The Ultimate ACT® Enhanced English Knowledge of Language Cheat Sheet

Knowledge of Language at a Glance

What's Tested

Knowledge of Language = 18–23% of English (~7–9 of the 40 scored Qs). 3 skills: **precision** (right word), **concision** (fewest words), **style & tone** (fits the passage).

Format: 50 Qs, 35 min (~42 sec/Q); 40 scored + 10 unmarked field-test Qs, so treat all as real. Underlined text + 4 choices; choice A is often NO CHANGE.

Not grammar: every choice is often grammatically OK. You pick the one that's clearest, tightest, and fits the tone.

Spot a KoL Question

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

Compare the choices too: whatever differs between the 4 choices = the exact skill being tested.

NO CHANGE

NO CHANGE (A): a real option, not a trap. Pick it only after all 3 other choices fail a check (error, repeat, tone).

Every Q has a stem: read it 1st. "Most concise," "most specific," "maintains tone" names the skill.

3-Step Method

1. Read whole sentence (+ one before) — tone and meaning come from context. **2. Cut** choices w/ errors, repeats, or wrong tone. **3. Pick shortest** left that keeps full meaning.

✓ Default rule: if 2 choices are both correct and clear, the shorter one usually wins on the ACT.

⚠ Shortest ≠ always right. A choice that drops needed meaning or breaks grammar is wrong, however short.

Concision: Redundancy

Redundancy = Saying It Twice

Redundancy: 2+ words carry same meaning. ACT hides the repeat in the *rest* of the sentence, not just the underline.

Redundant	Concise
Past history	History
Free gift	Gift
End result / final outcome	Result / outcome
Repeat again	Repeat
Return back	Return
Each and every	Each (or every)
Unexpected surprise	Surprise
Annually every year	Annually
Completely unanimous	Unanimous
Brief in duration	Brief
Revert back	Revert
Combine together	Combine

Hidden Repeats

Time repeats: "In 1925, *at that time*, the town..." → cut "at that time." **Cause repeats**: "The reason is *because*..." → "The reason is that..." (or just "because...").

Modifier repeats: "tiny, *small* seeds" → "tiny seeds." **Definition repeats**: "a nocturnal owl *that hunts at night*."

Restated clause: "She was exhausted, *and she felt very tired*." → end at "exhausted." Same idea twice.

Doubled qualifiers: "*about* roughly 50," "*might possibly*" → keep one. **Doubled emphasis**: "very unique" → "unique."

⚠ Always read past the underline. The repeat is often in the next 5–10 words, and the right answer is DELETE.

✓ Test it: cross out the phrase. If the sentence loses no meaning, the phrase was redundant.

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
In spite of the fact that	Although
For the purpose of	To / for
Is able to	Can
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."

Passive voice: "The ball was thrown by Ana" → "Ana threw the ball." Prefer active unless the actor is unknown.

Empty openers: "There are many students who..." → "Many students..."; "It is clear that..." → cut it.

Which/that clauses: "the dog that was brown" → "the brown dog"; "a man who is tall" → "a tall man."

Nominalization: "the implementation of the plan" → "implementing the plan." Verbs beat -tion nouns.

DELETE / OMIT Choices

OMIT the underlined portion: test it first. Right if sentence stays complete + nothing essential is lost.

✓ DELETE is right often enough on the ACT that you should test it 1st on every KoL question you see.

⚠ Don't DELETE if it breaks the sentence (fragment) or removes info the next sentence depends on.

Precision: Exact Word Choice

Specific Beats Vague

Precision: the word that says exactly what the writer means in context. Vague words (thing, stuff, good, nice, a lot) are almost never the answer on precision Qs.

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

Connotation

Connotation: feeling a word carries. Synonyms differ: **thrifty** (+), **frugal** (neutral), **stingy** (–). Match writer's attitude.

Denotation: dictionary meaning. A choice can sound right but mean the wrong thing (**infer** = conclude; **imply** = suggest; **continual** = repeated; **continuous** = nonstop).

Context decides: "cold" welcome = unfriendly; "cold" data = objective. Reread the sentence before + after.

Vague Pronouns

Unclear "this," "it," "they": replace w/ a specific noun when 2+ things could be meant. "This shows..." → "This drop in sales shows..." Ambiguous = wrong choice.

Precision Q Types

"Most precise/specific": pick the choice w/ the most concrete detail that still fits. **"Most vivid"**: sensory detail + strong verb, still in the passage's tone.

⚠ Fancy ≠ precise. A long, impressive word that doesn't fit context is a trap (e.g., "utilize" for "use").

✓ Plug each choice into the sentence. The one that changes the meaning least from the writer's intent wins.

Precision: Confusable Words

Commonly Confused Pairs

Word	Meaning	Partner
Affect (v.)	To influence	Effect (n.) result
Than	Comparison	Then = time
Accept	Receive	Except = but
Allude	Hint at	Elude = escape
Complement	Completes	Compliment = praise
Principal	Main / head	Principle = rule
Eminent	Famous	Imminent = soon
Elicit	Draw out	Illicit = illegal
Further	More/extent	Farther = distance
Fewer	Countable	Less = uncountable
Among	3+ things	Between = 2
Lie	Recline	Lay = put (obj.)

