

ACT: Approaching the Reading Test

[Reading on actstudent.org](http://actstudent.org)

The Reading test includes four reading passages with ten questions each. Standard-time students have 35 minutes for the Reading test, and most students find this section difficult to finish. To finish on time, a student would need to average about 8½ minutes per passage. You will always get one each of four types of passages:

- Prose Fiction
- Humanities
- Social Science
- Natural Science

The passage types will be labeled, and you should always start with the passage types with which you're most comfortable. There's no reason or need to go in order.

Time Strategy (for standard-time students)

Through practice, learn how long it takes you to do ACT reading passages. It is better to do 3 passages well than to do 4 of them hurriedly. Therefore, if you discover that you need more than 9 minutes to do a typical ACT reading passage, focus on doing a great job with three of the passages and stick with guessing and a few rushed answers for the fourth.

How should you do ACT Reading passages?

Very few reading questions on the ACT provide line numbers for reference. Additionally, questions are not asked in order of how the ideas appear in the passage.

Therefore, it is usually not practical to try to answer questions as you go along. Your steps for reading ACT passages and answering questions are as follows:

1. Save the paired passage for last. If you get in a time crunch, that's the best passage to have remaining because you can quickly read and answer questions from one of the passages. In that case, choose the passage about which more questions are asked.
2. When you get to each passage, read any introductory material. Then read the passage for general meaning and structure. As you read, **annotate each paragraph with a 1-2 word summary**. Think of the Cornell note-taking system; this will serve as a guide or index to help you find information as you answer questions.
3. Answer the questions in any order — they aren't in chronological order anyway.
4. The information you need to answer specific questions is typically 2-4 lines before or after the line numbers given to you (if you get them); more generally, it's not always exactly where it seems like it would be. Look a few lines before and after where you think the answer is. The ACT will reward you for being observant and thorough, and not just looking at one line and assuming it's enough.