

# ACT English Concepts to Know

√?	Concept	Rule	Example
	Commas	Put commas around parenthetical, nonessential, and descriptive clauses. This shows up often on the ACT.	<p>WRONG: Each year, the people according to ancient tradition, would travel twenty miles to the historical site.</p> <p>RIGHT: Each year, the <u>people, according to ancient tradition</u>, would travel twenty miles to the historical site.</p>
	Commas	Put a comma after an introductory phrase.	<p>WRONG: Against all odds James defeated the enemy.</p> <p>RIGHT: Against all <u>odds, James</u> defeated the enemy.</p>
	Commas	Use a comma and a conjunction to join two independent clauses.	<p>WRONG: Mary traveled to the business meeting, she discovered the meeting was canceled.</p> <p>RIGHT: Mary traveled to the business <u>meeting, BUT</u> she discovered the meeting was canceled.</p>
	Commas	Use a comma between two adjectives if the word “and” can be inserted between them.	<p>The strong, proud man did not give up. (The strong <u>AND</u> proud man did not give up.)</p> <p>The six medical students walked to class.</p>
	Commas	Don’t add unnecessary commas	<p>WRONG: She convinced me <u>that, I</u> should go to the dentist.</p> <p>RIGHT: She convinced me that I should go to the dentist.</p>
	Colons	Use colons to introduce a list	To be a good basketball player, you need to do these <u>things: dribble</u> well, shoot well, and defend well.
	Apostrophes	<p>Singular Possessive → Apostrophe goes before the “s” (cat’s)</p> <p>Plural Possessive → Apostrophe goes after the “s” (cats’)</p>	<p>The <u>cat’s</u> owner went to work.</p> <p>The <u>three cats’</u> owner gave each of them a treat.</p>
	Semicolons	For the ACT, semicolons function EXACTLY like a period.	The music was <u>soothing; it</u> calmed everyone in the room.
	Dashes	For the ACT, dashes function like commas (they are just stronger in style).	Each year, the people— <u>according to ancient tradition</u> —would travel twenty miles to the historical site.
	Run-ons	There are four correct ways to join independent clauses: 1) period, 2) semicolon, 3) comma + conjunction, 4) turn one clause into a dependent clause	<p>WRONG: I went to the store I bought an apple.</p> <p>RIGHT:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) I went to the <u>store. I</u> bought an apple.</li> <li>2) I went to the <u>store; I</u> bought an apple.</li> <li>3) I went to the <u>store, and</u> I bought an apple.</li> <li>4) <u>When</u> I went to the store, I bought an apple.</li> </ol>
	Similar Words: Who’s vs. Whose	<p>Who’s → Who is</p> <p>Whose → Possessive</p>	<p>Who’s in the kitchen?</p> <p>Whose book is this?</p>

Similar Words: It's vs. Its	It's → It is  Its → Possessive	It's in the box.  The dog chewed on its toy.
Similar Words: Who vs. Whom	Turn the sentence into a question:  If the answer is "he" or "she," use "who" (both end in vowels)  If the answer is "him" or "her," use "whom" (both end in consonants)	I gave the ball to Tony, <u>who</u> was appreciative. (Who was appreciative? <u>HE</u> was appreciative.)  The man <u>whom</u> I gave the ball to was appreciative. (Who did I give the ball to? I gave the ball to <u>HIM</u> .)
Similar Words: There, Their, and They're	There → Location  Their → Possessive  They're → They are	I put my book over <u>there</u> .  That is <u>their</u> book.  <u>They're</u> coming over for dinner tonight
Avoid Wordiness	Avoid saying the same thing twice	WRONG: I think I <u>might possibly</u> have made a mistake.  RIGHT: I think I have made a mistake.
Avoid Wordiness	Eliminate unnecessary words/information	WRONG: I bought the car <u>for the purpose of</u> driving to work.  RIGHT: I bought the car to drive to work.
Correct Preposition	Use the correct preposition	WRONG: I sat across the room <u>with</u> the strange man.  RIGHT: I sat across the room <u>FROM</u> the strange man.
Correct Verb Tense	Use the context to figure out what tense a verb should be in	WRONG: The commander led his troops into battle. The soldiers <u>fight</u> bravely.  RIGHT: The commander led his troops into battle. The soldiers <u>fought</u> bravely.
Correct Verb Form	Unless the context requires otherwise, choose the simplest verb form and the one that "sounds right"	WRONG: I <u>had found</u> a way to finally fall asleep.  RIGHT: I <u>found</u> a way to finally fall asleep.  (Note: This is just a general example. Always look at the context to determine what verb form to use.)
Correct Transitional Word	Use the correct transitional word	WRONG: She worked hard. <u>Nevertheless</u> , she succeeded.  RIGHT: She worked hard. <u>Therefore</u> , she succeeded.
Subject-Verb Agreement	A subject and verb must agree in number. Be careful when the subject and verb are separated, which is what you will often see on the ACT.	WRONG: The <u>President</u> , with advice from his trusted advisors, <u>make</u> decisions that affect the country.  RIGHT: The <u>President</u> , with advice from his trusted advisors, <u>makes</u> decisions that affect the country.

	Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement	A pronoun must agree with its antecedent in number and gender	<p>WRONG: The English language has many exceptions, which makes <u>them</u> difficult to learn.</p> <p>RIGHT: The English language has many exceptions, which makes <u>it</u> difficult to learn.</p>
	Pronouns in Compounds	Read the sentence with just the pronoun	<p>WRONG: My father bought the baseball bat for <u>my brother and I</u>.</p> <p>RIGHT: My father bought the baseball bat for <u>my brother and me</u>. (My father bought the baseball bat for <u>ME</u>.)</p>
	Avoid Ambiguous Pronouns	Pronouns must be clear in what they are referring to	<p>WRONG: <u>My mother and my sister</u> told me to help out around the house. <u>She</u> looked upset.</p> <p>RIGHT: <u>My mother and my sister</u> told me to help out around the house. <u>My mother</u> looked upset.</p>
	Misplaced Modifiers	A modifier must be next to the thing it is modifying	<p>WRONG: <u>Rolling down the hill, the picnickers</u> were afraid of the large rocks.</p> <p>RIGHT: <u>Rolling down the hill, the large rocks</u> scared the picnickers.</p>
	Adjectives vs. Adverbs	Adverbs modify verbs and usually end in -ly	<p>WRONG: She performed the piano piece <u>very beautiful</u>.</p> <p>RIGHT: She performed the piano piece <u>very beautifully</u>.</p>
	-er vs. -est	<p>Use -er (or more/less) when comparing two things.</p> <p>Use -est (or most/least) when comparing three or more things.</p>	<p>WRONG: Of the <u>two animals</u>, the lion was the <u>hungriest</u> one.</p> <p>RIGHT: Of the <u>two animals</u>, the lion was the <u>hungrier</u> one.</p>
	Maintain consistent tone and style	Do not use an informal tone and style if the rest of the essay is formal	<p>WRONG: The group thought the performance was absolutely sick.</p> <p>RIGHT: The group thought the performance was impressive.</p>