



# Exemplar Early High School English Test Questions



[discoveractaspire.org](https://discoveractaspire.org)



# Introduction

This booklet explains ACT Aspire® Early High School English test questions by presenting, with their answer keys, sample questions aligned to each reporting category on the test. A key includes the question’s depth-of-knowledge (DOK) level,<sup>1</sup> an explanation of the task posed by each question, a thorough explanation of correct responses, ideas for improvement, and more. The exemplar test questions included here are representative of the range of content and types of questions found on the ACT Aspire Early High School English test. Educators can use this resource in several ways:

- Become familiar with ACT Aspire question types.
- See what typical questions in each ACT Aspire reporting category look like.
- Help reinforce or adjust teaching and learning objectives.
- Learn how ACT Aspire improvement idea statements can help students identify key skills they have not yet mastered.

## Reporting Categories

ACT Aspire English tests assess students’ developed ability to revise and edit texts. A typical English test contains several stimuli, or texts, and a series of selected-response and technology-enhanced questions. Texts used in the assessments represent various content areas (including English language arts, the humanities, and the social and natural sciences), and, considered collectively, reflect a range of text complexity levels from simple to complex, as appropriate for students’ age and educational attainment. The questions fall under the following reporting categories.

## Conventions of Standard English

The questions in this category require students to apply an understanding of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, and mechanics to revise and edit text.

### **Punctuation and Usage Conventions**

These questions require students to edit text to conform to standard English punctuation and usage.

---

<sup>1</sup> Norman L. Webb, “Depth-of-Knowledge Levels for Four Content Areas,” last modified March 28, 2002, <http://facstaff.wisc.edu/normw/All%20content%20areas%20%20DOK%20levels%2032802.doc>.

**Sentence Structure and Formation**

These questions test understanding of relationships between and among clauses, placement of modifiers, and shifts in construction.

**Production of Writing**

The questions in this category require students to apply an understanding of the rhetorical purpose and the focus of a piece of writing to develop a topic effectively and to use various strategies to achieve logical organization, topical unity, and general cohesion.

**Topic Development**

These questions require students to demonstrate an understanding of and control over the rhetorical aspects of texts by identifying the purpose of parts of texts, determining whether a text has met its intended goal, and evaluating the relevance of material in terms of a text's focus.

**Organization, Unity, and Cohesion**

These questions require students to use various strategies to ensure that text is logically organized, flows smoothly, and has an effective introduction and conclusion.

**Knowledge of Language**

These questions require students to demonstrate effective language use through ensuring precision and concision in word choice and maintaining consistency in style and tone.

**Improvement Ideas**

ACT Aspire includes simple improvement ideas at the reporting category (skill) level on student and parent reports. These improvement ideas are provided for the lowest performing skill for each subject tested. The skills are always ordered from highest performing to lowest performing based on the percentage of points correct. If the percentages for two or more skills are tied, the skill with the lower number of total points is displayed first.

Keep in mind that the order of skills listed on reports may not always be exemplary of where to focus learning. For example, the skills in which a student performed within the ACT Readiness Range may not always be listed first, and the skills in which a student did not perform within the ACT Readiness Range may not always be listed last. Also, keep in mind the total number of points possible in each skill when interpreting the percentage correct.

There are two levels of improvement idea statements (low and high) for ACT Aspire summative reporting. Low statements are given on the report if the student's lowest skill score is below the ACT Readiness Range for that particular skill. High statements are given on the report if the student's lowest skill score is at or above the ACT Readiness Range for that particular skill.

# Answer Key

This section presents a stimulus text and the sequence number, grade, question type, DOK level, alignment to the ACT Aspire reporting categories, and correct response for each question about the text. Each question is accompanied by an explanation of the question and the correct response as well as improvement idea statements for ACT Aspire English.

## Text: “Pottery in Motion”

### Pottery in Motion

The adobe walls of the pottery workshop emitted a cool stillness that contrasted sharply with the heat of the afternoon’s red sun. Handwoven tapestries were displayed prominently throughout the room.<sup>1</sup> Cora greeted me warmly when I arrived for my lesson.

