

ACT: Approaching the Science Test

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

The ACT Science test does not test science. It does not require you to know chemistry, biology, physics, geology, or any other scientific discipline. The Science test measures your ability to think and reason scientifically. Standard-time students have 35 minutes to do 40 questions, just like the Reading test, but this test tends to go slightly quicker.

Science passages are purposefully crafted around material that test takers are unlikely to have seen before. If the material were familiar to students, it would be a test of scientific knowledge. Because ACT Science material is unfamiliar to all students, everyone must rely on scientific reasoning and logic skills, which is what the Science test intends to measure.

There are three passage types:

- **Data Representation** (2 passages, 6 questions each):
Read data points from charts, graphs, and pictures, and make interpretations.
- **Research Summaries** (a.k.a. Experiments; 3 passages, 7 questions each):
Understand descriptions and results of multi-step experiments, and make inferences.
- **Conflicting Viewpoints** (1 passage, 7 questions):
Short paired reading passages with compare/contrast questions.

The Science test is very similar to the Reading test. You're asked to sort through a large amount of information — too much to remember as you go along — that is only somewhat related to information you've seen before, find specific and general information, and make inferences. As a result, **ACT reading strategies are just as effective on the Science Test!**

- Develop your own answer first.
- The information is always in the passage.
- Use process of elimination.
- Do passage types that you're most comfortable with first.

How should you do ACT Science passages?

1. Read the introduction, but don't get stuck. Just keep going. Get what you get.
2. As you read, circle any defined or *italicized* words.
3. Carefully determine the *format* of the figures and tables; focus on units, scales, etc.: "**Look at everything outside before anything inside.**"
4. On Research Summaries passages, answer questions about each Study/Experiment before you start reading the next one.
5. On confusing questions, look for key words and data points to find your answers.