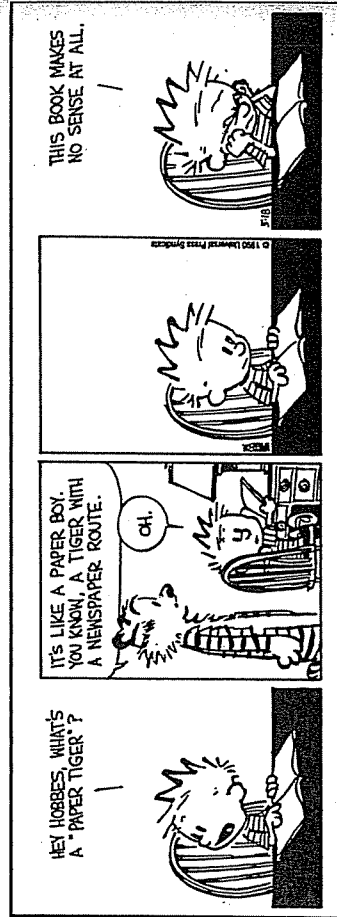


Two Self-Evident Truths

1. **The average test maker is just a little bit afraid.** Do you actually believe that the folks at ACT want to argue about which of their answers are correct? Test makers can't afford to be second-guessed by thousands of enraged students who provide plausible alternative answers. Test makers, therefore, tend toward the obvious answer, the unarguable answer. You should too.

2. **Don't outsmart yourself.** The ACT does not reward the "star" of classroom discussions: the meaning-behind-the-meaning kid, the clever kid—in short, anyone with a personality.



Be the Test Maker

*After all, what is reality anyway?
Nothing but a collective hunch.*

—Lily Tomlin

Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe

OK, earning a high verbal score isn't exactly *Zen and the Art of Reading*. But you need to stop thinking as a test taker and start thinking as a test maker. If you could crawl inside the brain of the average test maker, you wouldn't find the next Ozzie Osbourne. You would find, instead, someone who is positive, patriotic, politically correct. What does that mean to you? You should give serious consideration to answers that reflect those qualities.

Be careful, though, of assuming too much. In his book *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs*, Chuck Klosterman reveals the results of a study he conducted on the effects of patriotism. He sent out a mass e-mail to his acquaintances. In the e-mail he gave everyone two potential options for a hypothetical blind date. The respondents were instructed to pick whom they'd prefer. The first candidate was described as "attractive and successful." The second candidate was said to be "attractive, successful, and extremely patriotic." No other details were given.

Are you surprised to learn that just about everyone responded by selecting the first individual? Klosterman's point is that many of us are suspicious of the "too patriotic." E-mail respondents compared the second individual to Ted Nugent and Patrick Henry. One said that patriotic people weren't smart. The lesson for you? Don't go overboard.