Earlier, she had prepared the clay. Now she threw a slab of it on the potter’s wheel. Setting the wheel in motion with her foot, she centered the clay and molded it into the shape of a beehive. After opening up the center of the clay with her thumbs, her fingers formed it into a low, thick-walled bowl. She raised the sides into a cylinder and slimmed them by means of exerting pressure with her hands from both inside and outside.<sup>2</sup>

Entranced by the whirling motion of the wheel, I watched with awe as the clay was transformed into an earthenware vase by Cora’s artistry. When she was finally satisfied with its delicate shape, she used her small knife to trim away the excess clay, then removed the vase for drying.

She pointed to a shelf lined with glass jars and told me to choose the glaze. I knew that the glaze would waterproof the vase and minimize problems with germs and odors. But the glaze also had an almost magical property that would lend the drab clay surface a shimmering quality. Without hesitation, I chose a cobalt blue shade that reminded me of the color of the evening sky. After the vase was dry, I studied Cora as she applied the glaze with even strokes and then placed the vase next to other pieces that would be fired in the kiln.

Later, the afternoon dust scattered as the well-worn wheels of an ancient tour bus squeaked to a stop in front of the studio.<sup>3</sup> A small group of tourists entered the workshop, reminding me that it was time to go. Filled with eagerness, I anticipated the next lesson, when I would be the one to control the potter’s wheel.

## Question 1

**Pottery in Motion**

The adobe walls of the pottery workshop emitted a cool stillness that contrasted sharply with the heat of the afternoon's red sun. Handwoven tapestries were displayed prominently throughout the room. Cora greeted me warmly when I arrived for my lesson.

Earlier, she had prepared the clay. Now she threw a slab of it on the potter's wheel. Setting the wheel in motion with her foot, she centered the clay and molded it into the shape of a beehive. After opening up the center of the clay with her thumbs, her fingers formed it into a low, thick-walled bowl. She raised the sides into a cylinder and slimmed them by means of exerting pressure with her hands from both inside and outside.

Entranced by the whirling motion of the wheel, I watched with awe as the clay was transformed into an earthenware vase by Cora's artistry. When she was finally satisfied with its delicate shape, she used her small knife to trim away the excess clay, then removed the vase for drying.

She pointed to a shelf lined with glass jars and told me to choose the glaze. I knew that the glaze would waterproof the vase and minimize problems with germs and odors. But the glaze also had an almost magical property that would lend the drab clay surface a shimmering quality. Without hesitation, I

At this point, the writer wants to emphasize the pleasing effect of the tapestries in Cora's workshop. Which choice best accomplishes that goal?

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. had been hung on the walls as decorations.
- C. adorned the walls with a multicolored elegance.
- D. covered the walls completely.

Sequence	Grade	Item type	DOK level	Reporting category	Correct response
1	Early High School	Selected Response	3	Production of Writing	C

This selected-response question requires students to develop and focus text through the revision of information (aligns with the Common Core State Standards' College and Career Readiness anchor standards [CCRA] W.4 and W.5). To answer the question, students must read the entire sentence carefully and select the answer option that accomplishes the rhetorical purpose outlined in the question (a purpose aimed at providing more precise information about the idea being developed).

**Correct Response**

Answer option C is the only option that satisfies the rhetorical purpose outlined in the stem. The stem calls for a statement that emphasizes "the pleasing effects of the tapestries in Cora's workshop." Answer option C is the only option that provides words with positive connotations (*adorned* and *elegance*) that develop the idea that the workshop is a pleasant place to be.

**Improvement Idea Statements**

Reporting category	Grade	Low statement (scored below ACT Readiness Range)	High statement (scored at or above ACT Readiness Range)
Production of Writing	Early High School	In your writing, work on developing your topic effectively, organizing ideas in a logical, cohesive way, and expressing ideas in a precise, concise, and stylistically consistent manner.	Practice writing for a variety of purposes. Continue working on developing topics effectively, organizing ideas in logical, cohesive ways, and expressing ideas in a stylistically consistent manner.