Word Form

Adjective vs. adverb: "She ran *quick*" → "quickly" (modifies verb). **Noun vs. verb**: "a *decide*" → "a decision."

Could/would/should have, never "of." **Regardless**, never "irregardless." **Supposed to**, not "suppose to."

Who vs. whom: he → who; him → whom. **Who vs. which**: who = people; which/that = things and groups.

Idiomatic Phrases

Idioms: set word combos. **Capable of**, **interested in**, **comply with**, **differ from**, **prefer X to Y**, **regard as**.

Wrong idiom traps: "capable *to*," "different *than*" (formal ACT: different **from**), "in regards to" → **regarding**.

⚠ Spell-check can't catch these. Read each pair slowly: one letter can flip the meaning (affect/effect).

✓ Memory hook: Affect = Action (verb), Effect = End result (noun). "To effect change" = to bring about.

Style & Tone: Consistency

Match the Passage

Tone: writer's attitude (serious, playful, admiring, critical). **Style**: how it's written (formal, conversational, technical). The right choice must *match* both exactly.

Register: formality level. Most ACT passages are **neutral-formal** (essays, articles). Some memoirs are casual: there, mild informality fits; slang still rarely does.

Find the tone: look at word choice in nearby sentences. Contractions + jokes = casual. Data + citations = formal.

Too casual	Too stiff	Just right
Super cool	Exceedingly notable	Remarkable
Totally failed	Was unsuccessful	Failed
Kids	Juvenile persons	Children
Got mad	Became irate	Grew angry
A ton of	A plethora of	Many

Tone Shifts to Avoid

Slang in a formal essay ("awesome," "guys," "no big deal"). **Exaggeration** in an objective piece ("the greatest discovery ever"). Both break the passage's voice.

Tone Words to Know

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

Tone Q tip: name the tone in 1 word before reading the choices, then match it; cut any that clash.

⚠ Don't choose by what sounds smartest. ACT rewards what matches the passage, not the most elevated word.

✓ Read 2 sentences around the blank to set the tone, then reread the sentence w/ each choice in place.

Style: Effective Language

Strong Verbs & Nouns

Strong verbs carry meaning alone: "walked slowly" → "trudged"; "looked quickly" → "glanced." Cut adverbs that prop up weak verbs; 1 exact verb beats verb + adverb.

Concrete nouns beat abstract ones: "a problem with the tool" → "a cracked handle." Show the thing.

Sensory detail: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. "The kitchen smelled good" → "The kitchen smelled of cinnamon."

Figurative Language

Metaphor/simile: must match the passage's subject + tone. A violent image in a gentle nature essay = wrong.

Cliché ("at the end of the day," "think outside the box"): usually wrong in formal passages; precise wording wins.

Mixed metaphor: 2 clashing images ("a sea of hands took flight"). Keep 1 image consistent all the way.

Consistent Voice

Keep consistent	Shift error
Point of view	"One should... you will..."
Formality	Academic → "kinda"
Attitude	Neutral → mocking
Imagery	Calm scene → "exploded"

Fit the Purpose

Informative: neutral, exact, no opinions. **Narrative**: vivid, sensory, personal OK. **Argument**: confident but not insulting.

Hedging: "may," "suggests," "likely" fit science passages. Overclaiming ("proves," "always") breaks the neutral tone.

Sentence Variety

Choppy: a string of short sentences → combine w/ subordination ("because," "although"). **Run-on** style: break up long chains of "and" so each idea gets its own weight.

⚠ A vivid choice can still be wrong if it adds meaning the writer didn't intend ("devoured" vs. "ate" for a calm meal).

Strategy & High-Frequency Traps

Elimination Order

1. Grammar errors (fragment, wrong word form) → out. **2. Redundant** w/ rest of sentence → out. **3. Tone mismatch** → out. **4. Shortest clear** choice left → pick.

Trap Answers

Trap	Why it's wrong
Longest/fanciest	Wordy or wrong tone
Short but vague	Loses meaning
Synonym repeat	Redundant w/ nearby
Right word, wrong form	Grammar slip
Adds new idea	Changes meaning

Worked Example

"The scientists *made an attempt to try* to replicate the study." Choices: made an attempt to try / tried / attempted to try / DELETE. **Answer: tried** — "attempt" + "try" is redundant; DELETE leaves "scientists to replicate" (broken).

No penalty for wrong answers: never leave a blank. Unsure? Pick the shortest grammatical choice.

Quick Checks

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

✓ Practice: rewrite your own sentences w/ 20% fewer words. It trains the same eye ACT tests.

⚠ Read the full sentence every time. Most KoL misses come from judging the underline alone.

✓ Last check: reread the full sentence w/ your choice in it. It should be correct, clear, short and in the passage's voice.