**Past Panel ACT Hints and Pointers**

Below is a compilation of the hints we brainstormed as well as the hints from the previous panels. Please review these so that you are familiar with them so you don’t have to read from these notes.

**General Hints-**

* Try taking the test 5 times- the first test is a baseline and each subsequent test, try to focus on your lowest scores.
* Mark your answers in the test booklet, before turning the page; transfer all answers to your answer document. This saves time.
* Set your watch to 12:00 at the beginning of each test or buy an ACT specific watch to time yourself.
* After reaching your goal score, take the test one more time- there is significantly less pressure on you and that could help your score.
* Always choose the same letter to guess with rather than jumping around.
* A stimulating brain activity before the test is important such as reading something.
* Get a good night’s sleep of at least 8 hours and eat a breakfast high in protein.
* Study at least 45 minutes a day and take practice tests every 2-3 weeks. .
* Be confident! You can do this!
* During practice, tests review what you missed to keep from making the same mistakes over again.
* Use the *Princeton Review* book to help focus and improve on your weakest subjects.
* *The Black Book* is a great study tool.
* Begin to study at least a month before. Practice teaches you what to expect, how to pace and helps you identify strategies that work best for you.
	+ Two great books- *The Real ACT* and *the Princeton Review*
	+ Don’t try to cram the night or days before- if you don’t know it by then, you probably won’t learn it. Doing this may cause unnecessary stress.
	+ Use free resources like ACT prep online, ACT question of the day App for your phone, MAXthetest.com etc.
	+ Practice test books usually mimic the actual tests.
* Tackle one subject per week-review the necessary review materials, take a practice test, review what you got wrong and take another test to see improvement.
* Teach someone else the ACT. Showing someone else the right way to do something helps solidify the concepts.
* Practice using the process of elimination. You can usually eliminate one potential answer right away.
	+ Circle questions that you are unsure bout and come back to them if you have time. Mark your letter of the day on your answer sheet to avoid getting off on your answers and in case you run out of time it won’t be left blank.
	+ Guess on the really hard questions to make sure you have enough time to answer the questions you do know.
* Take your time on the Reading and English but go quickly on the Math and Science.
* Circle the answers in the test booklet for 2 pages, then bubble in on answer sheet.
* Be sure to take the practice tests in the same allotted time as you will take the test on test day. This helps you learn how to pace yourself.
* Study with friends- you can bounce ideas, questions and problems off each other. Especially helpful in math & science.
* Taking practice tests also boosts confidence- not knowing what to expect enhances nervousness. Go in with the feeling, “I can do THIS!”
	+ Have faith in your ability- you’ve already been taught most of what is on the test.
	+ Take the test as many times as you can
	+ Be prepared to take the test several times.
	+ Your first test most likely won’t be your best.
	+ If you have taken the test several times and keep making about the same score, concentrate on mastering one or two of the subjects to boost your score. Improving one or two areas may boost your score several points.
	+ If you take practice tests in school, ask & pay attention to why you got things wrong.
	+ Treat each section with a new mindset. Don’t carry frustrations from one part to another.
	+ Relax, it’s not the end of the world.
* Stay hydrated that week so you aren’t thirsty- if you drink a lot that morning you will have to leave the room and not be able to make up that time.
	+ Don’t drink too much water, coffee or energy drinks before the test.
	+ Energy drinks may make you crash before the test is over.
	+ Make sure you go to the bathroom before and during break!
* Get plenty of sleep, eat a good normal breakfast and don’t drink too many liquids prior to the test. Don’t go out the night before- plan what to do that AFTER the test.
	+ Do not eat too much or change your normal routine since this may make you sleepy or upset your stomach.
	+ Drink grape juice
	+ Bring a drink and a snack for break. This test last four hours- you’ll get hungry. M & M’s or nuts are good.
	+ Eat peppermints- it stimulates the brain
	+ If you chew gum, chew the same gum as you did while studying, it’ll help with information recall.
* **BE ON TIME!!! BRING A PICTURE ID AND ADMISSION TICKET.** You may not be allowed to take the test if you are late. These are timed tests. Once the tests begin, no one is allowed into the testing rooms.
* Bring clothing layers & dress comfortably. Some rooms are warm and others are cold. Do not wear arm jewelry that will make noise on a desk.
* Bring two methods for time keeping- no alarms or beeps! One to start a minute before the test and another to start when the test begins. When the first one ends, you know you have one minute left- guess to complete the test. Lay watch flat on your desk so you don’t have to stop & look at your wrist.
	+ If the start/end times aren’t written on the board, set your clock to 12:00 to count down
	+ If the start stop times is marked, set the watch to match the board times.
	+ Ask the room supervisor to write the stop and 5 minute warning times on the board.
* Bring good quality pencils- NOT MECHANICAL, a good eraser that won’t smudge or leave marks and an approved calculator.
* When you have one minute left but are not finished with the test, guess so that you do not leave anything blank. Guessing doesn’t count against you but can help. It is best to choose one letter, either “B” or “C” and use only that letter for completing a test where you have run out of time.
* Some questions are confusing- don’t let this scare you, pick apart the question as quickly as possible to determine what is being asked.
* Try to stay focused- don’t get distracted.
* Go with your first instinct- it’s usually correct. Don’t over think.
* Testing site choices can make a difference.

