The Simple ACT® Enhanced English Knowledge of Language Cheat Sheet

Knowledge of Language at a Glance

What's Tested

Knowledge of Language = 18–23% of ACT English (~7–9 of the 40 scored Qs). Skills: **precision** (right word), **concision** (fewest words), **style & tone**.

Format: 50 Qs in 35 min. Choices are often all grammatical: pick the clearest, tightest one.

Spot a KoL Question

You see...	Skill tested
Same idea, diff. lengths	Concision
Synonyms as choices	Precision
Slang vs. formal	Tone
Choice repeats a word	Redundancy
"Most precise" stem	Precision
"Consistent w/ tone"	Style & tone

Read the stem 1st: every Q has one, and it names the skill. Then compare the choices.

NO CHANGE

NO CHANGE (A): a real option, not a trap. Pick it only if every other choice is worse.

3-Step Method

1. Read the whole sentence. **2. Cut** choices w/ errors, repeats, or wrong tone. **3. Pick** the shortest one left that keeps the meaning.

✓ If 2 choices both work, the shorter one usually wins. Test the shortest choice 1st.

⚠ Shortest is wrong if it drops needed meaning or breaks the grammar of the sentence.

Concision: Redundancy

Redundancy = Saying It Twice

Redundancy: saying the same thing twice. The repeat is often outside the underline.

Redundant	Concise
Past history	History
Free gift	Gift
End result	Result
Repeat again	Repeat
Return back	Return
Each and every	Each
Unexpected surprise	Surprise
Combine together	Combine
Completely unanimous	Unanimous
Revert back	Revert

Hidden Repeats

Time repeats: "In 1925, *at that time*, the town..." → cut "at that time." Say the date once.

Modifier repeats: "tiny, *small* seeds" → "tiny seeds." "*very* unique" → "unique."

Restated clause: "She was exhausted, *and she felt very tired*." → stop at "exhausted."

Cause repeats: "The reason is *because*..." → "The reason is that..." or just "because."

⚠ Read past the underline: the repeat is often hiding in the next few words of the sentence.

✓ Cross the phrase out. No meaning lost → it was redundant, so DELETE or the shortest wins.

Concision: Wordiness

Wordy → Tight

Wordy	Concise
In order to	To
Due to the fact that	Because
At this point in time	Now
In the event that	If
Has the ability to	Can
For the purpose of	To
A large number of	Many
With regard to	About
In a quick manner	Quickly

Wordy Structures

Weak verb + noun → strong verb: "made a decision" → "decided"; "gave an explanation" → "explained"; "reached an agreement" → "agreed."

Passive voice: "The ball was thrown by Ana" → "Ana threw the ball." Active is shorter.

Empty openers: "There are many students who..." → "Many students..." Cut the filler.

Which/that clauses: "the dog that was brown" → "the brown dog." Fewer words, same idea.

DELETE / OMIT Choices

OMIT the underlined portion: right if the sentence still works and nothing key is lost.

✓ Always test DELETE 1st; it's often right.

⚠ Don't DELETE if it leaves a fragment or cuts info the next sentence needs to make sense.

Precision: Exact Word Choice

Specific Beats Vague

Precision: the word that says exactly what the writer means. Vague words (thing, good, a lot) are rarely right on the ACT English test.

Vague	Precise (context)
Went (to the top)	Climbed
Said (angrily)	Snapped
Good (results)	Accurate
Big (impact)	Significant
Things (in a lab)	Samples
A lot of (rain)	Heavy

Connotation

Connotation: a word's feeling. **thrifty** (+), **frugal** (neutral), **stingy** (−). Match the writer's attitude.

Denotation: dictionary meaning. **Infer** = conclude; **imply** = suggest. Don't mix them up.

Context decides: a "cold" welcome = unfriendly.

Vague Pronouns

Unclear "this" or "it": swap in a specific noun. "This shows..." → "This drop in sales shows..."

Precision Q Types

"Most specific": pick the most concrete detail that still fits. **"Most vivid"**: strong verb + sensory detail, in the same tone as the passage.

⚠ Fancy ≠ precise. "Utilize" is not better than "use"; a big word that doesn't fit is a trap.

✓ Plug each choice into the sentence and reread.

