Enhanced ACT Study Guide

Free printable plan from TestLessons. Official practice first (ACT.org). Built for a busy student or a parent helping one.

Edition 1 · November 2026

This is Edition 1 (about 20 pages). Later editions will grow into a longer ebook with deeper English, Math, Reading, Science, and practice modules — same structure, more drills.

Please read (AS-IS)

TestLessons provides this Enhanced ACT Study Guide free of charge, AS IS, without warranties of any kind — express or implied — including accuracy, completeness, fitness for a particular purpose, or non-infringement.

ACT can change Enhanced ACT format, timing, scoring, registration rules, Science optionality, and practice materials at any time. Always verify current facts on act.org before you register, practice, or test.

This guide is educational information only. It is not a guarantee of any score, admission result, scholarship, or other outcome. TestLessons and The TestLessons team are not liable for errors, omissions, or any decision you make based on this guide.

ACT® is a trademark of ACT, Inc. TestLessons is not affiliated with or endorsed by ACT.

— The TestLessons team

How to use this guide

- Print it or keep it next to an official ACT practice test. Write in the blanks.
- Start with Chapter 1 if you are new to the Enhanced ACT. Skip to Chapter 3 if you already have a timed practice Composite.
- Decide Science early (Chapter 3). It is optional and not in the Composite.
- After every timed set, fill one row in the Miss Log. Fix the two “why” labels that show up most before you chase new topics.
- Trust full timed practice from ACT.org for your real level. Use this guide between those tests.
- Optional chat prompts on testlessons.com are study help only — not a practice test and not a score predictor.

Contents

Chapter 1: What the Enhanced ACT is

Chapter 2: Official practice first

Chapter 3: Pick your path, Science, and plan

Chapter 4: English

Chapter 5: Math

Chapter 6: Reading (and optional Science)

Chapter 7: Traps that cost real points

Chapter 8: Miss Log (printable)

Chapter 9: Default ~8-week skeleton

Chapter 10: A simple week

Chapter 11: For parents (about 90 seconds)

Chapter 12: Final 72 hours

Chapter 13: Free stack and next steps

Chapter A: Appendix: optional AI prompts

Chapter S: Sources

Roadmap toward a longer ebook (~200 pages)

Edition 1 is the spine. Later editions add drills and worked examples under the same part numbers — you will not have to relearn a new layout.

Part I — Orientation: now Ch. 1–3 (~5 pages); later Stay lean; add SAT vs ACT worksheet, Science decision worksheet, paper vs online checklist.

Part II — English: now Ch. 4 (~2–3 pages); later ~40 pages: Conventions, Knowledge of Language, Production of Writing drills.

Part III — Math: now Ch. 5 (~2–3 pages); later ~50 pages: algebra through trig, integrating skills, calculator clinic.

Part IV — Reading & Science: now Ch. 6 (~3 pages); later ~40 pages: passage mapping, evidence discipline, Science figures/experiments.

Part V — Practice systems: now Ch. 7–8 (~3 pages); later ~30 pages: miss-log templates, pacing sheets, full-test review scripts.

Part VI — Plans by timeline: now Ch. 9–10 (~3 pages); later ~20 pages: 2-week / 8-week / 12-week tracks.

Part VII — Parents & logistics: now Ch. 11–12 (~2 pages); later ~10 pages: calendar, cost, test-day logistics.

Part App — Appendices: now A + Sources (~2 pages); later ~10 pages: glossary, official link index; optional AI prompts stay appendix-only.

Chapter 1 · What the Enhanced ACT is

The Enhanced ACT is the college admissions test ACT gives students now. It is not the older form many parents remember. You answer multiple-choice questions in timed sections. The score colleges usually care about most is the Composite: one number from 1 to 36. ACT makes that number by averaging your English, Math, and Reading scores (each of those is also 1–36). Science and the Writing essay are optional extras. They get their own scores and never change the Composite, though some colleges may ask for them.

Unlike the Digital SAT, the Enhanced ACT does not change difficulty mid-section. Each section is one straight timed block: you get a fixed number of minutes and a fixed number of questions, and you work straight through. That is why practice only helps if you use today's minutes and question counts — not last decade's longer forms. Live timings: English 35 minutes / 50 questions; Math 50 minutes / 45 questions; Reading 40 minutes / 36 questions; optional Science 40 minutes / 40 questions. Wrong answers don't lose points, so answer every question.

