

## What the ACT Expects You to Know

The ACT tests the following subjects:

**English:** The ACT expects you to know the fundamentals of grammar, usage, punctuation, diction, and rhetorical skills. For example, you must understand sentence construction — what makes a run-on and what makes a fragment. You need to know how to distinguish between commonly confused words, like affect and effect or principal and principle. You must be able to use the proper forms of words, distinguishing between an adjective and an adverb, and you must know the difference between a comma and a semicolon.

**Mathematics:** The ACT requires basic skills in arithmetic, geometry, and algebra. If you've had two semesters of algebra, two semesters of geometry, and a general math background, you have all the math you need to answer about 90 percent of the questions. Unfortunately, the ACT also tests a little bit of trigonometry. If you haven't had trigonometry, don't worry. This book gives you the few things you need to know. The test has only a few trig questions (usually just four), and they're often so close to the end that you may not even get to them anyway (although you should definitely guess on them before time is called). Trig should be the least of your worries. Oh, and you don't have to know calculus. The ACT has no calculus questions. Happy day!

**Reading:** The ACT expects you to be able to read a passage in a relatively short amount of time and answer questions based on it. Your reading skills are probably pretty set by now. If you're 17, you're not going to change the way you've been reading for the past 12 years. However, this fact doesn't mean you can't improve your ACT Reading score. Chapter 13 shows you a few tricks you can use to improve your speed and tells you how to recognize and avoid traps built into the questions.

**Science:** You don't have to have any specific science background to ace the Science Test. The passages may test chemistry, biology, botany, physics, or any other science, but you don't have to have had those courses. The test gives you all the information you need to answer the science questions in the passages, diagrams, charts, and tables.

**Writing (optional):** The ACT folks added this optional section to test your writing ability (an extremely important component for college success). Don't worry! You've been writing for

years, and the ACT people know that you can't possibly write a perfect essay in a measly 30 minutes. They're not focusing on perfection; instead, they're looking at your thesis, your organization, and your ability to support your thoughts. The ACT doesn't require you to write the essay, but we suggest that you do. Quite a few colleges require the essay, and taking the ACT Plus Writing will assure that you meet their requirements. (If you're also submitting SAT scores, however, you don't need to take the ACT Writing Test because the required essay on the SAT meets the college requirement.)