

Alberta Communication Test (ACT) Candidate Brochure

General Information about the ACT

Q1. What does the ACT measure?

A1. The portions of the ACT that police applicants must take are designed to assess one's ability to communicate in writing in English. In particular, the test focuses on vocabulary, spelling, and English grammar.

Q2. How many questions are there?

A2. The test is comprised of 134 multiple-choice questions.

Q3. How long will it take to write the ACT?

A3. It will take approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes to complete (including instructions and breaks).

Q4. What do I need to do to prepare for the test?

A4. The ability to communicate in writing is something that can be improved over time with proper instruction and plenty of practice. You may consider reviewing English grammar rules, as found in a typical grade 12 text book (we do not recommend any particular book for this purpose – check with your local library or any good bookstore). Developing vocabulary and spelling ability takes time. Reading well-written contemporary material (e.g., newspaper articles, magazines, etc.) to develop your vocabulary, and practicing spelling words from this material, are some of the things that you may choose to do to prepare for the ACT.

Q5. How do I arrange to take the test?

A5. If you need to write the ACT as part of the application process for a particular police agency, that agency will inform you of where and when you can write the ACT.

Sample Test Questions

The ACT includes questions that measure three different areas: (1) vocabulary; (2) spelling skills; and (3) English grammar. Following are 12 sample questions that are similar to the questions found in the test. After each question, the best response is identified along with a brief rationale.

Choose the word or group of words that means the same, or about the same, as the underlined words.

1. To invade is to –

- a. deceive b. breach c. impair d. abuse

Option “b”, “breach”, is the closest in meaning to the underlined word “invade”, and so it is the correct answer.

2. Incentive means –

- a. correction b. dilemma c. enticement d. interest

The word “enticement” is the closest in meaning to the underlined word, “incentive”, and therefore, option “c” is the correct answer.

3. The vehement actions of the suspect required that he be handcuffed. Vehement means –

- a. evasive b. confusing c. erratic d. determined

Option “d” is the correct answer as the word “determined” is the closest in meaning to the underlined word “vehement”.

4. The condition of the car after the accident made it difficult to extract the victim.

In which sentence does the word condition mean the same thing as in the sentence above?

- a. The condition that there is no overtime pay is unacceptable.
b. He will need two months to recuperate, given his condition.
c. We must condition new recruits to act responsibly.
d. The house was in bad condition after the tornado struck.

Option “d” is the correct response, as “condition” in this sentence refers to how badly something is damaged or in disrepair, in this instance a house. This is the same meaning as is used in the original sentence where a car was damaged. Option “a” is not correct, as “condition” in this sentence refers to a factor or rule, which is not the way “condition” was used in the original sentence. Option “c” can be ruled out as well, as “condition” in this sentence refers to training people. In option “b”, “condition” refers to an illness or injury. This is closer in meaning than options “a” or “c” to how “condition” was used in the original sentence. However, it is not as close in meaning as option “d”.

Find the word that is *not* spelled correctly.

5. a. provide b. comon c. quarter d. revenue

The word that is misspelled is “comon”. The correct spelling is “common”. The other three options are spelled correctly. Consequently, you would choose option “b” on the answer sheet.

6. a. exercise b. magazine c. autopsy d. offisial

In this item, the word “offisial” is incorrectly spelled. The correct spelling is “official”. The other three options are spelled correctly.

7. a. neccessary b. intoxicant c. offence d. identity

The word that is misspelled is “neccessary”. The correct spelling is “necessary”. The other three options are spelled correctly.

Look at the underlined word in each phrase. Find the word that is not spelled correctly for the way it is used in the phrase.

8. a. to rap up the case
b. healing time for an injury
c. tie a knot in the rope
d. hours after the incident

In option “a” the underlined word “rap” is misspelled for the way it is used here. The proper spelling is “wrap”. The underlined words in the other options are all spelled appropriately for the way they are used.

Read each sentence. Decide which word or group of words belongs in the blank.

10. The report is due next _____.
- Tuesday, not wednesday.
 - tuesday. Not Wednesday.
 - Tuesday, not Wednesday.
 - Tuesday. Not Wednesday.

Options "a" and "b" can be ruled out as the days of the week must always be capitalized. Of the remaining options, "c" is better than "d". In option "d", "Not Wednesday." is not a sentence on its own, as it has no subject or verb. Option "c" adds this phrase to the end of the sentence, separated from the first part of the sentence with a comma. Therefore, option "c" is the correct response, as it presents the best option of the four possible answers.

11. The witness stated that two cars _____ in the accident.
- has been involved
 - will involve
 - was involved
 - were involved

Option "a" is not correct as it uses a singular tense (that is, for one car) rather than a plural tense (for two or more cars). Option "b" is not correct, as it uses a future tense, and because we know that the witness "stated", we are dealing with the past. Option "c" refers to the past. However, like option "a", option "c" also uses a singular form. Option "d" is the correct response, as it refers to the past and uses the plural form "were involved".

