

## **Tips for Taking the ACT Writing Test**

### **Pace yourself**

The ACT writing test contains one question to be completed in 40 minutes. When asked to write a timed essay, most writers find it useful to do some planning before they write the essay, and to do a final check of the essay when it is finished. It is unlikely that you will have time to draft, revise, and recopy your essay.

### **Plan**

Before writing, carefully read and consider all prompt material. Be sure you understand the issue, its perspectives and your essay task. The prewriting questions included with the prompt will help you analyze the perspectives and develop your own. Use these questions to think critically about the prompt and generate effective ideas in response. Ask yourself how your ideas and analysis can best be supported and organized in a written argument. Use the prewriting space in your test booklet to structure or outline your response.

### **Write**

Establish the focus of your essay by making clear your argument and its main ideas. Explain and illustrate your ideas with sound reasoning and meaningful examples. Discuss the significance of your ideas: what are the implications of what you have to say, and why is your argument important to consider? As you write, ask yourself if your logic is clear, you have supported your claims, and you have chosen precise words to communicate your ideas.

### **Review your essay**

Take a few minutes before time is called to read over your essay. Correct any mistakes. If you find any words that are hard to read, recopy them. Make corrections and revisions neatly between the lines. Do not write in the margins. Your readers know you had only 40 minutes to compose and write your essay. Within that time limit, try to make your essay as polished as you can.

### **Practice**

There are many ways to prepare for the ACT writing test. These include reading newspapers and magazines, listening to news analyses on television and radio, and participating in discussions and debates.

One of the best ways to prepare for the ACT writing test is to practice writing with different purposes for different audiences. The writing you do in your classes will help you. So will writing essays, stories, editorials, a personal journal, or other writing you do on your own.

It is also a good idea to practice writing within a time limit. Taking the practice ACT writing test will give you a sense of how much additional practice you may need. You might want to take the practice ACT writing test even if you do not plan to take the ACT with writing, because this will help build skills that are important in college-level learning and in the world of work.

## **Practice your writing skills**

There are many ways to prepare for the ACT writing test. You may be surprised that these include reading newspapers and magazines, listening to news analyses on television or radio, and participating in discussions and debates about issues and problems. These activities help you become more familiar with current issues, with different perspectives on those issues, and with strategies that skilled writers and speakers use to present their points of view.

Of course, one of the best ways to prepare for the ACT writing test is to practice writing. Practice writing different kinds of texts, for different purposes, with different audiences in mind. The writing you do in your English classes will help you. So will practice in writing essays, stories, poems, plays, editorials, reports, letters to the editor, a personal journal, or other kinds of writing that you do on your own. Because the ACT writing test asks you to explain your perspective on an issue in a convincing way, writing opportunities like editorials or letters to the editor of a newspaper are especially helpful. Practicing a variety of different kinds of writing will help make you a versatile writer able to adjust to different writing assignments.

It's also a good idea to get some practice writing within a time limit. This will help build skills that are important in college-level learning and in the world of work.

## **Build your Writing Skills**

### **Here are some ways you can strengthen your writing skills:**

- Read and write frequently. Read as much as you can from a variety of sources, including plays, essays, fiction, poetry, news stories, business writing and magazine features.
- Become familiar with current issues in society and develop your own opinions on the issues. Think of arguments you would use to convince someone of your opinion. Taking speech and debate classes can help you think through issues and communicate them to others.
- Practice writing in different formats and in as many real situations as possible. Write letters to the editor, or letters to a company requesting information.
- Try some writing in extracurricular activities. School newspapers, yearbooks, and creative writing clubs offer opportunities to express ideas in writing.
- Share your writing with others and get feedback. Feedback helps you anticipate how readers might interpret your writing and what types of questions they might have. This can help you anticipate what a reader might want to know.
- Learn to see writing as a process—brainstorming, planning, writing and then editing. This applies to all writing activities.
- Listen to the advice your English teacher gives you about your writing.
- Strive for your writing to be well developed and well organized, using precise, clear and concise language.
- Remember that everyone can improve writing skills. Confidence and skill will grow with the more writing you do. Practice and work lead to achievement.

## **A Perfect Essay:**

Advances in technology have become so widely accepted in today's culture that very few people are willing to pause to consider the consequences. People get so excited about what new technologies can offer that they forget to question whether there might be any negative effects. Without caution and deliberation, replacing the natural with the mechanical would undoubtedly be disastrous.

