

The Questions Are the Answers

I have potential. Like I'm reading Moby Dick and I'm not even halfway through and I can already tell you the ending. The whale is a robot. . . . Here's something I did not know. They number every page.

—Michael Kelso, "That '70s Show"

They number every question, too. In one study, researchers found that students in colder states tended to do better on college admissions tests. Does that mean you should join Kelso in Wisconsin? Probably not, but you might want to consider the kinds of questions you'll be asked on the ACT.

For example, you'll find several general, or "big picture," questions. These questions investigate the theme, tone, or structure of a passage. Answer these first because they won't require you to look back. Then there are specific detail questions. Here you probably will need to return to the passage to find exactly the right answer. While you're there, you will want to look at vocabulary questions that test your ability to figure out the meaning of a word from its context. And finally, inference questions will ask you to read between the lines.

Consider these suggestions to make the most of your question-answering time.

1. Scan Can

You should scan the passages to focus your mind. Simply skim quickly for now. The purpose of this skimming is to find a topic that interests you. Begin with that passage. The higher your level of interest is, the stronger your start will be. If none of the topics grab you, then it's time for mind games. Convince yourself that you are fascinated by the subject matter. You would be surprised how revved-up you can get reading a scientific passage disproving the alternative hypothesis that the average raven is "clever"—especially if you are familiar with Monty Python's hypothesis that a "clever sheep" is dangerous. Let your mind be your friend.

2. Speed Kills

According to research at an English university, it doesn't matter in what order the letters in a word are, the only important thing is that the first and last letters are in the right place. The rest can be a total mess and you can still read it without a problem. This is because we do not read every letter by itself but the word as a whole and the brain figures it out anyway.

—Phil Proctor, *Funny Times*

Some teachers contend that readers with the best comprehension are usually fast readers. The argument is based on the assumption that slow readers are more easily distracted. Daydream city, as it were. A more important concern, though, is how carefully you read the Reading passages.

In the movie *Reuben, Reuben*, the subject of speed-reading is raised. Academy Award nominee Tom Conti—who portrays a drunken, but brilliant poet—says that he would pay someone to

teach him to read his favorite books as slowly as possible. Clearly, the poet in this film wants to savor every word.

Although you don't have time for much savoring, you should read as carefully as you can *and* still finish within the constraints of the exam.

3. Questions First

As you confront each new passage, read the questions first. Just the questions, not the answers. Too many conflicting answers can lead to information overload. In the middle of an important sentence, you don't want to find yourself wondering, "What was choice C anyway?"

You want increased focus rather than increased confusion. Some prep books disagree with this advice. These books argue that you may become so preoccupied with searching for answers that you will fail to get the overall meaning of the passage. To determine the best option for you, try using both methods on the Practice Passages in this book. Then stick with the system that works for you.

We recommend reading the questions first because reading comprehension is a two-step process: (1) perceiving and organizing information, and (2) connecting that information to what you already know. Your success in relating any information will increase if you have a frame of reference. The questions are that frame of reference. And those same questions should help you organize your thinking as you read through the passage.

Always remember that reading is an active process. Anticipate ideas. Your purpose is to actively search for the information you need to answer the questions you have already scanned. Have those questions in mind as you begin reading the passage. The search is about understanding. Don't worry about memorizing. Memorization is too time-consuming.

Tip: If you are running short of time, do the vocabulary in Curly context questions first, the Mo questions next, and the Hairy questions last.

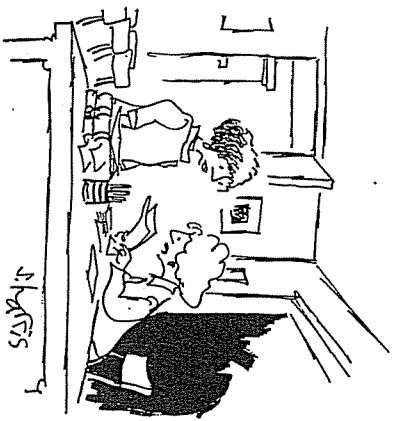
4. Play the Odds

*I used to be a gambler. But now I just make mental bets.
That's how I lost my mind.*

—Steve Allen

How much would you pay for all the secrets of the Universe? OK, what if we throw in the odds of guessing on the ACT? But wait. What if we send you an ice crusher? The truth is that you should guess. Unlike the SAT, there is NO penalty for guessing on the ACT.

When making difficult choices, former CIA director James Woolsey had his own way of determining the odds. Woolsey recalls the advice of the Damon Runyan character Harry the Horse. Runyan, a newspaperman in the 1920s, had Harry give this advice to gamblers: "Nothin' what depends on humans is worth odds of more than 8 to 5."



"If his IQ is based on guessing the right answers, perhaps we could assume we'll go through life being a remarkably successful guesser."