ACT grammar workbook

Eight grammar lessons, 16 original questions and explanations for every choice, with two short passages to practice editing in context.

SHARP

Build the sentence first

Read the rule and method, then try the questions before opening the answer key. This workbook covers eight selected grammar skills. ACT English also tests purpose, organization, style and other editing decisions.

1. Join complete clauses

A complete clause has a subject and a main verb and can stand as a sentence. A word such as although can make it dependent.

Method. Try a period between the clauses. If both stand alone, a semicolon or a comma plus a suitable coordinating conjunction can also connect them.

Example. The archive closed; its online catalog stayed open.

Watch for. A comma alone is not enough. Do not treat every pause as a clause boundary.

2. Introduce a list or explanation

A colon can introduce a list or explanation after a complete clause.

Method. Cover the colon and everything after it. Check whether the words before it form a complete statement.

Example. The kit held two instruments: a compass and a thermometer.

Watch for. Do not separate a verb from the objects it needs: The kit held: a compass is faulty.

3. Close extra information

Nonessential information inserted in the middle of a sentence needs punctuation on both sides.

Method. Remove the inserted words. Check the remaining structure and whether the sentence still identifies the same thing. Match the opening and closing marks.

Example. The Cedar Observatory, which opened last spring, welcomes visitors.

Watch for. A phrase that identifies which object you mean may be essential. Removal is a meaning check, not just a grammar check.

4. Find the true subject

The verb agrees with its subject, not automatically with the nearest noun.

Method. Find the main verb, then name its subject. Temporarily set aside phrases such as of photographs.

Example. The collection of photographs fills two drawers.

Watch for. The plural photographs does not make the singular collection plural.

Check words in context

5. Identify the owner

For a singular owner such as gardener, add 's. For a regular plural ending in s, add the apostrophe after that s.

Method. Decide how many owners the context gives. Write the noun in that form, then mark possession.

Example. One gardener's notebook; several gardeners' notebooks; the children's notebooks.

Watch for. Possessive its has no apostrophe. It's means it is or it has; expand it to check.

6. Keep a parallel pattern

Items doing the same grammatical job in a list or paired construction should use matching forms.

Method. Identify the units being joined. Compare words with words, phrases with phrases or clauses with clauses.

Example. The workshop covers sketching, carving and polishing.

Watch for. Do not match only the last word you see. First identify the whole unit in the list.

7. Name the actor after a modifier

An opening participial phrase with no stated actor should describe the subject that follows.

Method. Ask who performs the opening action. Check the subject of the main clause.

Example. Carrying a stack of folders, Maya entered the office.

Watch for. A door, a decision or an arrival cannot carry the folders just because Maya appears later in the sentence.

8. Follow the timeline

Keep tense consistent for actions in the same time frame. A real change in time can require a change in tense.

Method. Read the surrounding sentences for time clues. Decide when each action happens before choosing its verb.

Example. The town restored the bridge last year, and cyclists use it daily.

Watch for. Do not force every verb into the same tense when one action is past and another continues today.

Use the drills to learn a move, then test that move in the passages. Record which rule explains an error, not just the right letter.

Short drills: questions 1-4

Choose the most grammatically acceptable replacement for the underlined text, leaving everything else unchanged. A means NO CHANGE. These original teaching exercises use A-D throughout; they are not official ACT questions or a full English section.

Question 1

The museum opened a new gallery, visitors lined up before noon.

A. NO CHANGE
B. gallery; visitors
C. gallery visitors
D. gallery. Although visitors

Question 2

The volunteers needed two tools: a trowel and a rake.

A. NO CHANGE
B. two tools;
C. two tools.
D. two tools

Question 3

Rina's telescope, which she bought last spring has a removable eyepiece.

A. NO CHANGE
B. spring; has
C. spring has,
D. spring, has

Question 4

The list of donated books are on the librarian's desk.

