

The **ACT** Course Book

ENGLISH, READING, & WRITING

SAMPLE

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Modifiers

2-4 per test

A modifier is a descriptive word or phrase.

Modifier questions require careful consideration of the logic of sentences. Make sure that modifiers are properly placed so they describe the right things.

- ❑ Descriptions must be placed next to the things they describe.

Incorrect: Biking to school, the wind nearly blew me over.

Correct: Biking to school, I was nearly blown over by the wind.

Correct: As I biked to school, the wind nearly blew me over.

Correct: The wind nearly blew me over as I biked to school.

- ❑ A dangling modifier is a modifier that typically appears at the beginning of a sentence and is usually punctuated by a comma. The subject that directly follows the modifier should be what the modifier describes.

Incorrect: Tired and homesick, Mike's vacation was not as fun as he had hoped.

Correct: Tired and homesick, _____.

- ❑ When a modifier is misplaced, the entire sentence can become illogical.

Incorrect: He skipped a rock over the surface of the river that was perfectly round.

Correct: He skipped a rock that was perfectly round over the surface of the river.

- ❑ Some modifiers questions will require you to rewrite a modifier in order to eliminate modifier errors.

Incorrect: Looking at the horizon, ominous clouds warned me of a storm approaching.

Correct: _____, ominous clouds warned me of a storm approaching.

PUT IT TOGETHER

On his way to his grandmother's home, the sight of something by Matthew who¹ stopped his bike suddenly. A rattlesnake was stretched out on the pavement in front of him.

Nervous but curious, Matthew's bike stood² between him and the deadly creature.

An examination of³ the rattling end of the snake's tail, an animal control officer was kneeling near the edge of the road.

Trying to coax it into a container, using the officer's tool⁴ that looked to Matthew like a large fishhook. He knew enough not to get close, but he asked why she was helping the poisonous creature.

"He doesn't know it," she said, "but if this guy stays on the asphalt, he'll bake." She laughed, as the snake finally slipped into the carrier. "In the old west, he would've been the deadliest thing around. We'd have shot him on sight."

Because he was already late for dinner,⁵ Matthew was afraid to come closer. He waited for the officer to carry it

away on his bike,⁶ and then got back and continued to his grandmother's home.

1. A. NO CHANGE
B. Matthew saw something and
C. Matthew's sight of something
D. something seen by Matthew
2. F. NO CHANGE
G. Matthew standing his bike
H. Matthew stood his bike
J. standing Matthew's bike
3. A. NO CHANGE
B. Examining
C. A study of
D. DELETE the underlined portion.
4. F. NO CHANGE
G. the tool being used by the officer
H. the officer was using a tool
J. use of the officer's tool
5. A. NO CHANGE
B. Even though the snake was safely caged,
C. As his grandmother had warned him,
D. Leaning on his handlebars,
6. The best placement for the underlined portion would be:
F. where it is now.
G. after the word *officer*.
H. after the word *back*.
J. after the word *home* (and before the period).

Look for modifier errors when you see a descriptive phrase at the beginning of a sentence.

Checkpoint Review

In Ethiopian society, communal eating is the cultural norm. Injera, a soft, porous, and pancake-like flatbread, taking¹ the place of utensils, providing a vessel for delivering food to the mouth. Due to the fermentation process, it has a tangy, sourdough taste that complements the spices found in many sauces and stews in Ethiopian cooking.

Injera is made from teff, being a² tiny grain similar in size to poppy seeds, less than 1 millimeter in diameter. Native to

Ethiopia, recognizing³ teff as a highly nutritious grain. It can vary in color, ranging from pale white to yellow to deep brown. Those who can afford the expense will pay more for the pure white variety, known as manga, then other varieties.⁴ Many will buy the less expensive red or mixed varieties or will blend the teff with cheaper grains, such as sorghum, barley, and maize.