-ASU has small desks.

-Taking it at PHS is familiar which may lesson nerves.

- It may also help to take a test at your local school since you know the layout- some students get lost if locations aren’t well marked. Remember, if you are late or get lost, you may not be able to take the test that day and there are no refunds.

* Don’t wait until you’re sending out college applications to take the test- that may be too late. Try to finish testing before October of your senior year.
* Listen to music or do whatever usually calms you down before you arrive to take the test.
* Break test into small parts with smaller time limits to promote speed. Ex. Do one page in 5mins.

**English-**

* Choose clear and concise answer.
* Many of the answers are “No Change”.
* Read the whole sentence before choosing an answer.
* Less commas are better.
* Use common sense.
* Say phrase in your head to see if it flows correctly.
* If there is a tense question or question about additional information, read the context around the sentence so you can choose the best answer.
* Read the passages. It helps you really try to be interested in the passage. You will have an easier time if you try to enjoy what you are reading.
* Some of the easiest parts of the test are English section. Review the basic grammatical and syntax rules- the trickiest parts are normally comma rules- know them. An ACT review book usually has a good review section.
	+ The “red book” by ACT will make a big difference for English. Answers that may not initially appear to be subjective will be cleared up by the “explained answers” section.
	+ Refresh grammar rules, especially commas & semicolons, pronoun usage, transition words, their, there & they’re, who and whom
	+ I vs. me, he vs. him, she vs. her, who vs. whom, remember prep.
	+ Less= volume, fewer=quantity, further vs. farther
	+ Diagram sentences for practice.
* Allow 9 minutes per passage, max-Don’t read the passage, just answer the questions. Also, read the questions twice before attempting to answer. Be sure you know what they are asking for.
* If it says “which is NOT”….circle the word “NOT” to be sure you look for the one that doesn’t belong.
* If you think the answer is “No Change” it is probably the right answer
* Always choose the most concise, grammatically correct answer.
	+ Sometimes reading the sentence in aloud your head helps to pinpoint which punctuation to use.
	+ If you can’t imagine someone saying it, it probably isn’t right.
	+ If all else fails, go with what sounds best rather than what looks “smartest”.
	+ The answer is usually the shortest one- not wordy.
* Read the underlined part only to save time- then skim the article to answer the general questions.
* Don’t read the isolated, underlined portions to save time, read it all to understand the context, tense and tone.
* Practice what you are not good at
* Don’t read for comprehension- just read the question
* Read the ACT books to see what the ACT thinks sounds best- it may not be what you think
* Look to avoid repetition or redundancy.