A. NO CHANGE
B. books have been
C. books is
D. books were

Rules to revisit:

Short drills: questions 5-8

Choose the most grammatically acceptable replacement for the underlined text, leaving everything else unchanged. A means NO CHANGE. These original teaching exercises use A-D throughout; they are not official ACT questions or a full English section.

Question 5

Three painters shared the studio. A shelf held all three painter's brushes.

A. NO CHANGE
B. painters'
C. painters
D. painters's

Question 6

The interns spent the afternoon labeling jars, recording measurements, and to clean the workbench.

A. NO CHANGE
B. clean
C. they cleaned
D. cleaning

Question 7

After checking the map, the hikers chose the eastern trail.

A. NO CHANGE
B. the eastern trail was chosen by the hikers.
C. choosing the eastern trail.
D. the hikers' decision was to take the eastern trail.

Question 8

On Tuesday, Noor repaired the damaged hinge and tests the gate. By that evening, the repair was complete.

A. NO CHANGE
B. will test
C. tested
D. testing

Rules to revisit:

Passage 1: The repair table

Choose the most grammatically acceptable replacement for the underlined text, leaving everything else unchanged. A means NO CHANGE. These original teaching exercises use A-D throughout; they are not official ACT questions or a full English section. Read the full passage first. Numbers identify the edits.

> The neighborhood library sets aside a corner for residents who want to repair household objects. The plan for the monthly repair sessions include[9] three workstations. Each visitor brings two things:[10] a broken object and a description of the problem.
>
> Lena, who organizes the sessions checks[11] each item before work begins. At the first session, a volunteer explained each repair while its owner watched. By noon that day, the volunteers had replaced a lamp cord and tighten[12] a loose chair leg. The owners left with their objects and notes on how to maintain them.

Question 9

A. NO CHANGE
B. sessions have included
C. sessions includes
D. sessions, include

Question 10

A. NO CHANGE
B. two things;
C. two things.
D. two things and:

Question 11

A. NO CHANGE
B. sessions; checks
C. sessions checks,
D. sessions, checks

Question 12

A. NO CHANGE
B. tightened
C. tightening
D. they tighten

Passage 2: Notes from the garden

Choose the most grammatically acceptable replacement for the underlined text, leaving everything else unchanged. A means NO CHANGE. These original teaching exercises use A-D throughout; they are not official ACT questions or a full English section. Read the full passage first. Numbers identify the edits.

> The community garden had just received its spring supplies. Carrying a tray of seed packets, the greenhouse door was opened by Arun.[13] His neighbor Mira followed with a box of labels. Each of the two gardeners brought a notebook. A small shelf held both gardener's[14] notebooks.
>
> Their routine involved measuring the beds, labeling the rows, and recording[15] the planting dates. They compared their notes before moving to the next bed. Rain began just after lunch, the gardeners[16] moved the remaining packets indoors. The labels made it easy to resume their work the next morning.

Question 13

A. NO CHANGE
B. Carrying a tray of seed packets, Arun opened the greenhouse door.
C. Carrying a tray of seed packets, the opening of the greenhouse door was Arun's task.
D. Carrying a tray of seed packets, opening the greenhouse door.

Question 14

A. NO CHANGE
B. gardeners
C. gardeners's
D. gardeners'

Question 15

A. NO CHANGE
B. to record
C. they recorded
D. record

Question 16

A. NO CHANGE
B. lunch the gardeners
C. lunch; the gardeners
D. lunch. Although the gardeners

Answers: short drills

Check your reasoning as well as your answer. A correct guess still deserves review.

1. B: gallery; visitors

A. A comma alone cannot join these independent clauses. **B.** The semicolon joins two complete clauses. **C.** The clauses run together without a connection. **D.** The second sentence becomes a dependent fragment beginning with Although.

2. A: NO CHANGE

A. The clause before the colon is complete; the list names the two tools. **B.** The list is not an independent clause, and it is not a complex series requiring semicolons. **C.** The period leaves a fragment. **D.** The explanatory list needs a mark separating it from the complete clause.

