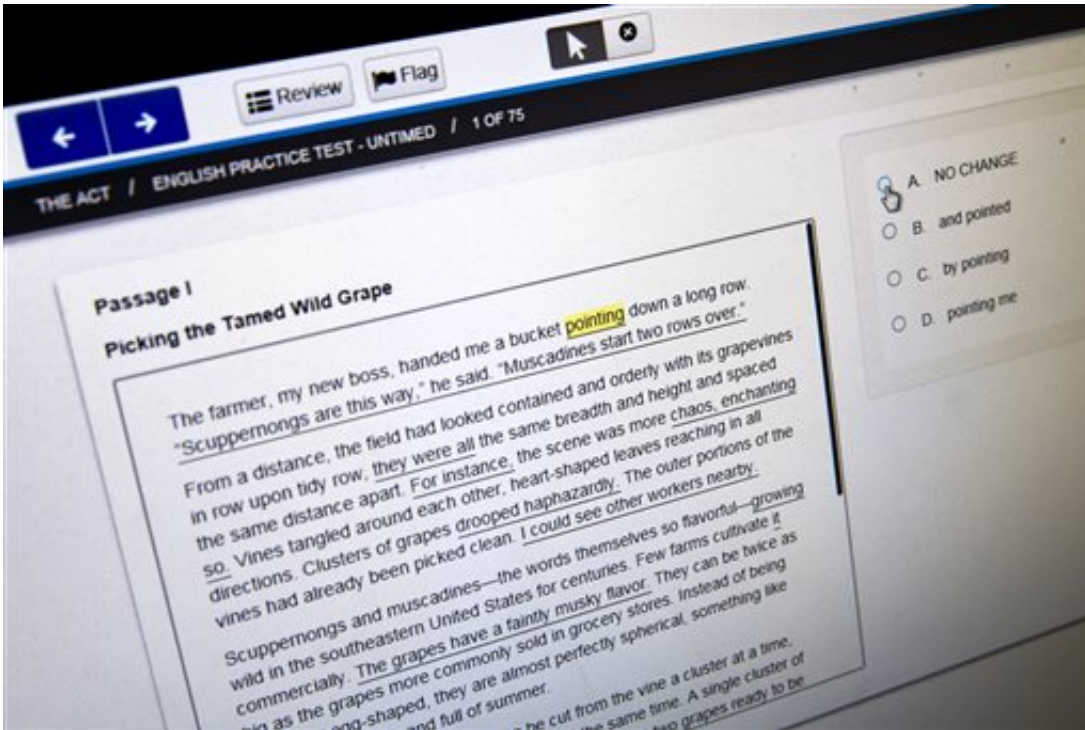


ACT to expand computer-based testing

May 8 2015, by Kimberly Hefling



A computer-based practice ACT English test is displayed on a computer monitor Wednesday, May 6, 2015, in Washington. The ACT is announcing May 8, 2015, that computer-based testing of the ACT would be available next year in the states and districts that require students to take the ACT during the school day. About 1 million students could be affected. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

ACT test takers take note: The No. 2 pencil is losing its cachet. Greater numbers of high school students will be able to take the college entrance exam on a computer next year.

The ACT announced Friday that computer-based testing will be available next year in the 18 states and additional districts that require students, typically juniors, to take the ACT during the school day. About 1 million students could be affected.

But don't throw away those pencils yet.

Participating schools provide the computers for testing, and ACT officials say it's too early to predict how many schools will be ready next year to offer the online testing. Even where computer-based testing is available, ACT officials said the traditional paper test will still be an option.

The announcement follows a two-year pilot project that allowed about 10,000 high school students to take the college-placement exam by computer, laptop or tablet.

The ACT said it's not making computer-based testing available on its traditional Saturday morning test dates largely because of the number of computers needed.

Paul Weeks, senior vice president for client relations at ACT, said the Iowa City, Iowa-based company is making the transition to online testing "thoughtfully and gradually," so that all stakeholders can be assured that test scores on the computerized version are comparable to the paper version, which has been offered since 1959.

What won't change? The familiar 36-point scale and the amount of time it takes for students to find out their scores, which is usually between two weeks and two months.

"There is no difference between the tests except that it's online and that was really important to us," said Kaitlynn Griffith, ACT's program

director.

The move to online testing is a reflection of the evolving ways students learn in classrooms and the ease at which they use computers. ACT is far from alone in making the transition to computer-based testing.

Next year, the College Board has said it will roll out the new version of the competing SAT college entrance exam and make computer-based testing an option. The SAT was once the dominant college admissions exam, but it was overtaken in popularity in 2012 by the ACT.

Computer-based testing, including standardized tests based on the Common Core standards, has led schools to upgrade Internet connectivity, make devices such as laptops or tablets available, and teach more keyboarding.

It also brings up new questions in test administration, such as in the area of cheating. While moving to online testing eliminates the ability to erase and change answers by educators, there are new issues such as the need to prevent test takers from taking screen grabs of test questions to share with others.

Weeks said the company has been grappling with these issues as it makes the transition. ACT suggests that students take a practice test on computer before taking an online test, and encourages schools that will offer the tests to go through a test preparation checklist.

Weeks said online testing could open the door for ACT to offer more modular testing, so that a student doesn't have to take every subject on the same day.

"The best preparation for the ACT has been and continues to be taking rigorous core course," Weeks said. "It doesn't matter if you're testing

online or not."

More information: www.act.org/

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