ACT grammar rules cheat sheet

Use this sheet while you practice. Cover the right-hand side of each rule and test yourself before you check.

Joining two complete sentences

A complete sentence has a subject, a verb, and a finished thought. These are the only correct ways to join two of them:

1. A period: The bus was late. We walked.
2. A semicolon: The bus was late; we walked.
3. A comma plus for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so: The bus was late, so we walked.
4. A colon, when the second explains the first: We had one choice: we walked.

A comma alone between two sentences is a comma splice. No punctuation at all is a run-on. However, therefore, and moreover need a semicolon before them and a comma after.

Commas and extra information

- Take the phrase out. If the sentence still makes sense and means the same thing, put a comma on both sides.
- If taking it out changes which person or thing you mean, use no commas.
- "Which" clauses usually take commas. "That" clauses never do.
- Never put a single comma between a subject and its verb, or between a verb and its object.

Colons, semicolons, and dashes

Mark	Check before you pick it
Colon	Is the left side a complete sentence?
Semicolon	Is each side a complete sentence?
Pair of dashes	Does it open and close with a dash?
Single dash	Is the left side a complete sentence?

Agreement and word form

- Cross out phrases between the subject and verb, then check they agree.
- Stay in the passage's tense unless the timeline changes.
- A team, company, or band is singular: use its.
- Its means belonging to it. It's means it is.
- Adverbs describe verbs: quickly, clearly, remarkably.
- Could have and would have, never could of or would of.

Rhetoric questions

- Concision: if two answers are correct and mean the same, pick the shorter one.
- Transitions: decide the relationship first (contrast, cause, addition, or example), then match the word.
- Add or delete: does the sentence support the paragraph's main point? Then check that the reason is accurate.

On test day

- 50 questions in 35 minutes: about 42 seconds each.
- NO CHANGE is right when the original already follows the rules.
- There's no penalty for guessing, so answer every question.