A full practice test (or real section sets) from ACT, done with a timer, is the honest way to see your score. On TestLessons, a free prompt is a ready-made study script: copy it from the site, paste it into ChatGPT, Claude, Grok, or another chat app you already use, fill any blanks with your real scores or goals, and use the reply as a coach between timed sections. It does not give you an official ACT score. Decide Science early by checking your college list. If you already know the format, skip ahead, circle one situation under Start Here, and do only that list.

Format facts (verify on ACT.org if anything looks stale)

- English: 50 questions in 35 minutes (40 are scored). Grammar, punctuation and improving short passages.
- Math: 45 questions in 50 minutes (41 scored). Pre-algebra through trigonometry. A calculator is allowed on the whole section.
- Reading: 36 questions in 40 minutes (27 scored). Passages from literature and informational texts.
- Science (optional): 40 questions in 40 minutes (34 scored). Reading graphs, tables and experiments.
- Writing (optional): one essay in 40 minutes. It gets its own score, from 2 to 12, that isn't part of the Composite.
- The core test (English, Math and Reading) is 131 questions in 2 hours 5 minutes. Science and Writing each add 40 minutes.
- Composite score: the average of your English, Math and Reading section scores, from 1 to 36.
- Some questions are unscored trial questions (called field-test items). You can't tell which ones, so answer every question.
- Not adaptive: every student gets the questions in a fixed order, so pacing matters in each section.
- No penalty for wrong answers, so answer every question.
- You can take the ACT on paper or on a computer, at a test center.

How long each section is — and what “Composite” means

Each section is one timed block with a set number of questions. Your job is to finish that block without running out of time halfway through. The Composite is simply the average of English, Math, and Reading. Science and Writing don’t change that average.

- English: 35 minutes · 50 questions (40 scored) — grammar, usage, and writing choices on short texts
- Math: 50 minutes · 45 questions (41 scored) — pre-algebra through trigonometry; calculator allowed
- Reading: 40 minutes · 36 questions (27 scored) — passages from literature and informational texts
- Science (optional): 40 minutes · 40 questions (34 scored) — graphs, tables and experiments, not a biology cram
- Writing (optional): separate essay score; not in the Composite
- Composite = average of English + Math + Reading (each 1–36); wrong answers don’t lose points, so answer every question
- Core testing is about 2 hours 5 minutes before optional Science/Writing; a few unscored tryout questions may appear — do not overfit oddballs

These facts change how you practice. Longer background is lower on the web version of this primer. If a book still uses 75-question English or other old counts, it will train the wrong speed.

Format facts come from ACT’s Enhanced ACT pages (act.org). Check act.org before you register.

Chapter 2 · Official practice first

A full timed practice test from ACT is the best check of where you stand. Use today's Enhanced minutes and question counts — not older books with 75-question English or Science treated as required for everyone. Chatbots and random worksheets are not the same difficulty or timing.

Tonight (or this weekend)

[ ] Open ACT's free practice materials on act.org and bookmark the page
[ ] Schedule one full core practice (English + Math + Reading, about 2 hours 5 minutes of testing) this week
[ ] Use Enhanced timing only — put away older, longer ACT practice books for timed sets
[ ] Decide Science yes / no / maybe using the checklist in Chapter 3
[ ] Write your test date (or target month) on the plan page in Chapter 3

Official first

Score you can trust → timed practice from ACT.org. Skill gaps → section help on testlessons.com/tests/act/ plus ACT's free section tools. Planning between tests → this guide and testlessons.com/tests/act/free-prep-stack/. Optional chat prompts → last, and never instead of timed ACT practice.

Prep principles we stand behind

- Take a full practice test from ACT with a timer when you want a real check of your score and your pacing.
- Use the current section lengths: English 35 minutes, Math 50, Reading 40. Older ACT books train the wrong speed, and a practice test with different section lengths isn't a good check.
- Decide early about Science. If your colleges want it, or you want to show strength in STEM, practice it. If not, spend that time on English, Math and Reading, which make up your Composite.
- After practice, write down what you got wrong and why. That works better than only reading the answer key.
- Use timed ACT practice to check your score. Between tests, review wrong answers and plan your weeks — chat tools can help you study, but they cannot give an official ACT score.

Chapter 3 · Pick your path, Science, and plan

The three boxes below are not three different tests. They are three common places students sit: no full timed practice yet; already have a practice Composite (or solid section scores) with weeks left; or test day is about two weeks away. Circle the one that matches you tonight. Do only that box's checklist.

