


News You Can Use



January 2010

ACT provides this monthly newsletter to inform students and their parents about college and career planning. ACT is a not-for-profit organization that serves millions of people in schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses and government agencies with programs and services that help people achieve their education and career goals. Visit actstudent.org for more information and services.



Key dates

January 2010

Jan 1: The FAFSA becomes available — file the form as soon as possible.

Jan 15: Late registration deadline for February ACT® test date (with additional fee).

February 2010

Feb 6: ACT national test date (the test is available in all states except New York).

Gathering FAFSA documents

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) became available on January 1. It is important to complete the form and submit as soon as possible, as financial aid is provided on a first-come, first-served basis. Here are some of the items you will need:

- Your Social Security number and your parents' Social Security numbers if you are a dependent.
- Your driver's license number if you have one.
- Your Alien Registration Number if you are not a United States citizen.
- 2009 federal tax information for you (and your spouse, if married) and your parents if you are providing parent information. You will still be able to submit your FAFSA even if you have not filed your taxes at the time, but you must still provide income and tax information.
- Records of untaxed income, such as Social Security benefits, welfare benefits and veteran's benefits for you and your parents.
- Information on savings, investments, and business and farm assets for you and your parents.
- Federal Student Aid advises families with unusual circumstances, including job loss, to complete FAFSA on the Web whenever possible, submit it and then contact the financial aid office of the school you plan to attend.
- Also, scholarship and financial aid scams are out there; do not pay a fee for FAFSA completion and filing. Help completing the FAFSA can generally be found at the school you are planning to attend, a school counselor or Federal Student Aid.
- To get started, visit www.fafsa.ed.gov. Don't miss out!

Juniors – Jump-start your college planning

The last half of junior year is here and that means it's time to spring into action. Ideally, you've already been thinking about college and investigating your choices, but now is the time for action. Just ask any senior. Time goes by very quickly.

Here are some things to do:

- Continue to take challenging courses. When registering for senior year, don't just sign up for easy courses, because that will hurt your chances for college admission and you'll pay when you arrive at college and can't handle the coursework.
- Begin to make a preliminary list of colleges you would like to investigate further. Surf the Internet and use college resources in the counseling office or library.
- Fill out a college comparison worksheet. You can download one at www.actstudent.org/college/11.html
- Make plans to visit colleges this spring when classes are in session.
- Start or update an academic resume.
- If you don't have a Social Security number, get one as soon as you can. You'll need it for college applications. If you have one but don't know what it is, ask your parents.
- Register for the ACT. You should be academically ready to take it by spring of this year. If not, plan to take it in the summer or fall, work hard in your courses and check out free test questions at www.actstudent.org.
- Check into applying to college online.
- Investigate scholarship opportunities.

No time to slump, seniors

Once you have a college offer in hand, you may get the urge to coast through the rest of the school year, or maybe you've already decided to slack off. It's your senior year and you deserve it, right?

Before you give in to senior slump, you should know that the college may be watching you.

Colleges, especially selective universities, have been known to withdraw offers of admission to students who drop college prep classes or begin earning uncharacteristically low grades. If you've slumped, but not too far, colleges might send you a warning letter and add certain stipulations to your admission, such as requiring a 2.0 grade point average during the first year of college.

Taking an extended breather during your senior year can make your freshman year in college difficult. So have fun your senior year, but don't give up on your college preparation. Study hard!

Taking the ACT — How soon? How often?

No one likes to take tests, so make sure that you're prepared when you do take your college entrance exam.

The ACT measures your skills and knowledge in English, math, science and reading. A good time to take the exam is the spring semester of your junior year. Advantages to testing in your junior year are:

- You've probably taken the courses that prepare you for the test—that is, if you're taking courses that prepare you for college.
- You'll have your test scores and other information in time to plan your senior year. For example, you may decide to take an additional class in a subject in which your test score was low.
- Colleges will know of your interests and have your scores in time to contact you during the summer before your senior year. Many colleges send students information about admission, scholarships and special programs at this time.
- You'll have more information about yourself and the schools you're interested in before campus visits, making your visits more focused.
- You'll have plenty of time to retake the test before applying to college if you feel your scores don't accurately reflect your ability. ACT research shows that of the students who took the ACT a second time, 55 percent earned a higher composite score, 23 percent

The decision to take the ACT more than once depends on your own situation. If you're happy with your scores, you don't need to take it again. But if you think you'll do better a second time because you'll know what to expect or you've taken additional classes, take the ACT again.

Talk it over with your parents and counselor if you're uncertain.



How scores are reported

ACT initially prepares three reports when you take the ACT.

First is your student score report. It is mailed to the address you provided on your registration. Student score reports are mailed three to eight weeks after you took the test. Your student score report is valuable, so put it in a safe place. But don't forget to use it. The score report contains valuable information on college and career planning.

