

Preparation for the Reading to Write (RTW) English Placement Test

RTW English Placement Test: Overview

The RTW English Placement Test is required for all incoming students who do not meet exemption criteria (see FAQs for information on exemptions). English Faculty use the RTW English Placement Test to place students into the appropriate English courses that will best promote academic success, and to determine eligibility for other courses new students can take in their first semester at college.

Understand that it is not possible to ‘fail’ this test! However, it is important that you perform to your best abilities to ensure appropriate placement for your first semester courses.

This is a timed test and you must complete it in one sitting. You will not be able to log out and then log back in and resume the test. Before beginning the test, you are encouraged to spend as much time as needed in reviewing the preparation material.

The test has several components to complete. You must complete the test within an allotted amount of time.

- You will respond to brief questions to help us better understand your academic, demographic, and personal background.
- Then you will be provided with a short passage to read.
- Based on this passage, you will answer some reading comprehension questions.
- Next, you will write a multi-paragraph essay in response to this passage.
- Finally, based on the provided course descriptions, you will write a short paragraph explaining which English course you believe is a good fit for you.

You have a total of 3 hours to complete the timed portion of RTW English Placement Test. You must complete the test in one sitting – you cannot stop, pause or log out and start again later.

RTW English Placement Test: Preparation

Below are information and materials that can help you prepare for the test.

About the passage

You will read a brief college-level passage for the RTW English Placement Test (sample passages can be found below in Additional Resource #3). Topics are based on current issues and will challenge you to reflect on past experiences, personal points of view, approaches to studying and learning, and so on. Passages will include a title and author's name. You are encouraged to refer to the author in your response.

Questions to Guide Reading Comprehension:

- What is the main idea of the article?
- What details are used to support the main idea?
- What is the author’s purpose for writing this article?

About the essay response

As you read the passage, you are encouraged to take notes on a separate sheet of paper.

Questions to Guide the Essay Response

- What best describes this passage?
- Why did the author write this passage?
- What is the author trying to argue or demonstrate?
- Is this an important topic, why or why not?
- Does the author make convincing points?
- In your experience, have you ever encountered what the author is discussing? If so, how?
- How does this passage relate to a larger discussion about the topic?

Planning your essay

The directions ask you to “Plan and write a well-organized essay in response to the following passage.” The writing prompt will be as follows: “In your own words, explain the author’s most important argument. Do you agree or disagree with the author’s ideas?” Support your ideas by discussing the passage above as well as your own experience and knowledge. Many academic writers plan their essays by pre-writing (listing; idea mapping; free writing) or creating outlines. We encourage you to create an outline. However, it is not necessary.

Writing a well-organized essay

Your academic writing should be divided into paragraphs, and a well-organized essay should include an introduction paragraph with a clear thesis statement, supporting details organized into well-composed body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph.

Structuring Your Response

- Thesis or major claim/stance
- Multiple paragraphs
 - Introductory paragraph
 - Body paragraphs
 - Concluding paragraph
- Supporting details/examples
- Academic tone; not conversational language
- Standard English grammar and mechanics

Academic Honesty

You may not use any outside sources while you are taking this placement test. All tests are checked for plagiarism. If plagiarism is found anywhere on your test, the test will become invalid and a CCC administrator will contact you.

Organizing Your Time

You will have 3 hours to complete the timed portion of the test, and we recommend that you use all the time you are given, using the following strategy:

Background Information: This section is not timed, but plan to spend about 15-30 minutes reading and responding to brief questions to help us better understand your academic and personal background.

Reading Comprehension: This section is timed. You will have 30 minutes to complete this portion of the test. You will answer multiple-choice questions about the reading passage.

Essay Response: This section is timed. You will have 120 minutes to complete this portion of the test. You will compose a multi-paragraph essay in response to the same reading passage.