From the plateaus of the highlands to the plains of the lowlands, teff adapts well to the lands of Ethiopia. It can survive through droughts and floods, grows⁵ more efficiently in higher temperatures than wheat and other grains can. Its optimal growth occurs at altitudes of 1800-2100 meters, but it can be grown at sea level to as high as 3000 meters. Over 6 million farmers harvest teff, producing a quarter of the cereal production in the country. Scattering a handful of the grain can sow a large area. Only one pound of seed is needed to grow

1. A. NO CHANGE
B. having taken
C. it takes
D. takes
2. F. NO CHANGE
G. teff, being a
H. teff, A
J. teff, a
3. A. NO CHANGE
B. recognized teff
C. one recognizes teff
D. teff is recognized
4. F. NO CHANGE
G. than other varieties
H. then do other varieties
J. than for other varieties
5. A. NO CHANGE
B. floods and grow
C. floods grow
D. floods; grows

Process of Elimination

- Correct answers to Reading questions might not jump out at you. Often, you will have to eliminate answer choices. Wrong answers range from clearly wrong to almost right.
- Make sure that you've found the **best** answer, not just a good one. Reading questions, especially difficult ones, will usually contain at least one or two choices that are "almost right."

- Eliminate answer choices that:

- aren't relevant or true.
- might be true but don't answer the question asked.
- might be true but are too broad.
- might be true but are too narrow.
- are exactly the opposite of what is correct.
- address the wrong part of the passage.
- use words and phrases from the passage but do not answer the question correctly.
- are too extreme.

- Look for opposites.

If two answer choices are exact opposites, one of them is likely the correct answer.

- Be careful of answer choices that are only mostly correct.

Some answer choices will be almost perfect, but will have one detail or word that does not work. Do not choose an answer choice just because parts of it sound good.

- Be careful of incorrect names and facts.

Some answer choices will be almost correct—the right answer, but with the wrong name plugged in, or with the names swapped.

- ❑ Be on the lookout for answer choices that are designed to attract your attention away from the correct answer.

In World War I, engineers realized that advancements in airplanes had neglected the safety and efficiency of pilots. Though planes had become faster, stronger, and more maneuverable, they were harder to fly. Therefore, throughout the war (and the next World War to follow), teams of researchers refined aircraft to be easier and safer to use. Controls were redesigned, displays were simplified, and cockpits were reorganized. This sparked a new mode of thought, considering man’s interaction with tools and technology. Engineers began viewing the man-machine interface as a sort of conversation, in which the user inputs signals (such as moving a joystick or flipping a switch), and the machine offers a response (such as illuminating a light or activating a rotor).

In the modern world, as technology becomes increasingly powerful and prevalent, there is an effort to ensure that tools are streamlined and simple to use. This may not seem overly important with something such as a vending machine, which only requires that the user provide payment and input the desired product. However, with a machine as robust as a smartphone, the user interface is carefully crafted so that the vast array of possible inputs does not overwhelm or confuse the user.

What does the statement about smartphones most strongly suggest about the “conversation” described in the first paragraph?

- A. Over time, users have become much better at adapting to complicated controls.
- B. If users become overwhelmed by their interaction with a tool, they should instead focus on using simpler tools.
- C. All modern technologies are based on lessons learned from the failures of World War I.
- D. The relationship between technology and user has become a critical consideration for modern devices.

Try to isolate the correct answer by eliminating the other answer choices. Explain how you can prove answers are incorrect.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

- ❑ Using Process of Elimination doesn’t mean you should rush through the question and immediately start reading answer choices. With each question, your first step should be to understand the question and to try to answer it before reading the answer choices.

PUT IT TOGETHER

LITERARY NARRATIVE: This passage is adapted from the short story “A Wake Awake” by Cynthia C. Washer.

We gathered in my great-grandmother’s room. The women of the family, some apart for many years, had gossip and family stories to relate. Ancient springs squealed as they perched on the edges of my great-grandmother’s bed. Their voices echoed off the walls of the small room. I was silent, because it seemed most appropriate. Their talking made me uncomfortable, as if we were being rude, but logically there was no reason to quiet down. In the center of this chamber was my old ancestor, as calm in her rest as a pearl within an oyster. Her skin seemed waxy and gray. I finally recognized how old she had been.

My great-grandmother had never looked like this before; at least, not in front of me. She had always refused to be seen until she had made herself ready. For her, this meant ruby lipstick, darkened eyebrows, and rouge. In later years, I discovered that it also meant inserting her dentures, and that her little pillbox hats had become less of a fashion statement and more a means to conceal thinning hair. I only ever saw her after all of her primping and grooming, so it had seemed that she had never aged during my lifetime. As a child, I had suspected that her heavy makeup was a natural part of her face.