**Math-**

* Organized easiest to harder.
* Try to answer the first 30 math questions at 8 minute per 10 questions, that way you’ll have over half of the time left for the last 30 questions which are substantially harder.
* Underline what you are solving for.
* There’s nothing wrong with the “Plug & Chug” method if you are stuck- using the multiple choice answers plug into problem to find the correct answer or eliminate wrong answers.
* With an exception of a few, math problems only require basic knowledge from Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1, and Geometry. They seem harder because the wording is tricky.
* If you get stuck, SKIP IT. Guess and come back later.
* Really good review website: <http://sbstjohn.com/QODWebSite/act_qod.htm>

It has review problems on a calendar for you to choose from: Pre & Elem **(A)**lgebra | **(I)**ntermediate Algebra | **(P)**lane Geometry | **(C)**oordinate Geometry | **(T)**rig. You work the problem, then click on the arrow button and the math teacher will demonstrate how to work the problem so you can check your work.

* PRACTICE- When practicing, circle problems you are 20% unsure about. Then review them to become more familiar with the concepts.
* Ask your math teacher for an ACT review day and or packet
* Aim to finish the first30 questions in less than 25 minutes- this will allow you 35 minutes or more to work on the harder problems.
	+ Skip the questions you don’t know to work the ones you can quickly.
	+ The last 10 questions are usually more difficult than the first 50. Work the first 50 quickly to allow more time for the last 10.
	+ Make educated guesses on the harder ones at the end if you don’t know how to work them.
* Get a math formula cheat sheet and learn the formulas and how to use them. Create a Quizlet and review the night before the test.
	+ Know these formulas: (especially Geometry- can eat a lot of time if you’re rusty on them.) Understand why these make sense.
		- Distance/Midpoint
		- Circle equation
		- Trapezoids
		- Triangles
		- Circumference
		- Area
		- Diameter
		- Trig
		- Fraction rules- switch signs of inequalities when dividing by a negative
		- Know angles- especially transverse planes
		- Sum of interior angles : (180°)(Number of Sides
		- Know the patterns for the parts of the 30-60-90 and the 45-45-90 triangles.
		- Know the Pythagorean Theorem
* Take practice tests to learn why you missed specific problems
* Skip any problem you don’t know- make a mark in your test booklet so that you can quickly go back to it.
* Write all over the test booklet to work your problems, it is okay to do this.
* **Be sure to know how to use the calculator & practice** **using your calculator- be sure it is approved**- a graphing calculator can help with some of the problems if you know how to use it.
* Many are ableto do more than add, subtract, divide and multiply.
* Try to do simple functions in your head. Learn to guestimate.

- The problems may look overwhelming but they were made to be solved without a calculator.

- Don’t rush yourself and miscalculate.

- More than half the test is pre-algebra, algebra and coordinate geometry (estimated 42 problems). Plane geometry and trigonometry compose the remaining estimated 18 problems. Very little is trigonometry but be familiar with their identities.

* Know how to find percentages, turn fractions into decimals and find **probability**. Probability is important.
* Don’t let what you don’t know get in the way of what you do know: the answer is probably easier than you think- do over think the problems. Use the process of elimination.
* Most of the math problems can be solved by plugging the answer choices into the equation.
* Don’t guess “C” for the last 10.