No practice score yet

When: First Enhanced ACT cycle, or you have not finished a full timed practice (English + Math + Reading) yet

Tonight:

[ ] Block quiet time for a full core practice — English + Math + Reading (about 2 hours 5 minutes of testing, plus breaks and setup)

[ ] Use today's minutes and question counts — not older, longer ACT practice books

[ ] Finish the Science yes/no checklist in this chapter.

Official first: Finish official ACT timed practice before long AI-only study sessions

I have a score · 4–10 weeks left

When: You already have at least one timed practice Composite, or solid section scores, in hand

Tonight:

[ ] From your practice scores, write a Composite target from college middle 50% ranges and list the three fixes that would raise it most.

[ ] From your last practice, label each wrong answer: didn't know it · wrong method · careless · timing — circle the two that show up most

[ ] Finish the Science yes/no checklist in this chapter.

Official first: Put the next full or multi-section timed practice on the calendar (about every 1–2 weeks)

Final 2 weeks

When: Test day is 14 days away or closer

Tonight:

[ ] Stop starting brand-new topics, giant new books, or old-style ACT pacing drills

[ ] Open the Test Day free prompt on testlessons.com/tests/act/ and build a simple 3-day plan (logistics + light review only)

[ ] At most one short mixed practice set; protect sleep and stick to the section timings you already practiced

Official first: Skip a brand-new full-length in the last 2–3 days unless you still need a calm timing run

Science — yes, no, or maybe?

Science is optional. It is not part of the Composite. Decide early so you do not spend hours on lab graphs you do not need — or skip Science when a college on your list actually wants it.

[ ] List colleges you care about: do any require or recommend ACT Science (or a science score)?

[ ] STEM major or scholarship that wants a science score? Lean yes and schedule Science practice.

[ ] If no college needs it and your Composite is still low: protect English, Math, and Reading hours.

[ ] Maybe = recheck applications in 2 weeks; until then, only light Science practice if time remains.

[ ] If yes: practice reading figures and experiments in 40 minutes — not memorizing AP Bio.

Science is optional and not part of the Composite. Taking Science also gives a STEM score (average of Math and Science). Taking Writing also gives an ELA score. Verify what each college wants on act.org and the college site.

Your study plan (fill in)

ACT's free official practice test on act.org comes first.

Test date

Current practice score (Composite (1–36))

Target score (Composite (1–36))

Science: yes / no / maybe

Hours per week you can really protect

Colleges / middle 50% ranges you checked

Pick a real Composite target

Composite is the average of English, Math, and Reading — so your lowest section pulls the number down. Look up each college's ACT middle 50% range (the middle half of enrolled students' scores). If a school only publishes SAT numbers, use a concordance chart. Aim near the middle or upper end of the schools you care about most. The three bands below are rough context only, not promises.

Rough national context (not a promise)

20–23: About the 63rd to 77th percentile of recent ACT takers (the average Composite is about 19)

28–31: About the 91st to 96th percentile of recent ACT takers

33–36: About the 98th to 100th percentile of recent ACT takers

Percentile (ACT calls it a national rank) is the share of recent ACT takers who scored at or below your score. These come from ACT's national ranks for graduates of 2024–2026, for tests taken September 2026 through August 2027. Choose your target from the typical scores at your colleges, not from a percentile.

Phased checklist

Tags: no tag = do first even on a short timeline. [6+ weeks] and [12+ weeks] = add when you have more time.

1. Baseline · Week 1

[ ] Take ACT's free official practice test from act.org with real timing

[ ] Decide whether you need Science (optional on the enhanced ACT; check your colleges)

[ ] Label every miss: didn't know / wrong method / careless / timing

2. Build · Middle weeks

[ ] English: learn the grammar rules that cost you points (testlessons.com/lessons/act-english-grammar/)

[ ] Math: drill your weakest topics (testlessons.com/tests/act/math/)

[ ] Reading: timed passage sets (testlessons.com/tests/act/reading/) [6+ weeks]

[ ] Science (if taking it): timed data passages (testlessons.com/tests/act/science/) [6+ weeks]

[ ] Re-do missed questions a week later [12+ weeks]

3. Test and adjust · Every 2–3 weeks

[ ] Take another full timed practice test

[ ] Re-pick your focus from the newest miss log

[ ] Compare free and paid practice options before buying anything (testlessons.com/tests/act/resources/) [12+ weeks]

4. Final weeks · Last 14 days

[ ] Final full practice test 7–10 days out [6+ weeks]

[ ] Review your miss log only

[ ] Check your ticket, ID and calculator rules on act.org

Chapter 4 · English

Enhanced ACT English: 35 minutes, 50 questions (40 scored + field-test items). Short texts mixing conventions and rhetoric. Composite section — English averages with Math and Reading (Science is optional and not in the default Composite). Below: pacing under the real clock, the traps that actually cost points, a worked transition example, a 10-minute drill for tonight, and when to close AI and open official ACT practice. Prompts on this page are practice help — not a fake proctor.