There in the room with her body, I slouched against the doorway as the other women of the family retold stories about her. They joked about when my great-grandmother began to call all of the women of the family “Mami;” then they guessed at when they first knew her memory was beginning to fail. I fiddled with the locket of my necklace and remembered the final time that my great-grandmother uttered my own name aloud: we had been in that same house, and she had taken off her gold necklace and pressed it into my hand. It was a gift, she explained. I had struggled to open the locket, but it remained firmly clasped, like a startled clam. I asked her what was inside the golden pendant, and she smiled back at me. “My legacy. Can you keep it safe?” she asked. I nodded and put the necklace on. That had been several years earlier, and I had worn it every day since.

She was a careful, reserved woman. I remembered bracing myself for embarrassment whenever we went out to eat with her. I knew, at some point, she would herd all of the little containers of marmalade and coffee creamer, along with the sugar packets and straws, into a little hill, and then dump them hastily into her bag. In her kitchen, there was always a used teabag, graying from multiple steepings, hanging to

dry over the dish rack, keeping company with the clear plastic bags she had washed for reuse. She was reluctant to let anything go to waste. In the same way, it seemed to me, she held tightly onto her few prizes.

I fondly remembered her moving expertly around her kitchen. Her tools and ingredients were plain, but her food was always incredible. Her pantry was stocked with all manner of canned goods; pears in sticky syrup, cannellini beans, and, most importantly, the staple of all Italian-American matriarchs: stewed tomatoes. I used to help her open the large cans and then watch her pour the tomatoes into her large cooking pot. At first, they would peek out timidly above the tomato juice, plump red frogs in a crimson pond. Somehow, with that culinary sorcery inherent to grandmothers, her creaky hands would transform the simple ingredients into a delicious sauce. The secrets of her magic were closely guarded; when others asked for the recipe, they would quickly discover that she had intentionally omitted some mysterious essentials. By doing this, she had protected her respected position among the members of our family.

My mother, aunts, great-aunts, and cousins shared these stories and more. Even as the lively conversation made their cheeks flushed and breath short, it only served to make my great-grandmother’s skin seem more colorless and her chest more still. And then, abruptly as twittering blackbirds, the flock of women abandoned their bedside perches and swooped into the kitchen, where they began preparing for dinner.

I felt the need to address my great-grandmother in some way, but did not know where to begin. I moved toward the casket, but I was stopped by an exposed nail extending from the doorway. It caught the chain of my necklace, and after a strangled yelp and brief struggle, I saw the locket fall through my grasping fingers to the floorboards. The pendant had burst open. My frustration quickly turned to wonder as I examined the golden remains. In place of the expected family portraits, the locket held something far more precious. In precise script, my great-grandmother had outlined the recipe for her famed marinara sauce, leaving no ingredient out of the mix. I read it in disbelief—here was the very secret that, for my whole life, relatives had been trying to uncover. Holding the treasured scrap in my hands, I finally knew how to honor her. After reading the words one last time, I carefully tore the paper into tiny fragments. Carefully, I placed all of the pieces back into the locket, and smiled. Her legacy was now secure.

1. The passage can best be described as primarily:

- A. a narration of several events that have restored the bonds of a broken family.
- B. an attempt by a young woman to understand the peculiarities of her great-grandmother.
- C. a young woman's remembrance of and tribute to her great-grandmother.
- D. a dialogue between members of two generations of a family.

Give reasons for eliminating incorrect answers.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

2. It is reasonable to conclude from the events in the passage that the narrator tears apart the paper found in the locket because she:

- F. felt jealous of her great-grandmother's cooking skills.
- G. was trying to get more attention from her other relatives.
- H. needed a way to express her grief physically.
- J. wanted to protect her great-grandmother's secret.

3. The descriptions in lines 42-53 are examples of:

- A. the great-grandmother's thrifty nature.
- B. reasons why the narrator never enjoyed spending time with her great-grandmother.
- C. secrets that the family was not aware of until the great-grandmother's death.
- D. traditional meals the family enjoyed together.