**Reading-**

* Read the Passage first.
* Answer all the questions you can without looking at the passages to save time.
* Don’t spend too much time on one question.
* Write a one word or short summary of each paragraph out to the side for quick referral when answering questions.
* With passage A & passage B, read passage A & answer all those questions before reading passage B.
* For timings sake, try to limit time for each passage to 8.5 minutes, reading passages in no more than 2 minutes.
* All answers can be found from direct evidence in the passage- don’t worry about trying to “interpret” an author’s opinion, etc.
* Don’t skim passages, actually read them. You will need the context of the entire passage to answer some questions.
* Skim the questions before reading the passages.
* Answer the questions with the line numbers first, then do the others
* Taking practice tests is a must for this section since strategies that work for others may not work for you. Choose the method that enables you to work the fastest.
* READ ANYTHING to get faster and build your ability to read fast while working on increasing understanding of what you read- comprehension.
* Some skip the passages and go straight to the questions then go to look for the answers.
* Some suggest reading everything- jumping in blindly can confuse you & waste time
* Circle names in each passage so that you can quickly refer back to them.
* Others must read passages first then go to the questions. Answer the specific questions as you read the passage (they go in order) and the go back and answer the questions that ask about the passage as a whole.
* Annotate- underline, highlight, draw arrows, and make marginal comments. Annotating is a way of making the text your own, of literally putting your mark on it--noting its key passages and ideas.
* Read as fast as you can- but don’t skim; skip the concluding paragraph. Don’t stay on one passage too long or you’ll run out of time. Try to retain what you read since that will make answering the questions easier. When finished, go back and re-take the test.
* Use your finger to follow the lines if needed –this keeps you focused on the passage not just skimming without reading.
* While reading, force yourself to picture what is happening in the passage, this will help you stay focused.
* Look for key words to save time- circle if needed. Underline important aspects of the passage.

**Science**-

* You do not have to go in order as long as you answer what you are most comfortable with, first.
* Understand the overall trends (is the graph going up or down) and the relationship between the units.
* Many questions are asking about relations between the figures, so make sure you know the graphs well.
* Don’t let the big word intimidate you; you do not have to know what they mean to answer the questions.
* Keep your cool whenever you see the big, hard, to understand words.
* Skim the multiple choice questions first. You don’t have to read each graph in-depth, which could save time.
* Read the information and refer to the graph. Even if you don’t understand the words, all you have to be able to do is read and understand the graphs.
* Save the Comparing Scientist part until last.

Do not spend a lot of time reading passages, read the questions and interpret the graphs first. This is essentially data interpretation.

-Almost every time, the question will direct you to a specific graph, figure, or experiment necessary to answer the question. Answer these first, then answer the ones requiring understanding of the whole passage

-Do not read the intro into every experiment unless you absolutely need to. This will save time.

- There is usually a question which has three or more students/scientists saying three different things. Write a brief synopsis/outline of what is unique about each person’s hypothesis.

- Don’t panic- know how to read an X & Y axis and independent and dependent variables on a graph.

- Don’t waste time looking for easy passages- work through all the sections

- Try to average 4-5 minutes per passage to help pace yourself

- You don’t need to know what the passage is talking about, this can bog you down and confuse & frustrate you, just answer the questions. Skip the BIG FANCY words

- Complete the science passages in order from easiest to hardest.

- Comparing viewpoints: read one opinion at a time & answer the questions that compare/contrast viewpoints last. Underline key concepts as you read for reference.

- Some science sections are harder than others. Skip what you don’t know and answer the simple ones- all are worth the same.

**Writing**-

* Use evidence to back up your argument. You do not have to use factual evidence, just be sure it’s believable and adds to your argument.
* Focus on convincing the reader of your argument and show them you understand the three perspectives.
* See Mrs. Forrester’s Planning template, attached
* Take practice writing tests. Learn how to write a complete paper in 30 minutes. Prompts may be found online or in an ACT review book.

- Create a SIMPLE outline to stay on point & so you won’t forget points

- Spend time brainstorming before you start writing

- Papers should follow this format- expect a 5 paragraph essay:

 Introduction

First point

Refute the opposition

Second point

Conclusion

- Discuss each perspective- don’t restate the prompt but fully address what it’s asking. Refute the ones that you don’t agree with, support the one you do, use specific evidence. Quote someone famous- they won’t check and see if they really said it. Write the ACT way not the AP way.

- Whether you agree with the argument or not, choose the side you have the most ideas/points/evidence to support. Stick to your idea/thesis- don’t get lost in your essay.

- Don’t be wishy-washy or too emotional with your argument- be sure to pick a side and adequately defend it. Don’t qualify!

- Write confidently and strongly, this helps make your argument.

- Use actual and concrete examples and relate to the real world.

- Writing is not graded on style, they are looking for content. Using big words **correctly** is a bonus but can impact score if they are used incorrectly or in excess.

-Use correct grammar!