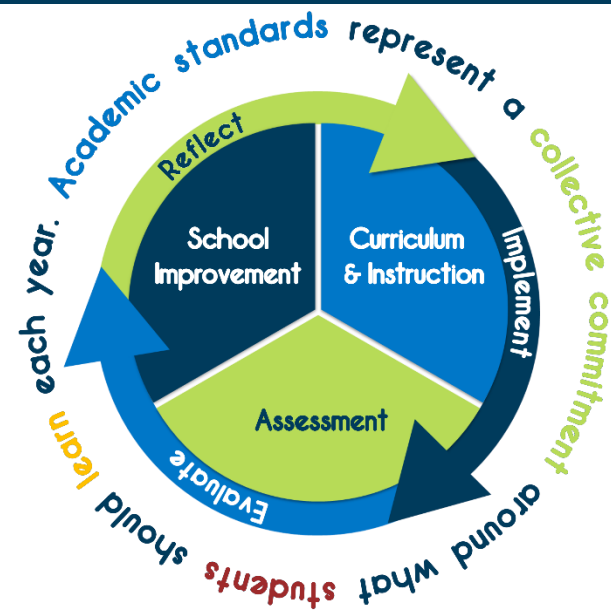


## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS SAMPLE ITEMS

**GRADES 9-11**

### Samples for Success

Sample items provide valuable insight into how students engage with different texts, tasks, and contexts, highlighting the types of opportunities they need for success in the classroom. These items offer a shared reference point for understanding proficiency expectations, complementing the assessment's role in measuring learning. By analyzing items alongside performance data, educators can gain a deeper understanding of students' strengths and areas for growth. Students thrive in environments rich with diverse materials, challenges that vary in task type, and multiple avenues for demonstrating understanding. High-quality instruction, aligned with the learning goals, is the most effective way to support students' growth and prepare them for success.



The ACT® English language arts (ELA) score measures overall performance on the ACT English, reading, and writing tests. The ELA score weights the English, reading, and writing scores approximately equally and is therefore reported only for students who take all three tests.

The sample items below correspond to skills and knowledge expected at each performance level as described in the ELA performance level descriptors.

## THE ACT READING CONTENT DESCRIPTION

### Item tally and time:

The ACT reading test is a 40-item, 35-minute test.

### Concept:

The test measures a student's ability to read closely, reason about texts using evidence, and integrate information from multiple sources.

### Knowledge and skills tested:

The test measures knowledge areas and related skills reflected in the reporting categories for this test (further described in a table on the next page):

- **Key Ideas and Details:** Students read texts closely to determine central ideas and themes; summarize information and ideas accurately; and read closely to understand relationships and draw logical inferences and conclusions, including understanding sequential, comparative, and cause-effect relationships.
- **Craft and Structure:** Students determine word and phrase meanings, analyze an author's word choice rhetorically, analyze text structure, understand authorial purpose and perspective, and analyze characters' points of view. They interpret authorial decisions rhetorically and differentiate between various perspectives and sources of information.
- **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:** Students understand authors' claims, differentiate between facts and opinions, and use evidence to make connections between different texts that are related by topic. Some items will require students to analyze how authors construct arguments, evaluating reasoning and evidence from various sources.

### Format and item types:

The test consists of four sections, each containing a passage or pair of passages accompanied by a sequence of multiple-choice test items.

- Passages in the reading test include both literary narratives and informational texts from the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences.

Grades 9-11 – Claim 1: Key Ideas and details (Reading)