The economic implications of the potential mechanical takeover alone should be enough to dissuade anyone from moving too fast. In the event the robots are more widely used in the workplace, humans would surely be replaced. At first, businesses would benefit from the efficiency of robots, but eventually a depressed job market would lead to a population that struggles just to feed themselves and their families, let alone purchase the products these robots make. In the long run, society will suffer if it does not take care to prevent the economic consequences of giving everything over to machines.

Our careless use of automation has already taken a toll on our culture. People have been interacting with automation in nearly every aspect of their lives, whether it be shopping, banking, or the use of a telephone. The effect of this is obvious: basic respect for our fellow man is all but absent today because of increased interaction with automation. Why treat a machine with kindness? It suffers no emotional or psychological damage. In a culture saturated with automation, we get used to treating machines rudely, and we begin to treat each other rudely. This of course leads to all sorts of issues, like intolerance and incivility, and in the long run, results in the complete degradation of culture.

Even in the face of these obstacles, some people argue that the increasing intelligence of today's machines is a good thing. After all, machine power can decrease the human work load. Computer processors double in power and ability every year. Computers are projected to reach human intelligence by as soon as 2025. The implications of this shift are unknown, but one thing is for certain. We are moving into this change too fast to anticipate and prevent damage to the human species. We are approaching this change too quickly for any sort of safety net to be built. Because of this, it is important that we as a species slow down our technological development so that we might consider all the implications of a change this big. We must figure out how to handle negative societal and cultural consequences before we embrace total integration of automated, intelligent machines.

Decreasing the speed with which we incorporate mechanical influence is important because of the potential dangers that lurk in blind acceptance. Not only does the preference of the mechanical over the natural interfere with the job market and the economy, but its use also has the potential to seriously degrade our culture as a whole. In combination with the uncertainty surrounding the increasing intelligence of machines, it is most assuredly better for the human species that technological progress be slowed so that we can, if necessary, prevent additional damage.

## Scoring Explanation

### Ideas and Analysis = 6

By framing the issue as a matter of reckless technological abandon, the writer establishes an insightful context for analysis of the issue and its perspectives. This context informs a nuanced, precise thesis: Though we are inclined to welcome technological advancement with open arms, “the potential dangers that lurk in blind acceptance” necessitate “caution and deliberation” as we determine how to make use of intelligent machines. In advancing this thesis, the writer examines the economic and cultural implications of moving too quickly into the age of automation. In doing so, the writer has generated an argument that critically engages with multiple perspectives on this issue.

### Development and Support = 6

An integrated line of reasoning and illustration effectively conveys the argument’s significance by exploring the economic and cultural implications of the mindless incorporation of intelligent machines. Hypothetical examples (*In the event the robots are more widely used in the workplace*) and skillful reasoning (*The implications of this shift are unknown, but one thing is for certain. We are moving into this change too fast to anticipate and prevent damage to the human species*) develop and support the thesis by drawing out and making persuasive its meaning and importance. The final body paragraph complicates the argument by conceding both the benefits of machine power and the unprecedented sophistication of modern technologies, using these concessions to reinforce the call for moderation and deliberation—as we reach new technological heights, it is even *more* important that we “figure out how to handle” potential unintended consequences.

### Organization = 6

As with its development and support, a persistent focus on exploring the thesis benefits the organization of this response. This skillful strategy is driven by its controlling idea, which shapes the argument as it progresses logically from a discussion of future economic implications to a treatment of present-day cultural conditions to an examination of opposing viewpoints. Effective transitions between paragraphs reflect this organizing principle (*The economic implications of the potential mechanical takeover; Our careless use of automation has already taken a toll on our culture; Even in the face of these obstacles, some people argue that the increasing intelligence of today’s machines is a good thing*), while transitions within paragraphs serve to clarify and strengthen the writer’s reasoning (*At first, but eventually, This of course, After all*). All told, this strategy increases the effectiveness of the argument.

### Language Use = 6

Precise vocabulary (*societal and cultural consequences, intolerance and incivility, emotional or psychological damage*) and a variety of clear sentence structures reflect advanced skill in the use of language. So too does the prose itself, which is largely free of errors. Of particular note are the writer’s strategic stylistic choices. Words like *degrade, depressed, and damage* work to establish a sense of alarm or dread, which underscores the writer’s call for consideration of the potential consequences she perceives. In the final body paragraph, the writer uses repetitive sentence constructions (*We are, We are, We must*) as the argument moves into its call for action. These rhetorical flourishes work to clarify the thesis and make persuasive its implications, thus enhancing the argument.