



Helping Students Understand the Importance of the ACT

The ACT serves as a critical tool for assessing a student's readiness for college, career training, military service, and apprenticeships. By understanding and embracing its significance, students can view the ACT as a meaningful step toward their future goals. Below is an overview of why the ACT matters, how it connects to various pathways, and what scores mean.

1. Why the ACT Matters

The ACT measures academic skills in English, Math, Reading, and Science, reflecting readiness for various post-secondary opportunities. Here's why it's important:

- **College Readiness:** The ACT's college readiness benchmarks predict a high likelihood of success in entry-level college courses. Meeting or exceeding these benchmarks means you are academically prepared to handle college-level work ([ACT.org](https://www.act.org)).
 - **Career Readiness:** Research shows the skills assessed by the ACT are equally applicable to workforce training programs and apprenticeships. Foundational abilities in math and reading are essential for success across all career paths ([ACT Workforce Readiness Research](#)).
 - **Long-Term Success:** Higher ACT scores correlate with greater chances of earning a degree, attaining jobs in chosen fields, and achieving long-term career satisfaction. Aligning academic efforts with career goals fosters motivation and focus ([ACT Research Reports](#)).
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2. Post-High School Pathways and the ACT

College Admissions and Scholarships

- **Admissions Impact:** Colleges use ACT composite scores to assess applicants. Strong scores can enhance admission prospects, especially at selective institutions, and may unlock merit-based scholarships.
- **Scholarship Opportunities:** Even a one-point increase in ACT scores can lead to thousands of dollars in additional scholarship funding.
- **Retesting for Improvement:** You can often improve your scores with retesting, increasing your eligibility for scholarships and admissions ([ACT Retesting Data](#)).

Workforce and Apprenticeships

- **Relevance of Core Skills:** Foundational math and reading skills, as measured by the ACT, are necessary for workforce training and apprenticeships. These programs often combine classroom learning with practical, on-the-job training, culminating in industry-recognized credentials.
- **Apprenticeship Pathways:** Apprenticeships are increasingly offering pathways to degrees, making them a complementary option to traditional college education ([US Dept. of Labor](#)).

Military Service

- **ACT and ASVAB Correlation:** The ACT and the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) measure overlapping skills, helping you understand your readiness for military roles. Below is an approximate comparison between ACT and ASVAB scores:

ASVAB Score Range	Estimated ACT Composite Score
31–40	13–15
41–51	16–18
52–61	19–21
62–72	22–24
73–83	25–27
84–93	28–30
94+	31–36

This comparison highlights how ACT scores align with military eligibility and opportunities for advanced training ([PrepGenius.io](https://www.prepgenius.io)).

3. ACT's Role in Career Exploration

The ACT includes an interest inventory that helps you:

- Identify career paths aligned with your interests and aptitudes.
- Explore potential majors and careers to find fulfilling opportunities.
- Recognize the connection between academic skills and career success.

Students with interests aligned to their chosen careers often experience greater job satisfaction and performance ([ACT Research](#)).

4. Balancing the ACT's Importance with a Holistic View

While the ACT is a valuable tool, it is not the sole predictor of success. It's important to understand:

- **Multiple Pathways to Success:** College is not the only option; the ACT reflects skills useful in career training, military service, and apprenticeships. **Meeting or exceeding ACT benchmarks increases a student's chances of success in college**, but it's not the only factor at play.
- **Comprehensive Evaluation:** Many colleges adopt holistic admissions processes, considering GPA, extracurriculars, and personal essays in addition to test scores.

- **Focus on Growth:** The ACT helps you identify strengths and areas for improvement, fostering a mindset of growth and resilience. **A majority of students who retake the ACT improve their scores.**
- **Not a Sole Predictor of Success:** While ACT scores can indicate college readiness, they do not guarantee success. Factors such as motivation, the desire to learn, parental support, and the quality of teaching also contribute to a student's achievement. **The ACT is one measure, but it is not the only measure of a student's potential.**
- **Real-World Skills:** The ACT is not just an academic measure but also reflects skills needed in the real world. The skills measured by the ACT in reading and mathematics are comparable to those required for many jobs. This highlights the real-world applications of the skills assessed by the ACT.

The ACT is one piece of a larger puzzle, and students should not feel defined by their test scores alone.

5. High School Coursework and ACT Benchmarks

Achieving ACT College Readiness Benchmarks is closely linked to the rigor of your high school coursework. Here are the recommended classes to take:

English (4 years)

- **Coursework:** Engage in four years of English classes, emphasizing literature, composition, and critical reading skills.
- **Junior Year Recommended Class:** English III or an equivalent advanced-level English class that emphasizes analytical reading, essay writing, and critical thinking.
- **Why It Matters:** These classes help students refine skills in grammar, sentence structure, and reading comprehension, which are assessed in the ACT English and Reading sections.
- **ACT Benchmark:** An ACT English score of 18 indicates readiness for college-level English Composition courses. An ACT Reading score of 22 indicates readiness for entry-level materials.

Mathematics (3–4 years)

- **Coursework:** Complete at least three years of mathematics, including Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. For students aiming for STEM fields, a fourth year involving Pre-Calculus or Calculus is advisable.
- **Junior Year Recommended Class:** Algebra II and/or, if possible, Pre-Calculus.
- **Why It Matters:** These courses build foundational and advanced math skills critical for solving ACT Math problems. Topics include algebraic functions, geometry, and trigonometric principles.
- **ACT Benchmark:** An ACT Math score of 22 suggests preparedness for College Algebra. Readiness for STEM coursework may require higher scores; an ACT STEM score of 26 is associated with at least a 50% chance of earning a B or higher in STEM-related courses.

Science (3 years)

- Coursework: Enroll in three years of science courses, such as Biology, Chemistry, and Physics, to build analytical and scientific reasoning skills.
- Junior Year Recommended Class: Chemistry and/or Physics.
- Why It Matters: These courses enhance scientific reasoning and problem-solving abilities, which are key to succeeding on the ACT Science section.
- ACT Benchmark: An ACT Science score of 23 reflects readiness for college-level Biology.

Social Studies (3 years)

- Coursework: Participate in three years of social studies, including World Studies, American Studies I, American Studies II (can add World History and/or AP European History) to develop critical reading and analytical skills.
 - Junior Year Recommended Class: American Studies I or AP USHistory and/or AP Psychology.
 - Why It Matters: These subjects improve reading analysis and critical thinking, skills that support success on the ACT Reading section.
 - ACT Benchmark: An ACT Reading score of 22 indicates readiness for college-level social science courses.
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6. Practical Steps for Success

Here's how you can use the ACT as a tool for your future:

- Understand how the ACT connects to your goals, whether college, career, military, or apprenticeships.
 - Use ACT score reports to identify strengths and areas for targeted improvement.
 - Retake the ACT if needed to maximize scholarship and admissions opportunities.
 - Explore the interest inventory to align your interests and aptitudes with potential career paths.
 - Consider how ACT scores relate to other assessments, such as the ASVAB, to expand your options.
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References

- [ACT.org – Understanding ACT Scores](#)
- [ACT Workforce Readiness Research](#)
- [PrepGenius.io – ASVAB and ACT Score Correlation](#)
- [US Department of Labor – Apprenticeships](#)
- [ACT Research – College and Career Readiness Benchmarks](#)
- [National Math and Science Initiative](#)