For each question, decide which sentence is written clearly and correctly.

12.
 - Two men started to shout and raise their voices and bellow at one another.
 - It became apparent that if someone did not step in to stop the fight.
 - As the police arrived, one of the men began to run down the alley.
 - They caught him and he was arrested and the other man got away.

Option "a" is not well written, as it needlessly repeats what the two men were doing (i.e., shouting; raising their voices; and bellowing). Using one of these three options would be sufficient, "Two men started to shout at one another." Option "b" is not a sentence. The "if" requires that there be a phrase added to the end, such as, "someone would get hurt". Option "c" is properly written, and therefore, is the correct answer. Option "d" is a "run-on" sentence, in that it presents three independent ideas: (1) They caught him. (2) He was arrested. (3) The other man got away. A better way to present these three ideas is to break them into two sentences, "When they caught him, he was arrested. The other man got away."

13. a. The first day of class was confusing and did not make much sense.
b. In reading the instructions, the chalkboard had not been cleaned properly.
c. We did not have enough time for the exercise, and so we completed it.
d. Everyone was completely exhausted by the end of the day.

Option “a” is not well written. The two phrases, “was confusing” and “did not make much sense” are repetitive. Only one of the two phrases should be used. Option “b” is incorrect, as it implies that the chalkboard was reading the instructions – an unlikely situation. Option “c” is not well written as the final phrase, “and so we completed it” does not follow logically from the first phrase, “We did not have enough time for the exercise”. Option “d” is properly written, and therefore, is the correct answer.

Test Writing Tips and Techniques

Get a good night’s sleep. Writing a test such as the ACT is mentally challenging to do. No one can perform at their best if they are tired. Therefore, the night before you write the test, get to bed on time so that you are well rested. It will not guarantee that you will do well on the test, but it will increase the chances that you will do your best.

Budget your time. To ensure you do not run out of time, at the start of each subtest make note of the time, and determine approximately how much time you have per question. For example, in the Vocabulary subtest, there are 40 questions and the time limit is 25 minutes. Therefore, you will have a little less than 1 minute per question. With this in mind, if you end up spending 2 minutes on one question, you know that you will have to make up that time by answering other questions more quickly. It is also useful to determine how many questions you should have completed by certain time points. For example, if the subtest begins at 9:00 a.m. you will be half way through the allotted time at 9:12 a.m. (i.e., 12 minutes is just less than half of 25.). If you are on pace to complete all the questions in the subtest, you should have completed approximately half of the test questions by that time. The ACT Vocabulary subtest has 40 questions in total. Therefore, if you have completed fewer than 20 questions by half time, you know that you will have to increase your pace somewhat in order to have sufficient time to complete all the questions in the subtest.

Read instructions, test questions, and answer options carefully. When writing the test, take the time to read the instructions, the test questions, and each answer option carefully before recording your response. Do not settle for the first option that appears to be “correct”. There may be a better option provided amongst the choices. Read all options prior to choosing that which you believe to be the best.

Eliminate the options you know are wrong. For some questions, you may not be sure of the correct or best response. However, you may be able to rule out some of the response options. If so, you will then have a better chance of guessing the correct or best response amongst the remaining options you could not rule out. Therefore, if you do not know which response is the correct or best one, rule out those options that are clearly wrong, and then guess amongst those options remaining.

Ensure you record your responses in the correct place on the answer sheet. Make sure that you get credit for the questions for which you know the answers. If you know the right answer but incorrectly record it on the answer sheet, you will not get credit for it. Take your time to ensure you record your answers in the appropriate spaces on the answer sheet. If in doubt as to where to record your answers, check with the person administering the test. Periodically, while writing the test, double-check that you are recording your responses in the correct places. If you have any time left at the end, use that time to double-check your responses. (You do not get extra marks for completing the test early.)

Answer all questions. For the ACT test, no marks are taken away for incorrectly answering a question. Therefore, if you are about to run out of time and you still have 20 questions left, you are better off answering them quickly even if you are simply guessing. The reason is that if you leave the 20 questions blank, you will get 0 marks for those 20 questions. However, if you answer all 20, you are likely to get at least some of the questions right just by chance alone. Therefore, if a test does not penalize for incorrect answers (and the ACT does not), it is to your advantage to answer all questions before submitting your answer sheet, even if you have to guess at some questions.

It is OK to be nervous. If you feel nervous before writing a test such as the ACT, that is perfectly normal. Most people feel nervous before writing such a test. Plan to get to the testing site a few minutes early so that you can relax before the test begins.

For more information about the ACT, contact your local police recruiting office.