Below Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
<p>Associated text, <i>My Documents</i> (p. 9 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>Based on the passage, Portillo can best be described as a boss who was mostly:</p> <p><b>A.</b> kind and caring, unless he caught the narrator sleeping.  <b>B.</b> abrasive and distant, though he asked little of the narrator.  <b>C. friendly and generous, requiring that the narrator meet simple standards.</b>  <b>D.</b> boisterous and fun, though he had exacting standards.</p> <p>Based on the passage, Juan Emilio says that the world “sometimes seems so strange nowadays, so different” (lines 74–75) while thinking about:</p> <p><b>A.</b> contemporary Paris.  <b>B. modern-day parenthood.</b>  <b>C.</b> changes in health care.  <b>D.</b> doctoral programs.</p>	<p>Associated text, <i>My Documents</i> (p. 9 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>The passage indicates that what the narrator remembers most about Portillo is Portillo’s:</p> <p><b>A.</b> pompous nature.  <b>B.</b> managerial style.  <b>C.</b> distinctive clothes.  <b>D. high-pitched voice.</b></p> <p>Associated text, <i>Built to Last</i> (p. 7 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>According to the passage, Jackson believes that the Romans’ process of formulating their unique mortar recipe involved:</p> <p><b>A.</b> specialized training.  <b>B.</b> sheer luck.  <b>C. careful experimentation.</b>  <b>D.</b> unfortunate accidents.</p>	<p>Associated text, <i>Built to Last</i> (p. 7 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>The main point of the eighth paragraph (lines 71–79) is that, by documenting aspects of the maritime concrete industry, the ROMACONS project has helped reveal:</p> <p><b>A.</b> proof that the Roman civilization invented concrete.  <b>B.</b> the presence of pozzolana along the coast near Baia.  <b>C. new information about Roman trade across the Mediterranean.</b>  <b>D.</b> evidence that the Romans built ports throughout the Bay of Naples.</p> <p>Associated text, <i>Apollo’s Angels: A History of Ballet</i> (p. 11 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>Based on the passage, which of the following statements best summarizes the “paradoxical injunction” mentioned in the first paragraph?</p> <p><b>A.</b> Ballet is known for its rigid constraints, yet dancers are told to improvise steps when performing.  <b>B.</b> Dancers are not taught ballet’s history, yet they are expected to perform traditional ballets.  <b>C. Ballet is marked by its connection to history, yet dancers are told to focus on the present.</b>  <b>D.</b> Dancers are encouraged to choreograph new ballets, yet only traditional ballets are produced onstage.</p>	<p>Associated text, <i>Seven Elements That Change the World: An Adventure of Ingenuity and Discovery</i> Form D (p. 8 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>According to the passage, transistors’ size, cost, and power requirements are significant because these qualities:</p> <p><b>A.</b> demonstrate the accuracy of the predictions of Shockley and his team.  <b>B.</b> vindicate the proponents of silicon semiconductors.  <b>C.</b> compensate for the relatively low speed of transistors’ switching functions.  <b>D. allow a large number of interconnected transistors to be contained in one computer.</b></p> <p>Associated text, <i>Notes from a Wedding</i>, Form C (p. 4 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>One theme of the passage is that:</p> <p><b>A. one’s previous experiences and pursuits can be useful in achieving success.</b>  <b>B.</b> talent is the most important factor in achieving success in both business and music.  <b>C.</b> recognizing one’s limitations is necessary in overcoming one’s failures.  <b>D.</b> pursuing one’s dreams should take precedence over more practical matters.</p>

