



How to Prepare for Upcoming Changes in ACT Administration (Information courtesy of a webinar with Jed Applerouth)

The recent announcement that the ACT will begin allowing students to retake individual sections of the exam beginning in September 2020 caught just about everyone by surprise, but the accompanying move to computer-based testing was foreseeable. Concerns about test security have been driving a shift to computer-based testing for decades already, beginning with tests like the GRE in 1997, GMAT in 1998, and MCAT in 2007. This past September the LSAT joined their ranks.

Once students have taken a complete ACT, administered either on paper or computer, they will be eligible to retake one, two, or three of the test's four individual sections on any test date, but these retakes will be available only via computer. How many test sites will be available for computer testing is not yet known, but there's a good chance that initially there may be too few to meet the demand, so students would be wise to register as early as possible. Registration for the September 2020 test will open in July.

Eventually, computer-adaptive testing will mean that no two students take an identical exam, but for the time being the computer and paper versions of the ACT will be identical. Still, students should plan to practice using the computer format for at least a few hours before taking their first test that way. They will want to get used to the special features that enable them to use on the computer some of the strategies they are frequently coached to use on paper.

The features students will want to practice with are Line Reader Masking (covering all but the line they are reading), Answer Masking (so they can figure out their own answer before looking at the options), Answer Tool Eliminating, Magnifying (for use with diagrams), and

Bookmarking (enabling them to quickly bring on screen anything they planned to return to).

Computer-based testing also offers some features that may make some students prefer it to paper-based testing. Besides speeding up the process of flipping back and forth between bookmarked items, the computer-based test has a built-in timer that tells students when they have only five minutes left so they don't have to worry about a proctor's remembering to do so. Perhaps best of all, scores for all sections except the essay will be available in two business days. That means students may have an additional test administration to obtain new scores in time for their application deadlines.

Students with learning differences who are entitled to time-and-a-half will be able to take the computerized test that way although computer-based testing will not be available initially for students entitled to double or triple time. Dyslexic students will be able to use a color contrast function as well as text-to-speech technology. They will most likely enjoy the latter greatly, as they will be able to adjust its speed and replay passages as many times as they wish without the embarrassment they may feel about requesting that a live reader do so.

One caveat: although the ACT's new policy will promote superscoring (taking the highest score for each section of the exam across multiple test administrations), it is not clear that all colleges will accept it. There was a time not too long ago that many colleges would superscore the SAT but not the ACT. That has been changing steadily, but students will still need to investigate the requirements of the specific schools where they are applying. Obviously, if a school doesn't superscore the ACT, there is no advantage to the applicant of retaking individual sections of the exam.