Shape of the section

What You Face

- 35 minutes · 50 questions (40 scored + field-test items)
- Passages with underlined portions and whole-text rhetoric items
- Mix of usage/mechanics and rhetorical skills

How to Train

- Master high-frequency rules: boundaries, agreement, pronouns, modifiers, transitions
- Always re-read full sentence (sometimes full paragraph) before choosing
- Prefer concise, precise answers that preserve meaning

What to practice (name the skill)

Sentence Structure & Boundaries

Commas, dashes, semicolons, fragments, run-ons—highest ROI conventions cluster.

Usage & Agreement

Subject-verb, pronouns, verb tense consistency, modifiers.

Rhetorical Skills

Transitions, add/delete, organization, purpose, tone, concision.

Punctuation Precision

Possessives, lists, nonessential clauses—train pattern recognition under time.

Common English traps

Longest Sounds Smartest

Prefer clear and complete. If two choices are grammatical, pick the one that keeps the author’s purpose without padding. Wordy is not a score strategy.

Comma Wherever You Breathe

Name the structure: compound sentences need a real join; essential info usually stays un-comma’d; lists and nonessentials follow boundaries. If you cannot name the rule, parse the core subject–verb first.

Transition By Feel

Label the logic bridge: contrast, cause, example, addition. Read the sentence before and after as a pair. Wrong relationship, wrong transition — even if grammar is clean.

Which Choice Is Most Relevant — Include Everything

Read the stated goal in the question (emphasize X, stay on topic Y). Keep only what serves that goal. True-but-off-topic is still wrong.

Agreement With The Nearest Noun

Cross out prepositional fluff. Match verb/pronoun to the head noun. Collective and compound subjects get a one-second second look.

[ ] This week: one timed English section (35 minutes, 50 questions) at Enhanced timing

[ ] Label misses: grammar rule gap, rhetoric/meaning, punctuation, timing
[ ] Drill only the top two labels (testlessons.com/lessons/act-english-grammar/)
[ ] Stop using 75-question / 45-minute English sets as your main timer

Chapter 5 · Math

Enhanced ACT Math: 50 minutes, 45 questions (41 scored). Pre-algebra through trigonometry. Calculator allowed on Math — this is not Digital SAT Desmos-in-Bluebook. Linear section (not adaptive). We fix pacing, calculator boundaries, and the skills that drag Composite — not a geometry-only grind.

Shape of the section

What You Face

- 50 minutes · 45 questions (41 scored)
- Generally increases in difficulty overall—don't bleed time early
- Algebra and geometry dominate; some trig/statistics

How to Train

- Build a formula/relationships sheet from YOUR misses
- Practice triage: easy first accuracy, mark time-sinks
- Mix no-calculator thinking even though calculator is allowed

Content areas (study by name)

Algebra & Functions

Linear/quadratic, systems, expressions, function notation.

Geometry & Trig

Angles, triangles, circles, coordinate geometry, basic trig.

Numbers & Stats

Ratios, proportions, probability, interpreting data.

Modeling & Word Problems

Translate English → math quickly; define variables explicitly.

Common Math traps

Desmos Brain On ACT

ACT Math is your allowed calculator + paper thinking. No Bluebook Desmos module reset drama. Practice with the calculator you will carry and know its fraction/trig quirks.

Calculator As First Move

Write the relationship first. If it is one clean equation, solve; if it is messy arithmetic, then calculate. Random keying flips signs and drops units.

Early Items Too Casual

Easy early misses are free Composite points donated. Bank them cold. Save ego fights for later items you can mark and return to.

Geometry Grind Fantasy

Balance algebra/functions, stats, modeling, and some geometry/trig. Do not spend three weeks on circles while linear systems still leak.

Word Problem Without The Ask

Box what the question wants before computing. Intermediate values are trap choices on purpose.

