. Information is available on the website (www.actstudent.org) or in the registration booklet located in your guidance office.

2. Registering: Selecting a Test Option

- Your options are: ACT Assessment (which includes the four multiple choice tests: English, Math, Science, Reading) or ACT Assessment Plus Writing (which provides you with two additional scores: a Writing test subscore and a combined English/Writing score).
- If you choose the ACT Assessment Plus Writing, be aware that the test results are mailed only after all the scores are released, so make sure you allow enough time to meet all your projected deadlines.
- Make your choice before actual registration (in class, two weeks from today).

3. Costs

- \$_____ without the Writing Assessment (includes reports for you, your high school, and up to four colleges requested as part of registration).
- \$_____ with the Writing Assessment (includes reports for you, your high school, and up to four colleges requested as part of registration). The \$_____ Writing Test fee is refundable, upon request, if you are absent on the test day or remove the Writing Test option before you begin the test.
- Fee waivers are available for certain students who are eligible for free or reduced lunches. See your guidance counselor and get a fee waiver number before actual registration (which will occur in class, two weeks from today).

4. Test Prep Options

- Visit the ACT website: (www.actstudent.org).
- RUReadyND.com has in-depth and free ACT test preparation.
- Ask your school counselor for a copy of **Preparing for the ACT**, a free booklet published by ACT. You can also download this free from the ACT website.
- Check your public or school library for information and practice tests.
- Once you know what to expect, review those content areas you have studied but need to review again.
- Identify areas you have not mastered, and seek materials and prep classes that will help you get ready.

Plan of Action

Things to do to get ready to sign up for the ACT on _____ (date).

- Visit the ACT website (www.actstudent.org).
- Select an ACT test date and location.
- Decide if you are taking the ACT Assessment with or without the Writing Test.
- If you are eligible for a free or reduced lunch, talk to your guidance counselor about fee waivers, and get a fee waiver number.
- Think about what colleges should receive your test scores. ACT will send your scores to four schools free if you list them on your registration; but you may prefer to decide later, once you see your scores. (Note: fees apply).
- Discuss with your parent or guardian whether or not you want to use your social security number when registering for the ACT. (Social security numbers are used to distinguish between students who have similar names.)

- ❑ Get credit card information from a parent, in order to register for the ACT in class. (**Note: You still sign up online in class and fill in credit card information later at home, on your own computer.**)

WARNING: To avoid identity theft or unauthorized purchases, please do NOT share this information with anyone.

If you're concerned about these issues, you may complete everything but the credit card information in class, and log on to add this information at home.

Type of credit card: _____

Credit card #: _____

Name of cardholder: _____

Expiration date: _____

Security code
(last three digits located on the back of card where cardholder's signature is) _____

If you are going to use a credit card to register for the ACT, please have your parent or guardian complete the information below.

_____ (name of student) has my permission to use my credit card to register online for the ACT during his/her Roads to Success class. I understand that the following costs will be charged to my card:

\$_____ ACT registration fee

\$_____ Writing Test fee

\$_____ Total amount charged on card

(Signature of parent/guardian)

(Printed name of parent/guardian)

(Date)

If you are bringing in a check or money order, make it out to "ACT Registration".