## Grades 9-11 – Claim 2: Craft and Structure (Reading)

Below Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
<p>Associated text, <i>My Documents</i> (p. 9 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>The point of view from which the passage is told is best described as that of a first-person narrator who:</p> <p><b>A.</b> used to work with Portillo and Juan Emilio.  <b>B.</b> heard about Portillo from Juan Emilio, who was his close friend.  <b>C. worked with Portillo and interacted with Juan Emilio over the phone.</b>  <b>D.</b> became acquainted with Portillo and Juan Emilio through his teaching job.</p> <p>Associated text, <i>Pinch Hitter</i> (p. 5-6 of ACT Reading Texts)  As it is used in line 81, the word <i>free</i> most nearly means:</p> <p><b>A.</b> independent  <b>B.</b> immodest  <b>C.</b> discrete  <b>D. relaxed</b></p>	<p>Associated text, <i>Notes from a Wedding</i> (p. 4 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>The main purpose of the passage is to:</p> <p><b>A.</b> explain why Holmes's musical tastes gradually changed over time.  <b>B.</b> describe how Holmes's hectic professional life affects his personal life.  <b>C.</b> highlight the different instruments Holmes mastered in becoming a famous musician.  <b>D. document how Holmes eventually became an enterprising bandleader.</b></p> <p>Associated text, <i>Rough Water</i> Form B (p. 1 of ACT Reading Texts)  The narrator of the passage can best be described as a swimmer who primarily:</p> <p><b>A. recalls the swim of his life and the factors that motivated him during that swim.</b>  <b>B.</b> remembers the events that inspired him to participate in a time trial at the Junior Nationals.  <b>C.</b> contrasts the joy of winning competitions early in the season with his later struggles to succeed.  <b>D.</b> chronicles his swimming career, from childhood through high school.</p>	<p>Associated text, <i>Photography Changes How Cultural Groups Are Represented and Perceived</i> (p. 13 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>Which of the following actions referred to in the passage most clearly characterizes a hypothetical event rather than an actual event?</p> <p><b>A.</b> "Traveled to" (line 17)  <b>B.</b> "Defend" (line 18)  <b>C.</b> "Farmed" (line 72)  <b>D. "Stand next to" (line 83)</b></p> <p>Which of the following rhetorical techniques does the author repeatedly use in the passage as a means to engage the reader?</p> <p><b>A.</b> Fortright attacks on what he labels as readers' misunderstanding of basic historical fact.  <b>B. Open-ended questions and appeals directed to readers</b>  <b>C.</b> Direct quotations from past readers of his work that capture their responses to his ideas  <b>D.</b> Descriptions of his own experiences as a citizen of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation of Oklahoma</p>	<p>Associated text, <i>Pinch Hitter</i> (p. 5-6 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>In the passage, lines 20–77 can most nearly be described as reflecting the perspective of:</p> <p><b>A.</b> a young girl recalling the moment her mother met Jackie Robinson.  <b>B.</b> a young girl recounting an exciting moment during her first summer in New York.  <b>C.</b> an adult woman telling her daughter about an important moment in her life.  <b>D. an adult woman telling a story she has heard many times.</b></p> <p>Associated text, <i>Plate Tectonics Spotted on Europa</i> Form E (p. 12 of ACT Reading Texts)  In Passage B, the author mentions a torn photograph most likely to:</p> <p><b>A.</b> help illustrate Europa's jagged landscape before plate tectonics emerged there.  <b>B.</b> clarify that Kattenhorn and Prockter needed to tear the images they were studying in order to replicate Europa's surface fractures.  <b>C. help portray the fractures on Europa's surface that intrigued Kattenhorn and Prockter.</b>  <b>D.</b> reveal that the images NASA's Galileo took of Europa's surface fractures were somewhat flawed.</p>

Grades 9-11 – Claim 3: Integration of Knowledge (Reading)