Calculator + pacing

Calculator is allowed on every Math question — practice with the same calculator you will bring. Set simple time checkpoints (for example every ~10–12 questions) so you do not discover you are behind with five questions left. Bank easy points early; mark and return on sticky ones.

[ ] This week: one timed Math section (50 minutes, 45 questions) with your real calculator
[ ] Drill your weakest named content area — not a random worksheet pile
[ ] Log whether misses were content, method, careless, or timing
[ ] Re-work every missed problem without looking at the key

Chapter 6 · Reading (and optional Science)

Enhanced ACT Reading is 36 questions (27 scored) in 40 minutes — not Digital SAT short passages and not a literature seminar. You need a passage map, an evidence rule, and a clock so the last passage still has minutes left. Use this clinic for traps, pacing for 36 questions in 40 minutes, a worked map habit, tonight's checklist, and when to open official timed Reading (the real check of your score).

What You Face

- 40 minutes · 36 questions (27 scored; field-test items embedded)
- Several passages, including paired passages you compare
- Passages like those in first-year college courses: literary and informational texts
- Detail, inference, main idea, vocab-in-context, author perspective — answers stay in the passage

How to Train

- Passage map in ~45–60 seconds before grinding questions
- Prove every answer with line/logic evidence (finger before choices)
- Minute bank across the whole section — do not gold-plate passage one
- Weekly ACT-style timing if ACT is the exam (SAT short passages alone will not save you)

Passage Mapping

Purpose, tone, structure landmarks — prevents reread loops.

Evidence & Inference

Supportable claims only; extreme language and outside knowledge lose.

Paired passages

When forms include comparison items, map each voice before relationship questions.

Pace Without Panic

Order policy + a hard time limit per question so the last passage is still alive.

Common Reading traps

SAT Short-Passage Training Only

ACT wants full passages and sustained map. Keep some SAT skills (evidence), but weekly ACT-style full-section timing is non-negotiable if ACT is the exam.

Read Every Word Like Class

Map first: purpose, tone, structure landmarks. Detail questions send you back. Spending six minutes absorbing prose before any question is how the last passage gets rushed.

Passage Order By Stubbornness

Open the section and rank comfort (prose fiction vs natural science vs social science vs humanities — whatever your mix is). Start with your best win condition. Stubborn order is not a moral victory.

Inference From Outside Knowledge

ACT inference stays tethered to the passage. If you cannot point near a line or paraphrase, it is not supported.

If you take Science

Enhanced ACT Science is optional: 40 minutes, 40 questions (34 scored). Data, experiments, and competing scientific claims — not a biology content olympiad. Not in the default Composite (English, Math and Reading). Below: whether to sit it, traps, 40-minute pacing if YES, a figure-first worked example, tonight's checklist, and when to open official ACT practice.

Interpretation of Data (38–50 percent)

Tables, graphs and diagrams: trends, translating between formats, axis discipline.

Scientific Investigation (18–32 percent)

Experiment design: independent/dependent variables, controls, predicting results.

Evaluating Scientific Arguments and Models with Evidence (25–35 percent)

Judge claims against evidence, including competing scientists' claims; answer only from the passage.

[ ] This week: one timed Reading section (40 minutes, 36 questions)
[ ] Map each passage before diving into every line; prove answers with passage words
[ ] If Science = yes: one timed Science section focused on figures/experiments
[ ] If Science = no: put those 40 minutes into your weakest Composite section instead

Chapter 7 · Traps that cost real points

These show up again and again. Fix them before you buy another book.

Practicing on the old ACT timing

Books built for the older, longer ACT (for example 75-question English) teach the wrong pace. Every timed set should use today's minutes and question counts.

Taking Science "just in case" while Composite is low

Optional Science is not free points if it steals study hours from a weak English or Math section that actually sits in the Composite.

Treating Science like a content cram

If you take Science, the score comes from reading graphs, tables and experiments under time — not memorizing a science textbook.

Going too slow early in a section

This test does not rescue you with a second, easier or harder module the way the Digital SAT can. If the first half of a section is too slow, you simply run out of time. Pick simple time checkpoints (for example, "I should be near question X at minute Y").

Trusting chat practice for your real score

Use chat prompts to learn patterns and plan. Use official ACT timed practice when you want to know where the score really sits.