Outlining, Planning, and Pre-Writing: Spend about 10-15 minutes outlining your response, or pre-writing. Your outline and notes will not be turned in; they are for your benefit. The purpose is to generate an easy-to-follow plan that you can refer to when you begin to write your response.

Writing Your Essay: Spend about 75-90 minutes writing your essay. Make sure to follow the directions and answer all parts of the essay question. Again, your essay will be evaluated on the following: your ability to critically respond to the writing task; the development of your ideas; the structure of your response; your sentence and word choice; and your grammar, usage and mechanics.

Proofreading and Editing: Spend about 10-15 minutes proofreading and editing your essay. Read your essay carefully and make any changes that you feel would improve your writing. As you proofread, consider the following questions:

- Did I answer the question and follow the directions?
- Did I organize my essay with an introduction, conclusion, and supporting details divided into neat paragraphs and units?
- Did I provide enough details to really develop my thesis or main idea?
- Did I use proper punctuation, including the proper use of periods and commas?
- Did I write clear and grammatically correct sentences?

Self-Placement: This section is timed. You will have 30 minutes to complete this portion of the test. You will read descriptions of English courses and write a short paragraph explaining the level of English that you believe is a good fit for you.

Understanding How Your Test is Scored

There are five main components that the faculty readers will look for in your essay:

- **Critical Response to the Writing Task:** This category refers to your ability to analyze and thoroughly discuss the reading passage and integrate your own ideas into the response.
- **Development of Writer's Ideas:** This looks at your ability to develop your ideas in a clear and organized way. When developing your response, you should include both general statements and specific details and examples by paraphrasing and quoting from the passage. In addition, connect those ideas to situations you have experienced or observed in your life.
- **Organization:** This evaluates your ability to organize ideas into a coherent multi-paragraph essay that supports a thesis or a central idea. Place your thesis at the beginning of the essay and follow with body paragraphs and a conclusion.
- **Language Use: Sentence and Word Choice:** This evaluates your vocabulary usage and how well you demonstrate sentence control and variety in sentence structure. “Variety in sentence structure” refers to your use of different sentence patterns: simple, compound, and complex, as well as how creatively you begin your sentences.
- **Language Use: Grammar and Mechanics:** This looks at your ability to follow the conventions of Standard American English usage in terms of grammar and mechanics.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE #1

Suggested Outline Template for the Essay

<p>Introduction Paragraph</p> <p>Thesis Statement</p>
<p>Body Paragraph #1</p> <p>First major supporting point (topic sentence)</p> <p>Minor supporting details (personal experience and references to the article)</p>
<p>Body Paragraph #2</p> <p>Second major supporting point (topic sentence)</p> <p>Minor supporting details (personal experience and references to the article)</p>
<p>Body Paragraph #3</p> <p>Third major supporting point (topic sentence)</p> <p>Minor supporting details (personal experience and references to the article)</p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <p>Final thoughts: Tell your readers again why this issue is so important.</p>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE #2

Common Sentence and Grammar Errors

- *Run-on Sentences*: These are sentences that are either fused sentences or comma splices. In the case of a fused sentence, proper punctuation is missing and it just “runs on and on.”
 - Incorrect: I love going to the park I like to play fetch with my dog while I am there.
 - Correct: I love going to the park, and I like to play fetch with my dog while I am there.
 - Correct: I love going to the park. I like to play fetch with my dog while I am there.

A comma splice is two sentences joined by a comma when a coordinating conjunction (or replacing the comma with a period or semicolon) is necessary to correct the sentence(s).