## Question 2

**Pottery in Motion**

with her thumbs, her fingers formed it into a low, thick-walled bowl. She raised the sides into a cylinder and slimmed them **by means of exerting** pressure with her hands from both inside and outside.

Entranced by the whirling motion of the wheel, I watched with awe as the clay was transformed into an earthenware vase by Cora's artistry. When she was finally satisfied with its delicate shape, she used her small knife to trim away the excess clay, then removed the vase for drying.

She pointed to a shelf lined with glass jars and told me to choose the glaze. I knew that the glaze would waterproof the vase and minimize problems with germs and odors. But the glaze also had an almost magical property that would lend the drab clay surface a shimmering quality. Without hesitation, I chose a cobalt blue shade that reminded me of the color of the evening sky. After the vase was dry, I studied Cora as she applied the glaze with even strokes and then placed the vase next to other pieces that would be fired in the kiln.

Later, the afternoon dust scattered as the well-worn wheels of an ancient tour bus squeaked to a stop in front of the studio. A small group of tourists entered the workshop, reminding me that it was time to go. Filled with

A. NO CHANGE  
 B. through the means of using  
 C. by wielding the exertion of  
 D. by exerting

Sequence	Grade	Item type	DOK level	ACT Aspire reporting category	Correct response
2	Early High School	Selected Response	3	Knowledge of Language	D

This selected-response question requires students to recognize and revise instances of redundancy in a text (aligns with CCRA.W.4-5, L.3). Students must read the entire sentence carefully, identify the redundancy in the highlighted portion, and select the answer option that eliminates this redundancy.

**Correct Response**

Answer option D is the only choice that does not unnecessarily repeat information provided elsewhere in the sentence. It also eliminates wordiness.

**Improvement Idea Statements**

Reporting category	Grade	Low statement (scored below ACT Readiness Range)	High statement (scored at or above ACT Readiness Range)
Knowledge of Language	Early High School	In your writing, work on choosing language that is precise and concise while maintaining consistency in style and tone.	In your writing, experiment with how word choices affect meaning and how language functions differently in different contexts.

## Question 3

**Pottery in Motion**

Entranced by the whirling motion of the wheel, I watched with awe as the clay was transformed into an earthenware vase by Cora's artistry. When she was finally satisfied with its delicate shape, she used her small knife to trim away the excess clay, then removed the vase for drying.

She pointed to a shelf lined with glass jars and told me to choose the glaze. I knew that the glaze would waterproof the vase and minimize problems with germs and odors. But the glaze also had an almost magical property that would lend the drab clay surface a shimmering quality. Without hesitation, I chose a cobalt blue shade that reminded me of the color of the evening sky. After the vase was dry, I studied Cora as she applied the glaze with even strokes and then placed the vase next to other pieces that would be fired in the kiln.

Later, the afternoon dust scattered as the well-worn **wheels of an ancient tour bus** squeaked to a stop in front of the studio. A small group of tourists entered the workshop, reminding me that it was time to go. Filled with eagerness, I anticipated the next lesson, when I would be the one to control the potter's wheel.

A. NO CHANGE  
 B. wheels, of an ancient tour bus,  
 C. wheels of an ancient, tour bus  
 D. wheels of an ancient tour bus,

Sequence	Grade	Item type	DOK level	ACT Aspire reporting category	Correct response
3	Early High School	Selected Response	1	Conventions of Standard English	A

This selected-response question requires students to identify and correct text that does not conform to conventions of standard English punctuation (aligns with CCRA.W.5, L.5). Specifically, students must identify punctuation that is unnecessary or actively interferes with meaning.

**Correct Response**

Answer option A does not contain unnecessary punctuation. Answer options B, C, and D each contain an unnecessary comma or commas.

**Improvement Idea Statements**

Reporting category	Grade	Low statement (scored below ACT Readiness Range)	High statement (scored at or above ACT Readiness Range)
Conventions of Standard English	Early High School	Work on using parts of speech and punctuation (including colons, semicolons, and dashes) correctly. Avoid errors in sentence construction.	Challenge yourself to write complex sentences, avoiding all errors in sentence construction and using parts of speech and punctuation correctly.