Also skip

- Older ACT books as your main timed path (wrong minutes and question counts).
- Treating chatbot question banks as the same difficulty as ACT practice.
- Buying three workbooks before one full timed ACT practice.
- Leaving Science undecided until the week of the test.

Chapter 8 · Miss Log (printable)

Use the blank table below like a notebook grid. After every timed section or full practice test, add one row per question you missed. Write the date, which section (English, Math, Reading, or Science), why it went wrong, what it was about, and what you will fix tomorrow. Why options: didn't know it, wrong method, careless slip, or ran out of time. Do not only mark the right answer and move on — fix the two reasons that show up most.

* Why: didn't know it (content gap) · wrong method (bad process) · careless slip · ran out of time

Date	Section	Why*	What I missed	Fix tomorrow

Second miss-log page (keep going)

Date	Section	Why*	What I missed	Fix tomorrow

Chapter 9 · Default ~8-week skeleton

Use this if you have roughly two months. Under 4 weeks? Compress to baseline → weakest Composite section → one more full practice → taper. Always protect timed ACT practice on the calendar.

Week 1 · Get a real baseline and learn the format

[ ] One full timed practice (at least English + Math + Reading)
[ ] After the test, fill the wrong-answer table later in this booklet (why you missed each one)
[ ] Finish the Science yes/no checklist
[ ] Refresh your Composite target and top 3 fixes from the latest practice scores

Week 2 · English foundation

[ ] Daily ~20 minutes on conventions and rhetoric using Enhanced short texts
[ ] One timed English section (35 minutes, 50 questions; the older ACT English was longer)
[ ] Log wrong answers; repair only the top English reasons

Week 3 · Math foundation

[ ] Algebra/functions block + geometry/trig block under a timer
[ ] One timed Math section (50 minutes, 45 questions); a calculator is allowed throughout
[ ] Re-work the reason you miss most in that section without looking at the key

Week 4 · Reading systems

[ ] Passage-mapping drills on literature and informational passages
[ ] Evidence-from-passage discipline — no outside-knowledge leaps
[ ] One timed Reading section (40 minutes, 36 questions)

Week 5 · Weak-section intensive

[ ] Re-work the reason you miss most in that section without looking at the key
[ ] 2–3 timed sections on that weak area only
[ ] Refresh your Composite target and top 3 fixes from the latest practice scores

Week 6 · Science or Composite polish

[ ] If Science = yes: practice reading graphs, tables and experiments (not a biology cram)
[ ] If Science = no: mixed English/Math/Reading using today's minutes and question counts
[ ] Set simple time checkpoints in each section so you do not run out of minutes at the end

Week 7 · Full tests + repair

[ ] Another full practice at real Enhanced timing
[ ] Repair only the top 3 reasons from your wrong-answer notes — no random new books
[ ] Refresh your Composite target and top 3 fixes from the latest practice scores

Week 8 · Taper and get ready for test day

[ ] Short drills only on your personal wrong-answer patterns
[ ] Run the Final 72 hours checklist in Chapter 12
[ ] Sleep priority — stop cramming new content

Chapter 10 · A simple week

When life is busy, keep the week boring and real. One good timed section beats five unfocused nights.

[ ] 2–4 short skill blocks (20–40 minutes) on your top Miss Log labels
[ ] 1 timed section at Enhanced minutes (English 35 / Math 50 / Reading 40 / Science 40 if yes)
[ ] Same-day Miss Log rows for every miss from that section
[ ] 1–2 times a week in longer weeks: a full core practice (English + Math + Reading)
[ ] Avoid: six chatbot “practice tests” and zero timed ACT practice

Who owns what

Real practice tests and your score → ACT.org timed practice. This Study Guide → plan + miss log between tests. Section clinics → testlessons.com/tests/act/english/ · /math/ · /reading/ · /science/. Optional chat prompts → last.

Weekly scorecard (fill in)

Week of

Timed sections done

Full practice done? (Y/N)

Top Miss Log label this week

Hours I actually studied

Chapter 11 · For parents (about 90 seconds)

- Official ACT practice with a timer is the real score check. Study help between timed sections is fine — it is not a fake proctor or a guaranteed score.
- Buy materials that match the Enhanced ACT. Old books with longer older timings, or that treat Science as required for everyone, waste months.
- Help decide Science from the college list — not guesswork. If schools do not need it, protect Composite study time.
- Help with the calendar: quiet blocks for full timed practice, sleep, admission ticket, calculator if they use one. Encouragement beats score lectures.
- Still choosing SAT vs ACT? Read testlessons.com/tests/sat-vs-act/ once before buying two full prep piles.