Before jumping to the answers, make sure you understand the question, and try to answer it without looking at the answer choices. Doing so will make it easier to use POE and to find the correct answer.

4. The narrator uses all of the following to characterize her great-grandmother EXCEPT:

- F. physical details.
- G. descriptions of the narrator's memories.
- H. references to how other family members describe her great-grandmother.
- J. comparisons between the narrator and her great-grandmother as a young woman.

5. The descriptions in the second paragraph (lines 13-24) and fifth paragraph (lines 54-71) depict the great-grandmother as someone who:

- A. is unwilling to reveal information about herself.
- B. prefers to be alone rather than to share time with her family.
- C. makes great efforts to be respected.
- D. frugally keeps and reuses things in order to save money.

Give reasons for eliminating incorrect answers.

- A. _____
- B. _____
- C. _____
- D. _____

Words in Context

3-6 per test E M H

- Words in context questions ask you what a word, phrase, or statement means in the context of the passage.

These questions do not test your vocabulary as much as they test your ability to understand how words can have different meanings in different situations.

- Words in context questions typically appear in the following forms:

As it is used in line ____, the word ____ most nearly means that...

In the context of the passage, the statement in lines ____ most nearly means that...

The phrase _____ refers to the...

Which of the following words from the passage is used figuratively?

The author uses the term ____ to refer to...

In the context of the passage, the phrase _____ can most nearly be paraphrased as...

When the author says, "____," she most nearly means...

- The correct answer to a words in context question is often a secondary and obscure definition of the selected term. Incorrect answer choices usually include more common usages or definitions.
- Read the entire sentence to understand the context in which the word or phrase is used. If necessary, also read the sentences which appear before and after.

When you encounter a word you don't recognize or a sentence you don't understand, you can use the surrounding information to help you determine what it means. Even if you can't determine the exact meaning, you should be able to make an educated guess.
- If you are stuck, try plugging in. Reread the sentence with each of the answer choices and see which works best.

PUT IT TOGETHER

HUMANITIES: This passage is adapted from Larzer Ziff’s introduction to “Nature and Selected Essays,” a collection of essays by writer and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In his constant emphasis on the self, Emerson was reacting to the social tyranny of the American crowd. He did not for a moment believe that the counter to majority rule should be a return to some form of monarchy. Rather, he pursued the ideal of disbanding the mob through bringing to each of its members a sense of identity as a separate person. Ideally, each of us can develop a sense of self that resists grouping if we follow our reason rather than our understanding. The rightness of our own uniqueness takes precedence over the mere correctness of common sense. Where others gazed upon a church congregation or a political gathering and saw a mass unified by a purpose or a prejudice, Emerson saw individuals, each with his or her own integrity, an integrity that was being destroyed by the preacher or party boss who encouraged them to think of themselves as a collectivity.

In May 1839, Emerson returned from attending church to vent in his journal his displeasure with the minister he had heard: “Cease, thou unauthorized talker, to preach of consolation, and resignation, and spiritual joys, in neat and balanced sentences. I know these folk who sit below you, and on the hearing of these words look up. Hush, quickly: for care and crisis are real things to them. There is Mr. Tolman, the shoemaker, whose daughter is gone mad, and he is looking up through his spectacles to hear what you can offer for his case. Here is my friend, whose clients are all leaving him, and he knows not what to turn his hand to next. Here is my wife, who has come to church in the hope of being soothed and strengthened after being wounded by the sharp tongue of an intruder in her house. Here is the stage-driver who had the jaundice, and cannot get well. Here is B, whose courage failed last week, and he is looking up. O speak real things, then, or hold thy tongue.” These comments are an example of how Emerson saw one plus one plus one when he saw a group. For him this was not a trick of perception; it was a moral necessity.

European reformers of the day struggled against the tyranny of one or another monarch and were enraged by the cruel division of their native land into parcels. They opposed their rulers by attempting to rally their compatriots and create powerful mobs. But America was a land in which the tyrant was already a collectivity. In this different political environment, Emerson pursued a different tactic. He attempted to disperse the American mob and encouraged each citizen to have their own, individual voice. He writes

in his journal in April 1841: “Let there be one person, let there be love and truth and virtue in one individual, in two individuals, in ten individuals, then can there be community: then is community for the first time possible. Now nothing can be gained by merely adding zeroes to a faceless sum.”

