

# News You Can Use



**November 2008**

ACT provides this monthly newsletter to inform students and their parents about college and career planning. ACT is a not-for-profit organization that serves millions of people in schools, colleges, professional associations, businesses and government agencies with programs and services that help people achieve their education and career goals. **Visit [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org) for more information and services.**



## College Planning ACT<sup>®</sup>

### Key Dates

#### November

- If any schools on your target list offer Early Action/Early Decision, consider the option and complete any paperwork they require.

#### December

- Some early admission decisions will be available, so check with any schools to which you submitted an application.
- The ACT<sup>®</sup> is administered on December 13.
- Complete and mail college applications with January 1 deadlines.
- Prepare for the FAFSA, because it will be available January 1. Visit [fafsa.ed.gov](http://fafsa.ed.gov) to get a head start on the process.

#### January 2009

- The FAFSA becomes available January 1. File the FAFSA as soon after January 2 as possible.
- Registration deadline for the February ACT test date is January 6. (No test centers are scheduled in New York for the February test date.)

#### February 2009

- The ACT is administered on February 7. (No test centers are scheduled in New York for the February test date.)

## Writing your college essay

Like your ACT score, the essay is just one component of your college application. An essay can say a lot—or a little—about who you are. The point of the essay is to paint a picture of you to a total stranger. Admissions officers want get to know you and why you belong at their school.

Tips for writing sound essays can be found online from many sources. Just type “writing a college essay” into a search engine. Here are some quick pointers to help craft a stand-out essay.

1. Plan. Review application deadlines and plan ahead. Outline, then draft, then proof, rewrite, have someone else proof it and then revise accordingly. Give it one last look before submitting. Remember, spell check doesn't catch everything!
2. Stand out. Admissions officials review hundreds of applications and the ones that pique their interest are unique. While the essay should single you out from the crowd, be careful not to focus so narrowly on something others cannot relate to or understand.
3. Be real. This one can be interpreted a couple different ways. First, don't use a story or essay found online or written by a friend. Admissions officers can spot a “borrowed” essay from long distance. Secondly, don't write to what you think others want to hear. Show personality and individuality.
4. Stay on topic. Review each application's essay question, develop a few ideas and settle on one. Follow that theme throughout the essay.

## Establishing homework strategies

Homework is a valuable part of learning. Though you probably think it's a pain, homework does help to cement lessons taught in class.

- Assume that you will have homework every night. Even if you completed your assignments, take time to review them. It's easier to see any errors the second time around. Don't forget to look ahead to long-term assignments like research papers or science projects. And if you're fortunate enough to have time during the school day to finish all homework assignments, use your scheduled homework time to develop solid studying habits.
- Don't be intimidated by homework. It's like a sporting event, but for your mind. Homework is part of your learning process. If you're having problems with an assignment, check with your teacher or look for free homework help that might be available in your area. Many public libraries offer either a live or online homework service. Tutors are another option.
- Make it a routine. Find a place and set a consistent time for doing homework. The adage states that it takes three weeks to develop a habit. Practice your homework routine and it should become second nature before long.

Homework is one aspect of your study skills. While homework focuses on a specific assignment, studying goes beyond that to enhance understanding of the concepts and topics taught in class. You can find ideas for enhancing your studying skills elsewhere in this newsletter.

### Homework tips for parents

Parents can help students establish good homework skills. The National Education Association has valuable homework tips for parents at <http://www.nea.org/parents/homework.html>. And

homework motivation ideas for parents are at <http://www.act.org/path/parent/motivate/homework.html>.

## College planning tips for high school students

Planning for college and a career doesn't happen overnight. It's a process, filled with research and exploration. ACT encourages high school students to do some of the work each year. You can find a college planning checklist at <http://www.actstudent.org/college/checklist.html>.

Many high school freshmen and sophomores do not know what career they want, let alone where they want to go to college or what they want to study. Use the scores from your EXPLORE and PLAN tests to guide your planning. Talk with your counselor about what those scores mean and visit the World-of-Work Map ([www.act.org/wwm](http://www.act.org/wwm)) to match your interests with potential fields. You can find out more about careers and their requirements at <http://www.actstudent.org/wwm/>.

Juniors can do more career exploration by talking to someone in the field. See if you can spend a day with a professional to see what the job really entails. Also, you should be looking at dates to register for the ACT in the spring. The ACT tests you on what you learn in school, so spring of junior year is the appropriate time to take it. Free practice tests are available at <http://www.actstudent.org/sampletest/index.html>. You can use your scores to see areas in which you might need to improve.

Seniors who haven't settled on a particular career have probably narrowed to an area of focus. As you complete college applications, be sure the schools meet your needs. And remember that you won't be able to slack off after your last application has been submitted. College admissions officers are increasingly putting more weight on a student's performance during the last semester to evaluate your ability to perform consistently.

ACT's student bloggers are in the college application process now. Read what they have to say about applications and their senior years at [actstudent.org/blog](http://actstudent.org/blog).



## Check It Out

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### Improving study skills

You can always improve your study skills. Developing good skills and habits in high school will help you make learning the material more effective and ease the transition to college classes. In college, learning is a much more individual effort so going the extra mile in high school will pay off later on.

Some good study skills to develop:

- Questioning. If a concept doesn't make sense to you, ask someone to explain it. Talk with a teacher or even a classmate who gets it. Ask questions until you feel like you have a grasp on the topic.

- Make studying a regular habit. And don't just focus on getting homework done. Really put effort into learning, understanding and applying the concepts learned in class to your daily activities.
- Take notes every day in class. Then review those notes. Highlight key points. Write down questions you want to ask and points to study further.
- Go beyond the assignment. Writing helps many people retain information, so take advantage of that and write down key points from reading assignments, make flash cards or create your own practice tests.
- Schedule it. Don't let studying become just another item on the to-do list that remains undone. Schedule a regular time and place. Keep distractions to a minimum.

Studying is really about developing a set of habits and skills that work best for you. Like any habit, it can be difficult to get into a routine, but stick with it and you'll find it gets easier.



## Test date reminder

The next national ACT test date is December 13, 2008. The registration deadline is November 7. Late registration, with an additional fee of \$20, is available through November 20. Register online today at [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org).

Other test dates during the 2008-09 school year are February 7, 2009; April 4, 2009; and June 13, 2009. Registration deadlines for these dates are normally about five weeks before the test date.

An optional Writing Test is available in addition to the multiple-choice achievement test. Go to [www.actstudent.org/writing](http://www.actstudent.org/writing) to learn more about the Writing Test, including the colleges that require it.

Test-day tips, a list of what to bring and approved calculators for use on the Math Test are listed on the site, too. For all your questions about the ACT test, visit [www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org).