[ ] Student has a test date (or target month) written down

[ ] Science decision made from the college list (or dated “maybe”)

[ ] Quiet block protected for at least one full timed practice this month

[ ] Calculator ready if they use one; admission ticket plan exists

Chapter 12 · Final 72 hours

[ ] Know which sections you registered for (Science? Writing?) — matches how you practiced
[ ] Admission ticket or school instructions printed or saved offline
[ ] Allowed calculator ready if you use one; charged devices only if your site allows them for other tools
[ ] Break plan per admission ticket / center rules (food/water if allowed)
[ ] You know start time, arrival time, and ID rules
[ ] Light review only of patterns from the wrong-answer table above — no new textbooks or older-ACT drills
[ ] Sleep beats one more full-length the night before

Chapter 13 · Free stack and next steps

- ACT free practice — act.org (timed practice first)
- This Study Guide + free path — testlessons.com/tests/act/free-prep-stack/
- Section help — testlessons.com/tests/act/english/ · /math/ · /reading/ · /science/
- Optional: Self-Assess quiz — testlessons.com/tests/act/approach/
- SAT vs ACT — testlessons.com/tests/sat-vs-act/

Do this next

[ ] Schedule one full core timed practice this week if you have not taken one
[ ] Finish the Science yes/no checklist
[ ] Fill Chapter 3 plan blanks from your real scores
[ ] Print or save this PDF where you will actually see it

Appendix A · Optional AI prompts

AI prompts are optional. They sit last on purpose. Official timed ACT practice is still the real check of your score. If you use a prompt, paste it into a chat tool you already trust, then close the chat and return to a timed set.

Each row is a free prompt on testlessons.com/tests/act/. Open that tab, press Copy Prompt, paste it into the chat app you already use, and replace each [BRACKETED] part with your real details. Use the reply to study. Use a timed practice test from ACT to see where your score stands.

Score Plan

When: right after you take a full practice test from act.org and want a two-week plan built from your real scores.

Success looks like: A dated 14-day plan aimed at your top 3 fixes, with the next official practice on the calendar

Missed Question

When: after reviewing an ACT practice test from act.org. Paste one question you got wrong. Use it on your 3–5 most important misses.

Success looks like: You can say why the right answer is right, name your mistake, and you have a rule for next time

Science Decision

When: when you are deciding whether to add the optional Science or Writing sections.

Success looks like: A YES / NO / MAYBE for Science and Writing, checked against each college's own site

Test Day

When: three days before your test, to plan light review, logistics and sleep.

Success looks like: Logistics confirmed on the official site; a calm 3-day plan with no new topics

Guardrails

Never treat chatbot questions as your only practice tests. Never trust a chatbot's claimed "ACT score." Verify format and registration on act.org.

Sources

Primary format and scoring facts: ACT Enhanced ACT structure and scoring pages (act.org), including optional Science and the EMR Composite (English, Math, Reading). Always re-check those pages — details can change.

1. Allensworth, E. M., & Clark, K. (2020). High school GPAs and ACT scores as predictors of college completion: Examining assumptions about consistency across high schools. Educational Researcher, 49(3), 198–211. (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0013189X20902110)
2. University of Chicago News. (2020). Test scores don't stack up to GPAs in predicting college success (press coverage of Allensworth & Clark, adapted from the AERA release). (https://news.uchicago.edu/story/test-scores-dont-stack-gpas-predicting-college-success)
3. ACT Research. Investigating test prep impact on score gains using quasi-experimental methods (R1710). Notes meta-analytic coaching effects near ~0.25 SD for SAT-like achievement tests and discusses ACT-scale implications. (https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R1710-investigating-test-prep-impact-2018-07.pdf)
4. Bangert-Drowns, R. L., Kulik, J. A., & Kulik, C.-L. C. (1983). Effects of coaching programs on achievement test performance. Review of Educational Research, 53(4), 571–585. (Often cited coaching ES ≈ .25 for achievement-test coaching syntheses.) (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/00346543053004571)

© 2026 TestLessons.com. Free educational resource. Provided AS IS — see the disclaimer on page 1. Official practice is the real check of your score.

— The TestLessons team

Download: testlessons.com/pdfs/guides/TestLessons-act-study-guide.pdf · Hub: testlessons.com/tests/act/ · Free path: testlessons.com/tests/act/free-prep-stack/