

Writing Assessment

English writing assessment is a two-step process:

The first step is the Accuplacer Sentence Skills test. This computerized placement test consists of two types of questions. According to the information provided by Accuplacer: “The first type is sentence correction questions that require an understanding of sentence structure. These questions ask you to choose the most appropriate word or phrase for the underlined portion of the sentence. The second type is construction shift questions. These questions ask that a sentence be rewritten according to the criteria shown while maintaining essentially the same meaning as the original sentence. Within these two primary categories, the questions are also classified according to the skills being tested. Some questions deal with the logic of the sentence, others with whether or not the answer is a complete sentence, and still others with the relationship between coordination and subordination.”

Here is an example of a sentence correction question written by Accuplacer:

Stamp collecting being a hobby that is sometimes used in the schools to teach economics and social studies.

- A. being a hobby that is
- B. is a hobby because it is
- C. which is a hobby
- D. is a hobby

EXPLANATION: Choice D is the correct answer because the verb ‘being’ cannot stand alone as the verb of the sentence. The correct verb form to use here is “is.” Notice that choice A is the same as the example, so if on the test you feel an example is correct as it is written, choose A for your answer.

Here is an example of a construction shift question written by Accuplacer:

It is easy to carry solid objects without spilling them, but the same cannot be said of liquids.
Rewrite, beginning with Unlike liquids,
The next words will be

- A. it is easy to
- B. we can easily
- C. solid objects can easily be
- D. solid objects are easy to be

EXPLANATION: These questions ask you to re-write the sentence in your head while keeping the meaning essentially the same. Here, the correct choice is C. If you were to re-write the sentence beginning with the words “Unlike liquids,” the next words you would need to have would be “solid objects can easily be” because the entire sentence would look like this: “Unlike liquids, solid objects can easily be carried without spilling them.”

Students who score 86 or higher on the Accuplacer sentence skills test automatically place into English Composition I (ENGL-100) as their first English course, and those who score below a

68 are placed into Review for College Writing (DWRT-099). Test-takers whose results lie between those points proceed to the second stage of English assessment: the English Placement Essay.

The placement essay is an impromptu writing sample in response to a topic that the writer selects from a short list of prompts. Here is an example of one essay prompt that was used in past years:

What is the most memorable or significant book you have read in the last year? Identify the specific qualities of the book and explain why they affected you. Don't simply retell the story; rather, focus on the impact that the book had on your own mind and heart.

Students have a maximum of 60 minutes to plan, draft, edit, and proofread a five-paragraph essay. Completed essays are evaluated by two members of the Developmental English or English faculty. Essays that qualify for placement into ENGL-100 show an understanding of basic essay structure. The writer knows how to present and develop a central idea in response to one of the assigned topics. The supporting points are stated clearly and are organized in an attempt to produce logical paragraphs. Although individual paragraphs may not be fully developed, the writer has included some specific details and observations to clarify general statements. Most sentences in the sample are clearly written. While there may be some errors in sentence structure, standard English grammar, punctuation, and spelling, these errors are occasional rather than persistent.

A writer whose sample essay achieves this standard will be assigned to English Composition I as his or her first English course. All others will be assigned to the developmental writing course, Review for College Writing, as their initial class.

Reading Assessment

STCC uses the Accuplacer Reading Test to evaluate the reading skills of entering students. Results on this test determine whether or not a student will be required to take a reading class at the college, and if so, at which level. The Accuplacer test is an adaptive test of reading comprehension given at a computer terminal. Adaptive means that the program automatically selects appropriate questions for you based on your responses to previous questions. Because the test reacts to you, it can assess your reading skills with fewer questions than other tests, in this case about twenty items. Here are examples of

the two ways in which the reading test presents questions:

Some questions will ask you to read a statement or passage and then choose the best answer to the question. You will answer according to what is stated or implied in the passage.

There are two types of pottery that I do. There is production pottery - - mugs, tableware - -the kinds of things that sell easily. These pay for my time to do the other work, which is more creative and satisfies my needs as an artist.

The author of this passage implies that

list of 4 items

- A. artists have a tendency to waste valuable time
- B. creativity and mass-production are incompatible*
- C. most people do not appreciate good art
- D. pottery is not produced by creative artists

list end

The correct answer is B. - creativity and mass-production are not compatible. Other questions will give you two underlined sentences followed by a question or statement. Read the sentences, before choosing the best answer or best completion of the statement.

The Midwest is experiencing the worst drought in fifteen years. Corn and soybean prices are expected to be very high this year. What does the second sentence do?

list of 4 items

- A. It restates the idea found in the first.
- B. It states an effect.*
- C. It gives an example.
- D. It analyzes the statement made in the first.

list end

The correct answer is B – it states an effect. A college-level score on the reading test will be designated READING 105. Students who place at that level do not need to take a reading course at STCC. Scores of DRDG 091 or DRDG 092 indicate that you will benefit from a college reading course and you will be required to take those classes to move forward in your degree program.

Preparing for the English and Reading Assessments

Habits of careful, critical reading and practice in clear, correct writing acquired over years of schooling are the best preparation for these tests. However, there are some more immediate things you can do to help you to perform your best on the sentence skills test, the placement essay, and the reading assessment tests.

1. If the rules of writing aren't fresh for you, find a review book, preferably one with practice exercises, that explains correct grammar, sentence structure and punctuation. Having an understanding of issues like subject-verb agreement, pronoun use, identifying and fixing sentence fragments and run-ons, and commonly confused words like there, their, or they're, for example, you will have a better chance of recognizing the correct choices on the sentence skills test. Books like *The Least You Need to Know about English – Writing Skills* (Wilson & Glazier, Wadsworth Publishing Co. 2007) or any other basic college English book will help you greatly.

2. As there's a good chance you will be writing an essay as part of English assessment, you should get in shape for it. Writing is a skill, and like many other skills, it needs practice. If you have not written much recently or if you feel uncertain about what essays are and how to write them, give yourself some practice. Consult a review text for hints about essay writing and then try writing a five or six paragraph essay to express and support a position. Here is a topic you can practice with:

Commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq have stretched the ability of the U. S. military to do its work and not enough new recruits are entering the military to fill the positions of those soldiers, sailors, marines and air force personnel who will soon retire. Should the United States reinstitute a draft to fill staffing needs? Yes or No? If your answer is no what other solution can you offer?

3. As an Accuplacer Reading Test doesn't test for vocabulary words (in isolation, anyway) you should steer away from wordlists and focus on practice materials that give you passages to read and comprehension questions to answer. Any of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) review

materials will be useful in this regard, but the best help you can give yourself is to get into the practice of reading every day and thinking carefully about what you read.

4. Simple test-taking strategies always help in producing test performances that show your full abilities. First, understand that you need to take these placement tests seriously because your performance on them will have a direct impact on your course schedule for your first semester at STCC. Getting a good night's sleep before the assessments, taking your time to read and understand the directions, reading all of the answer choices before answering each question, eliminating obviously wrong answers, thinking carefully about the answers you choose and why you've chosen them, etc. contribute to good test performances. You should also be aware of the rules about time and guessing. The Accuplacer sentence skills test and the Accuplacer Reading Test are both untimed. Neither of the tests penalizes wrong answers so make your best educated guess. The English placement essay does carry a firm 60 minute time limit, but most writers find they don't need that much time to write a satisfactory essay.

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