

Student Reflections on The Official ACT[®] Self-Paced Course, Powered by Kaplan[®]

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The Official ACT[®] Self-Paced Course, Powered by Kaplan[®] is a test preparation solution in partnership between Kaplan and ACT.¹ The goals of good test preparation are multifaceted and include content reinforcement, test familiarization, and testing strategies. This solution allows students to study with top-rated teachers using official ACT practice questions and materials. It features on-demand video lessons, more than 30 short, self-paced video lessons, over 2,000 real ACT practice questions, and five full-length official practice tests. The program is designed to be flexible to fit students' schedules with online resources available 24 hours a day. A built-in syllabus facilitates students' progress through the course. Additionally, students who take the ACT with a fee waiver receive complimentary access to this test preparation solution.

In April of 2022, we surveyed users of the self-paced course who took the ACT test between August 2020 and February 2022 to better understand (a) ways the solution helped them when they took the ACT, (b) what features of the solution they considered most important, and (c) their behaviors when they used the solution. We invited 209,897 students to share their perspectives on the course, and 2,535 students responded to the survey. This brief highlights what students responding to selected questions from the survey learned from The Official ACT Self-Paced Course, Powered by Kaplan; 818 students.² Demographic characteristics are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic	Percent	
Gender	Male	38
	Female	61
	Another gender	0
	Prefer not to respond/missing	1
Family income	Less than \$36,000	5
	\$36,000–\$100,000	17
	Greater than \$100,000	58
	Missing	20
Race/ethnicity	Black	5
	American Indian	0
	White	77
	Hispanic	5
	Asian	5
	Native Hawaiian	0
	Two or more races	4
	Prefer not to respond/missing	3

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

We asked students to connect their usage of the self-paced course with its effect on taking the ACT by responding to statements about how the program helped them on a 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Table 2). Over 80% of respondents indicated that the program helped them anticipate the types of questions on the ACT, as well as remember what they had learned during their preparation and apply it on the test. About 70% of students reported that the program helped them identify material that they had mastered, as well as identify areas where they needed further support. A majority of students recognized how the self-paced course had helped them prepare for the ACT by having strategies for answering test questions and understand the instructions for the test.

Table 2. Student Connections Between ACT Self-Paced and the ACT Test

Student Perceptions	Agree/ strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/ strongly disagree
The program helped me to know what types of questions to expect on the ACT.	82	12	6
I was able to remember what I learned from the program and apply it while taking the ACT.	81	12	7
The program helped me to identify which material I had mastered.	72	19	9
The program helped me to identify areas where I needed further practice.	71	20	8
The program helped me to have strategies for answering the test questions.	66	22	12
The program helped me to understand the instructions on the test.	66	23	11
While taking the ACT test, I was able to see how the program helped me to be prepared.	64	23	14

Note. Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

We also investigated the features students valued most from the test preparation solution. Survey respondents were asked to rank order features of the solution from first to 10th, and results are shown in Table 3.³ Over a third of respondents (39%) indicated that the most important feature was the inclusion of official practice tests. This solution offers retired, official ACT tests as practice tests that may not be available through other preparatory solutions, making this a unique feature of ACT Self-Paced. Official practice tests are an excellent way for students to get a true sense for how they might score on the ACT. The second feature that students cited as the most important feature was the flexibility to study when they wanted to study. Availability of resources 24 hours a day means that students can schedule their test preparation at a time that is most convenient for them. This allows students to meet family or work obligations while preparing for the ACT.

Table 3. Rank Order of Self-Paced Course Features (by Percentage)

Feature	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Official practice tests	39	23	20	9	5	2	1	1	0	0
Flexibility to study when I wanted	30	27	22	10	8	2	1	1	0	0
The cost of the program was within my/my family's budget	24	9	12	14	10	6	10	5	10	1
Personalization to meet my individual style and needs	24	20	19	13	12	4	5	3	1	0
Opportunity to prepare for certain topics on the test	23	28	22	11	8	3	1	11	2	0
Short video lessons for each topic	17	27	23	11	10	5	3	3	2	0
Practice questions	17	26	33	11	6	4	2	1	1	0
6 months of access	10	13	21	13	14	6	5	11	6	1
Customizable question bank	9	16	16	22	15	3	11	11	13	1

Note: Numbers 1 through 10 indicate the percentage of students ranking each feature by relative importance for students. For example, for official practice tests, a larger percentage of students (39%) ranked this feature in the first position.

Lastly, we asked students to respond to statements about their behaviors when using the self-paced course on a 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Table 4). Almost 50% or more of students indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with engaging in behaviors that supported their test preparation. Nearly three quarters of respondents (72%) indicated that they were in a quiet environment with few distractions when using the program. This type of environment is important for students to concentrate on their test preparation and focus on meeting their test preparation goals. Two out of three students (67%) also reported having a positive attitude when they interacted with the solution. When students have a positive attitude, they may utilize more resources. Over 50% of students reported that they were not distracted by electronic devices, and they made sure to give themselves enough time to prepare for the ACT. As the self-paced program is driven largely by student initiative, these are key behaviors to consider in effective usage of the solution. In addition, many students (62%) were confident that the self-paced course helped prepare them to take the ACT.

Table 4. Test Preparation Behaviors When Using Self-Paced Course (by Percentage)

Behaviors	Agree/ strongly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree/ strongly disagree
I was in a quiet environment with few distractions when I used the program.	72	18	10
I usually had a positive attitude when I used the program.	67	21	12
I feel confident that the program prepared me to take the ACT.	62	23	14
My use of electronic devices (e.g., cell phones and video games) did not interfere with my test preparation.	59	19	21
I made sure to give myself enough time to prepare so that I didn't have to cram before the ACT.	56	19	25
The amount of time I spent with the program was adequate to prepare for the ACT.	52	24	24
Other obligations such as a job, family, etc. did not interfere with my test preparation.	48	18	34
I made a schedule for how and when to use the program.	47	16	37

Note. Percentages do not add to 100% due to rounding.

The Official ACT Self-Paced Course, Powered by Kaplan helps students attain content reinforcement, increase test familiarization, and learn testing strategies. The surveyed respondents clearly indicated that this self-paced program was beneficial in their test preparation efforts for the ACT. This program fits well in the family of test preparation solutions offered by ACT. The Official ACT® Prep Guide and The Official ACT® Subject Guides are solutions that includes official practice questions and full explanations covering all sections of the ACT. The Official ACT® Live Online Class, Powered by Kaplan® solution provides students with a team of top-rated teachers that shows students what to study and how to study with engaging live classes. The Official ACT® Tutoring, Powered by Kaplan® is the most personalized solution that helps students learn test content and test-day strategies in individual tutoring sessions led by an expert from Kaplan, who adapts to student needs in real time, answers questions, and provides specific recommendations. Through this family of programs, students can find the support level they need to learn and prepare best for the ACT.

Notes

¹ Kaplan is a registered trademark of Kaplan, Inc.

² Note that while 2,535 total students responded to at least one item on the survey, only 818 students responded to at least one of the items discussed in this brief.

³ The 10th option, other, is not listed in the table.



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