

# Writing Between the Lines

You ought to hold something in your hand while you read. No, not a glass of iced tea. Not even a Snickers, though that's not a bad idea. What we're talking about is a pencil.

The pencil represents your alertness. It acts as a symbol of the active reader. Use the pencil as you read to mark the passage.

Students are sometimes reluctant to write on a book. If the book belongs to the school, that's a good policy. But if the book belongs to you, make it your own and mark all over it. That's the real way to claim it as your property.

In the case of the ACT test, you're free to mark up the reading passages. Don't miss this opportunity. Marking the passage accomplishes two very important goals:

1. It keeps you alert. With that pencil in hand, you have the sense that you're doing something as you read, not simply absorbing information passively.
2. It makes it easy to review. When you go back over a passage, you can quickly return to key points and terms that you've already identified.

Here are a couple of techniques to help you mark a passage effectively and efficiently:

- Underline key points or ideas.
- Use vertical lines in the margins when the section you want to highlight is too long to underline.

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- Use stars or asterisks to indicate the thesis statement of a passage.
- Use numbers to indicate key supporting details.
- Circle key words or terms. These can be terms that seem especially important or, occasionally, terms that seem to be used in a strange or unusual way.
- Write in the margins or at the top or bottom of the page. These are the places to jot down a few thoughts. Make note of any questions you might have. In the case of the ACT, if you have looked ahead at the questions, write down possible answers—before you look at the answers the test makers offer.

Keeping a pencil handy as you read makes reading a more active, physical process. If you can do something to keep your body (as well as your mind) in motion, you have a much better chance of understanding and remembering what you read (see Strategy 5 for additional ideas).