Precision: Confusable Words

Commonly Confused Pairs

Word	Meaning	Partner
Affect	Verb	Effect = noun
Than	Compare	Then = time
Accept	Receive	Except = but
Allude	Hint at	Elude = escape
Principal	Main	Principle = rule
Eminent	Famous	Imminent = soon
Fewer	Countable	Less = amount
Among	3+ things	Between = 2
Further	More	Farther = distance
Elicit	Draw out	Illicit = illegal

Word Form

Adjective vs. adverb: "She ran *quick*" → "quickly."

Could/would/should have, never "of."

Who = people; **which** = things. "The team *which* won" → "the team *that* won" (a group of people).

Idiomatic Phrases

Idioms: fixed pairs. **capable of**, **interested in**, **different from**, **regard as**, **comply with**.

Idiom traps: "capable *to*," "in regards to" → **regarding**; "irregardless" → **regardless**.

⚠ Affect = Action (verb); Effect = End result (noun). "The rain affected the game's effect."

✓ Read each pair slowly: 1 letter can flip the meaning (accept/except, then/than).

Then vs. than: "taller *then* me" → "taller than me." Than compares; then = a time or next step.

Style & Tone: Consistency

Match the Passage

Tone: writer's attitude. **Style**: how it's written (formal, casual). Your choice must match both.

Register: formality. Most ACT passages are **neutral-formal**: no slang, no stiff jargon.

Tone Shifts to Avoid

Find the tone: contractions + jokes = casual; data + citations = formal. Match the passage.

Too casual	Too stiff	Just right
Super cool	Very notable	Remarkable
Kids	Juveniles	Children
Got mad	Became irate	Grew angry
A ton of	A plethora	Many

Slang in a formal essay ("awesome," "guys").

Exaggeration in an objective piece ("the best ever"). Both break the voice of the passage.

Tone Words to Know

Positive	Neutral	Negative
Admiring	Objective	Critical
Nostalgic	Analytical	Dismissive
Enthusiastic	Informative	Skeptical

Tip: name the tone in 1 word before reading the choices, then match it to the passage.

⚠ Don't pick the "smartest" word. Pick the one that matches the passage's tone and meaning.

✓ Read the sentences around the blank to set the tone, then test each choice in place.

Style: Effective Language

Strong Verbs & Nouns

Strong verbs: "walked slowly" → "trudged"; "looked quickly" → "glanced." 1 exact verb beats a weak verb + adverb combo every time.

Concrete nouns: "a problem with the tool" → "a cracked handle." Name the actual thing.

Sensory detail: "smelled good" → "smelled of cinnamon." Sight, sound, smell, touch, taste.

Figurative Language

Metaphor/simile: must fit the subject + tone of the passage; no violent images in calm essays.

Cliché ("at the end of the day"): usually wrong in formal passages; exact wording wins.

Mixed metaphor: 2 clashing images in 1 line. Keep 1 image all the way through the sentence.

Consistent Voice

Keep consistent	Shift error
Point of view	"One... you..."
Formality	Academic → "kinda"
Attitude	Neutral → mocking

Fit the Purpose

Informative: neutral, exact. **Narrative**: vivid, personal OK. **Argument**: confident, not insulting.

Hedging: "may," "suggests" fit science passages. "Proves," "always" overclaim the data.

Sentence Variety

Choppy short sentences → combine them w/ "because" or "although" to show how ideas link.

⚠ A vivid word is wrong if it adds meaning the writer didn't intend ("devoured" vs. "ate").

Strategy & High-Frequency Traps

Elimination Order

Cut in this order: **1. grammar errors**, **2. repeats**, **3. wrong tone**. Then pick the **shortest** clear choice.

Trap Answers

Trap	Why it's wrong
Longest/fanciest	Wordy or stiff
Short but vague	Loses meaning
Synonym repeat	Redundant
Adds new idea	Changes meaning

Worked Example

"The scientists *made an attempt to try* to replicate it." **Answer: tried**. "Attempt" + "try" repeat each other, and DELETE breaks the sentence.

No penalty for wrong answers: never leave a blank, even in the very last minute of the test.

Unsure? Pick the shortest grammatical choice.

Timing: KoL Qs go fast; bank time for harder Qs.

Quick Checks

Ask yourself	If yes →
Said twice?	Cut repeat
Vague word?	Be specific
Sounds like texting?	Too casual
Meaning changed?	Wrong choice

✓ Practice: rewrite your own sentences w/ fewer words; it trains the eye ACT tests.

⚠ Always read the full sentence, not just the underline. Most misses start there.