Below Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
<p>Associated texts, Passage A adapted from the memoir <i>The Piano Shop on the Left Bank</i>; Passage B adapted from the article “Me and My Violin” (p. 2-3 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>Compared to Passage A, Passage B is more directly focused on the:</p> <p><b>A.</b> damage a musician can do to an instrument.</p> <p><b>B.</b> characteristics of an instrument that give clues to its history.</p> <p><b>C. interdependence between musician and instrument.</b></p> <p><b>D.</b> Benefits of making instruments available to young children.</p> <p>*Only one sample is available in this score-range and domain.</p>	<p>Associated texts, Passage A adapted from the memoir <i>The Piano Shop on the Left Bank</i>; Passage B adapted from the article “Me and My Violin” (p. 2-3 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>Which of the following assertions about instruments is most strongly supported by details provided in both Passage A and Passage B?</p> <p><b>A. Familiarity with your instrument is an important part of the joy of playing music.</b></p> <p><b>B.</b> Instruments should be revered and never treated like furniture.</p> <p><b>C.</b> Selling your instrument shows disrespect for the music you have made together.</p> <p><b>D.</b> Maintaining proper humidity levels is essential to preserving an instrument.</p> <p>Associated text, <i>On the Map: A Mind-Expanding Exploration of the Way the World Looks</i> (p. 10 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>The author’s central claim is that the depiction of California as an island was an error that mapmakers:</p> <p><b>A.</b> knew about and ignored.</p> <p><b>B.</b> should have caught.</p> <p><b>C. spread for centuries.</b></p> <p><b>D.</b> hoped would inspire exploration of North America.</p>	<p>Associated text, <i>Built to Last</i> (p. 7 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>Based on the passage, the statement that Roman maritime concrete gets stronger over time can best be categorized as:</p> <p><b>A. a fact supported by Jackson’s analysis of Roman maritime concrete’s physical characteristics and material makeup.</b></p> <p><b>B.</b> a fact that the passage author presents as a result of his own research on Roman maritime concrete.</p> <p><b>C.</b> an opinion of Jackson’s that has yet to be tested by the ROMACONS team.</p> <p><b>D.</b> an opinion of the passage author’s that is supported by Oleson’s and Jackson’s remarks about Roman maritime concrete.</p> <p>Associated texts, Passage A adapted from the memoir <i>The Piano Shop on the Left Bank</i>; Passage B adapted from the article “Me and My Violin” (p. 2-3 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>In contrast to the way the pianos are described in Passage A, the passage author’s violin in Passage B is described as:</p> <p><b>A.</b> exhibiting unique characteristics.</p> <p><b>B. having an active personality of its own.</b></p> <p><b>C.</b> sustaining damage from careless children.</p> <p><b>D.</b> being important to daily life.</p>	<p>Associated text, <i>Built to Last</i> (p. 7 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>Which of the following pieces of evidence does Oleson use to support the idea that the ash used in Roman maritime concrete was exported throughout the empire?</p> <p><b>A. The ash was found in ports in Caesarea and Alexandria.</b></p> <p><b>B.</b> The ash was named for Pozzuoli, the town where it was originally used.</p> <p><b>C.</b> The ash makes up parts of the coastline throughout the Bay of Naples.</p> <p><b>D.</b> The ash had been used for port construction in Greece.</p> <p>Associated texts, Passage A “<i>Weird Wet Worlds: Why Earth Is Lucky to Have Oceans</i>”; Passage B <i>Plate Tectonics Spotted on Europa</i> Form E (p. 12 of ACT Reading Texts)</p> <p>The functions of the first paragraph of Passage A and the third paragraph of Passage B (lines 57–61) are similar in that both paragraphs:</p> <p><b>A. use other planetary bodies to highlight the uniqueness of Earth or Europa.</b></p> <p><b>B.</b> introduce the discovery of plate tectonics on Earth or Europa.</p> <p><b>C.</b> contrast previous discoveries of volcanic activity with newer discoveries of tectonic plates.</p> <p><b>D.</b> explain how various planetary bodies lost their surface water.</p>

## Grades 9-11 – Claim 4: Written Expression (Writing)

### THE ACT WRITING CONTENT DESCRIPTION

Students respond to a prompt designed to elicit evidence of core thinking and writing competencies. This includes the ability to engage critically with a complex issue and multiple perspectives on it.

- o Each prompt begins by describing a contemporary issue that is relevant and accessible to students.
- o The prompt also offers three different viewpoints on the issue.
- o Students are asked to establish a perspective on the given issue and relate their perspective to at least one other.
  - Students may adopt one of the perspectives given in the prompt as their own, or they may introduce one that is completely different from those given.

Two trained raters independently score the ACT writing test. Each rater provides a rating (ranging from 1 to 6) for each of the four writing domains. For each domain, the rater scores are then summed to obtain the four domain scores, which range from 2 to 12. The four domain scores appear on student score reports along with a writing score (which is calculated as the average of the four domain scores).

Reporting Category (Rubric Domain)	Number of Points	Percentage of Test
Ideas and Analysis	2–12	25%
Development and Support	2–12	25%
Organization	2–12	25%
Language Use and Convention	2–12	25%

See [ACT Writing Essay Prompts & Examples](#) to view sample writing prompts, student essays, and annotated scoring.

### THE ACT ENGLISH CONTENT DESCRIPTION

Four scores are reported for the ACT English test—a total test score based on all 75 items and the three reporting category scores. The English test puts the student in the position of a writer who makes decisions to revise and edit a text. The test measures knowledge areas and related skills reflected in the reporting categories for this test (further described in a table on the next page):


- **Production of Writing:** Students apply their understanding of the rhetorical purpose and focus of a piece of writing to develop a topic effectively. They use various strategies to achieve logical organization, topical unity, and cohesion.
- **Knowledge of Language:** Students demonstrate effective language use by ensuring precision and concision in word choice and maintaining consistency in style and tone.
- **Conventions of Standard English:** Students apply their understanding of the conventions of Standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics to revise and edit text.