Your high school also will receive a report if you authorized it when you registered. High school counselors may use the information to help you plan appropriate coursework supporting your college and career goals. Schools also use this information to plan courses. Some schools include your test score on your official transcript. The high school report also contains your score and college and career planning information.

When you register for the ACT, you can choose four colleges or scholarship agencies to have your scores sent to for free. You can select two more for an additional fee. This report includes the same information found on the student and high school reports, high school grades you reported and performance predictions for specific college programs and courses. This is the same report that will be sent to additional schools and agencies you choose at a later date.

All three reports are sent three to eight weeks after you take the test. There is no way to speed up the scoring of your test or reporting of your scores.

For more information about the ACT and score reporting, visit www.actstudent.org.

Career planning

Remember when grown-ups asked you what you wanted to be when you grew up? Your response probably elicited some smiles, giggles and maybe even some looks of surprise. Well now it's time to start having some serious conversations about potential careers. You probably have some tools to help you get started.

Look at your EXPLORE[®], PLAN[®] and ACT[®] test score reports and use them to help plan your future. All three test score reports contain information about your educational and career plans. And each is a predictor of your score on the next test. This allows you to adjust your course selection to focus on areas where you want to improve.

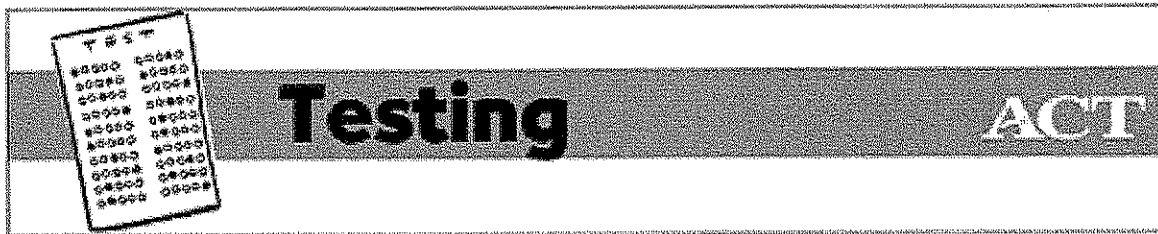
Deciding on a career doesn't happen overnight. And just like any other major goal in life, you need to develop a plan to get you there.

The first step is to really explore your strengths, weaknesses and personal interests. Really think about yourself. What areas do you need to improve to achieve your goal? What potential obstacles are in the way?

Next, investigate your options. You can't create your plan if you aren't even aware of all of the possibilities open to you. "Try on" a job by volunteering or shadowing a professional. You also can get a good idea of the training you'll need to enter a field by visiting www.actstudent.org/wwm.

Finally, make the plan and work it. List the courses you'll need to be ready for college and your potential career and find out when you'll be able to take them. Research schools that offer the training you need. Learn about financing your college education.

You can research hundreds of career opportunities and sign up for a student account at www.actstudent.org. Now is the perfect time to find an answer to "What do you want to be when you grow up?"



Plan ahead to relieve test-taking stress

When you head off to take the ACT, don't let forgetfulness or inattention surprise you with something unexpected and affect your test-taking abilities. Here are some true stories of unexpected events:

- A student bought a new calculator the night before the test and used it the first time while taking the test. Unfortunately, he found the calculator didn't work.
- Another student failed to look at the list of calculators that are allowed during the test and arrived with one that had been banned. She had to take the test without a calculator.
- One student didn't look at her admission ticket until the day before the test. She was surprised to learn that she had registered for a site one hour away, not her high school. At the last minute, she had to factor in driving time for her pre-test preparations.
- A student arrived at the test site without a photo ID. Fortunately, he was able to run home and get it before the test started.
- Recently, one of our student bloggers took the ACT. When Emily sat down, she discovered her desk wobbled. Knowing that this would bother her throughout the test, she asked to be re-seated. Emily had planned ahead to arrive early and make sure she was comfortable, which left her enough time to request a new seat.

Plan ahead to make sure little things won't distract you from doing your best on test day. Double-check your admission ticket. Is it for the right date? The right location? Make sure your calculator is allowed, that it has fresh batteries and that it works. Bring a photo ID and be comfortable.

Obviously, unexpected events do happen. Read your testing information from ACT early and visit www.actstudent.org/testprep/tips/testday.html to get familiar with test day procedures and what is allowed in the testing room.

Test date reminder

The next national ACT test date is February 6, 2010. No test sites are scheduled in New York in February. The late registration deadline, with an additional fee, is available until January 15. Other 2009-10 test dates are April 10 and June 12. Registration deadlines for these dates are normally about five weeks before the test date.

An optional Writing Test is available in addition to the multiple-choice achievement test. Go to www.actstudent.org/writing to learn more about the Writing Test, including a search tool to find out which colleges recommend or require it.

Test-day tips, a list of what to bring and approved calculators for use on the Math Test are listed on the site, too. For all your questions about the ACT test, visit www.actstudent.org.

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