3. D: spring, has

A. The inserted clause has no closing comma. **B.** A semicolon cannot close the inserted clause. **C.** The comma belongs after spring, not after the main verb has. **D.** The second comma closes the extra information before the main verb.

4. C: books is

A. Are is plural, but the subject list is singular. **B.** Have been is plural; books does not control agreement. **C.** Is agrees with the singular subject list. **D.** Were is plural; the phrase of donated books does not change the subject.

5. B: painters'

A. This marks one owner, but the context specifies three. **B.** The plural painters ends in s, so possession takes an apostrophe after it. **C.** The plural alone does not mark ownership. **D.** A regular plural ending in s does not take another possessive s.

6. D: cleaning

A. The infinitive breaks the pattern labeling, recording. **B.** The bare verb does not match the two -ing forms. **C.** A new clause breaks the parallel list. **D.** Cleaning matches labeling and recording.

7. A: NO CHANGE

A. The hikers are the people checking the map and the subject that follows. **B.** The subject trail cannot check a map. **C.** There is no independent clause with a subject and finite main verb. **D.** The subject decision cannot perform the opening action.

8. C: tested

A. Present tests conflicts with the completed Tuesday actions. **B.** Future will test conflicts with the completed sequence. **C.** Tested places both actions in the established past time frame. **D.** Testing does not supply the parallel finite verb after repaired.

Answers: passage practice

9. C: sessions includes

A. Include is plural, but the subject is plan. **B.** Have included still supplies a plural verb. **C.** Includes agrees with plan; sessions is inside a modifying phrase. **D.** The comma separates the subject phrase from its verb without fixing agreement.

10. A: NO CHANGE

A. The complete clause introduces a list that names the two things. **B.** What follows is a noun phrase, not an independent clause. **C.** The period leaves the list as a fragment. **D.** And leaves the construction unfinished before the colon.

11. D: sessions, checks

A. The extra clause never closes. **B.** A semicolon cannot pair with the opening comma. **C.** The comma is misplaced after checks rather than after the extra clause. **D.** The matching comma closes who organizes the sessions.

12. B: tightened

A. Had cannot take bare tighten as its second coordinated participle. **B.** Had applies to both replaced and tightened in the completed sequence. **C.** Tightening does not match replaced after had. **D.** The new present-tense clause breaks the past sequence and the shared had construction.

13. B: Carrying a tray of seed packets, Arun opened the greenhouse door.

A. The subject door cannot carry the tray. **B.** Arun, the person carrying the tray, becomes the subject. **C.** The subject opening is an event, not the person carrying the tray. **D.** There is no independent clause.

14. D: gardeners'

A. This marks one owner despite the two gardeners in context. **B.** This is a plural without a possessive mark. **C.** A regular plural ending in s takes only the apostrophe. **D.** Gardeners' marks the plural owners.

15. A: NO CHANGE

A. Recording matches the other two -ing forms. **B.** The infinitive does not match measuring and labeling. **C.** A clause breaks the list of activities. **D.** The bare verb does not match the other list items.

16. C: lunch; the gardeners

A. The comma alone joins two independent clauses. **B.** Two complete clauses run together. **C.** The semicolon connects the complete clauses. **D.** Although makes the second sentence a dependent fragment.

Next session: choose one missed rule, explain it with the key closed, then try a new question. These short passages do not cover the full range of ACT English tasks.

Review record and references

Use one row for each error or uncertain answer. Reprint this page when you need more space.

Question	What I checked / what I missed	Rule in my words	New practice and date
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Scope and sources

These eight drills and two short passages are original Sharp teaching material. They describe invented situations.

- ACT: English test description
- ACT: English standards
- Purdue OWL: independent and dependent clauses
- Purdue OWL: punctuation; commas; apostrophes
- Purdue OWL: subject-verb agreement; verb tense consistency
- Purdue OWL: parallel structure; dangling modifiers
- Merriam-Webster: it's

Teaching methods cross-checked against Sharp's ACT lessons. Sources checked November 5, 2026. This is an independent Sharp resource, not an ACT publication.