### Format and item types:

The test consists of five passages, each accompanied by a sequence of multiple-choice test items.

- Different passage types are used to provide a variety of rhetorical situations.
- Students must use the rich context of the passage to make editorial choices, demonstrating their understanding of writing strategies and conventions.
- Passages are chosen not only for their appropriateness in assessing writing and language skills but also to reflect students' interests and experiences.



Below Proficient	Approaching Proficient	Proficient	Above Proficient
<p><b>1</b> </p> <p>At Edinburgh's Filmhouse Cinema, a three-dimensional sculpted scene shows patrons sitting in a movie theater as horse leaps out of the screen. At the Scottish Storytelling Centre, a dragon crafted from the pages of a mystery novel was found nesting in a window. At the National Museum of Scotland, a paper tail was spotted emerging from the spine of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's book <i>The Lost World</i>. Inside, a dinosaur charges through shredded pages of the open book. More creations appeared at more than a few additional places where literature and artifacts are related to books and writing.</p> <p>5.  <b>A. NO CHANGE</b>  <b>B. movie theaters as horse's leaps</b>  <b>C. a movie theater as horses leap</b>  <b>D. movie theater's as horse leap</b></p> <p>(Usage/Conventions)</p> <p>*Only one sample is available in this score-range and domain.</p>	<p>Today, twenty-nine white lines making more than half a billion encodings possible.</p> <p>[3]</p> <p>To create a bar code scanner, Woodland and Silver adapted technology from an optical movie sound system. Their prototype scanner used a 500-watt bulb, a photomultiplier tube (a device that detects light), and an oscilloscope (a device that translates electronic signals into readable information). Although successful, the concoction was both large and costly. For example, progress stalled until the 1970s, when laser technology (both more compact and less expensive) became available.</p> <p>7.  <b>A. NO CHANGE</b>  <b>B. contraption</b>  <b>C. substance</b>  <b>D. stuff</b></p> <p>(Knowledge of Language)</p> <p>8.  <b>A. NO CHANGE</b>  <b>B. As a result,</b>  <b>C. However,</b>  <b>D. Even so,</b></p> <p>(Production of Writing)</p>	<p>[3]</p> <p>Verna authored several books about his broadcasting career. Videotapes could not be cued precisely; there was no way to find a particular moment in the footage.</p> <p>Verna's use of a system of multiple videotape decks, solved this problem. [B] At the start and stop of each play, he would transmit beeps to an unused audio track on the recording. These beeps would bookmark moments of action. Verna could then rewind the tape, listen for the beeps, and restart the play at the chosen spot.</p> <p>66. Which choice best introduces the main focus of the paragraph?  <b>A. NO CHANGE</b>  <b>B. Though instant replay was first used in football, other sports soon adopted the technology.</b>  <b>C. Officials were new to the technology.</b>  <b>D. The technology, however, was limited.</b></p> <p>(Production of Writing)</p> <p>68.  <b>A. NO CHANGE</b>  <b>B. start, and stop, of each play</b>  <b>C. start and stop, of each play</b>  <b>D. start and stop of each play</b></p> <p>(Punctuation Conventions)</p>	<p>Step outside into blowing snow, freezing fog, 45 mph winds with hurricane-force gusts, and a -50° Fahrenheit windchill. Welcome to a typical January day at the Mount Washington Observatory. [A] Weather conditions at this facility, which sits atop its namesake's 6,288-foot peak in New Hampshire, has earned the location the nickname "Home of the World's Worst Weather."</p> <p>[2]</p> <p>[B] Though somewhat diminutive compared to other mountains, (Colorado's Pikes Peak, for example, is more than twice its height), Mount Washington is the tallest peak in the Presidential Range. The peak stands at the confluence of three major storm tracks,</p> <p>47.  <b>A. NO CHANGE</b>  <b>B. Hampshire, have earned</b>  <b>C. Hampshire has earned</b>  <b>D. Hampshire, earns</b></p> <p>(Usage/Conventions)</p> <p>48.  <b>A. NO CHANGE</b>  <b>B. mountains (Colorado's Pikes Peak,</b>  <b>C. mountains, (Colorado's Pikes Peak</b>  <b>D. mountains (Colorado's Pikes Peak</b></p> <p>(Punctuation Conventions)</p>