The revolution which Emerson incites is moral. He urges us to realize that when we follow our individual reason, each of us is a majority of one already. Emerson argues that if we each yield to a numerical majority, we simply add zeroes to ourselves, as our own voice is lost in the crowd’s. In this sense, to join the majority is to participate in our own diminishment and in the degradation of democracy.

1. The word “counter” in line 3 most nearly means:
 - A. addition.
 - B. support.
 - C. ledge.
 - D. antidote.

2. By the expression “one plus one plus one” in line 38, the author emphasizes Emerson’s:
 - F. oversimplified view of human differences.
 - G. reliance on mathematical logic to support his philosophy.
 - H. belief in the importance of each individual person.
 - J. conviction that people are as interchangeable as numbers.

3. In line 44, the word “parcels” most nearly means:
 - A. segments.
 - B. packages.
 - C. camps.
 - D. groups.

4. In line 61, the statement that “we simply add zeroes to ourselves” most nearly means that:
 - F. the way to accumulate wealth for ourselves is to cooperate with others.
 - G. the way to gain support for our cause is to adapt it to the wishes of the majority.
 - H. we gain nothing by opposing public opinion.
 - J. we gain nothing by aligning ourselves with the biggest constituency.



Assessing the Perspectives

- ❑ Objectively analyze each of the three perspectives. You can systematically examine the perspectives by identifying the interest, argument, and conclusion for each.

The **interest** is what a person or group cares about. When considering issues, different people will have different concerns based on what matters most to them. Identify the underlying values or concerns that are the basis of the perspectives.

The **argument** is the reasoning and logic that a perspective uses to justify its conclusion. Arguments connect details from the issues to a party's interest, showing how the issue affects the things the party values.

The **conclusion** is like a verdict, a decision on the point of conflict. The issues presented in the ACT essay prompts have no clear solution, but each perspective offers a generalized solution based on its main interest and supported by its argument.

- ❑ Judge the strengths and weakness of each of the perspectives. Identifying the interests, arguments, and conclusions will help focus your assessments.

Consider the importance of the interests. Some interests may be more critical than others. Ask yourself: *Is this really what matter most when considering the main issue?*

Compare the strength of the arguments. Some may be more reasonable than others. Determine if there are any logical errors, such as false assumptions.

Ask yourself: *Is there any other way to think about the interests of this perspective?*

Consider the effects and effectiveness of the conclusions. Some solutions bring more problems or don't fully solve the issue. Also, some interests can be addressed with different conclusions.

Ask yourself: *What is the best way to the problem that is mentioned in this perspective?*

TRY IT OUT

Read the following essay prompt. Consider the issue and perspectives. Write a brief response in support of or in opposition to each perspective.

Genetically Modified Foods

Genetically modified foods are organisms that have had their DNA altered. Through genetic engineering, scientists modify organisms to be more resilient, nutritious, and appealing. Plants are common subjects of genetic modification, which allows scientists to have more control over plant traits than traditional methods of selective breeding. Many crops have been genetically modified to be more resistant to disease and less vulnerable to parasites. Even milk-producing animals have been modified to produce proteins used in medical treatments. Because genetic modification is a modern practice made possible by recently discovered techniques, there is still controversy over the labeling and regulation regarding genetically modified foods. Many of these policies are not yet finalized because there are no long-term studies on the effects of producing or consuming these foods.

Read and carefully consider these perspectives. Each suggests a particular way of thinking about the problems or benefits associated with genetically modified foods.

Perspective One

As the human population rises, there is an immediate need for more food. By making food sources more available and productive, genetic modification is the solution to world hunger.

Perspective Two

Modified foods should not be made available to consumers until more testing is done. Such modifications can create new diseases or other problems. We should not potentially endanger consumers.

Perspective Three

Scientists have an ethical obligation to honor and preserve the natural world. A change made for humanity's sake may harm systems of nature, which must be preserved for our existence.

Perspective One: _____

Perspective Two: _____

Perspective Three: _____