- Incorrect: I hope to earn a certificate in Early Childhood Development, my hope is to open my own daycare center.
 - Correct: I hope to earn a certificate in Early Childhood Development, and my hope is to open my own daycare center.
- *Sentence Fragments*: These are incomplete sentences that lack a subject and/or a verb and/or a complete thought.
 - Incorrect: Because I did not get to school on time.
 - Correct: Because I did not get to school on time, I could not talk to my teacher.
 - *Subject-Verb Agreement*: This is when subjects and verbs agree in number. Singular subjects require singular verbs; plural subjects require plural verbs.
 - Incorrect: The kids loves pizza.
 - Correct: The kids love pizza.
 - Explanation: The subject (kids) does not agree with the verb (loves).
 - *Verb Tense*: If you are discussing something that takes place in the present, make sure to use present tense verbs. If you are discussing something that takes place in the past, make sure to use past tense verbs.
 - *Spelling*: Use appropriate spelling in your essay. The test does not have autocorrect or spell check functions, so you need to carefully proofread your work.
 - *Punctuation and Sentence Control*: Check for appropriate punctuation in your sentences. Make sure to include commas, when necessary, and to use periods to separate sentences.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE #3

Sample Passages

PASSAGE 1

“If Walls Could Talk” adapted from an article by A. Kohn

You can tell quite a lot about what goes on in a classroom or a school even if you visit after everyone has gone home. Just by looking at the walls – or, more precisely, what’s on the walls -- it’s possible to get a feel for the educational priorities, the attitudes about children, even the assumptions about human nature of the people in charge.

“**NO WHINING**” is a sign that I have often seen in classrooms across the country. This sign is meant to send a message to students, and that message seems to be, “I don’t want to hear your complaints about anything that you’re being made to do (or prevented from doing).” To be sure, this is not an unusual sentiment; in fact, it may be exactly what your boss would like to say to you. But that doesn’t mean it’s admirable to insist that students should just do whatever they’re told, regardless of whether it’s reasonable or how it makes them feel. If *we* might respond with frustration or resentment to receiving such a message, why would we treat students that way? “No whining” mostly underscores the fact that the person saying this has more power than the people to whom it’s said.

It’s fine to offer an occasional, matter-of-fact reminder to a child that people tend to be put off by certain ways of asking for something, but our priority should be to make sure that kids know we’re listening, that our relationship with them doesn’t depend on the way they talk to us. Besides, young children in particular need to have some way of expressing their frustration. We don’t let them hit, scream, or curse. Now we’re insisting that they can’t even use a tone of voice that’s, well, insistent?

Regardless of how “whining” is defined, going to the trouble of posting a sign about it suggests that our own convenience is what matters most to us (since it’s obviously easier for anyone in a position of authority if those being ordered to do something comply without question). It also implies that we’re unwilling to reconsider our own actions and uninterested in having students question authority -- despite the fact that education at its best consists of helping them to do precisely that.

PASSAGE 2

“Competition or Collaboration” adapted from an article by A. Kohn

Most of us were raised to believe that we do our best work when we're in a race -- that without competition we would all become fat, lazy, and mediocre. It's a belief that our society takes on faith. It's also false.

There is good evidence that productivity in the workplace suffers as a result of competition. The research is even more compelling in classroom settings. David Johnson, a professor of social psychology at the University of Minnesota, and his colleagues reviewed all the studies they could find on the subject from 1924 to 1980. Sixty-five of the studies found that children learn better when they work cooperatively as opposed to competitively, eight found the reverse, and 36 found no significant difference. The more complex the learning task, the worse children in a competitive environment fared.

Brandeis University psychologist Teresa Amabile was more interested in creativity. She asked 22 girls, ages seven to 11, to make "silly artwork." Some competed for prizes and some didn't. Seven artists then independently rated the girls' work. It turned out that the children who were trying to win produced artwork that was much less creative -- less spontaneous, complex and varied -- than the others.

One after another, researchers across the country have concluded that children do not learn better when education is transformed into a competitive struggle. Why? First, competition often makes kids anxious and that interferes with concentration. Second, competition doesn't permit them to share their talents and resources as cooperation does, so they can't learn from one another. Finally, trying to be Number One distracts them from what they're supposed to be learning. It may seem paradoxical, but when a student concentrates on the reward (an A or a gold star or a trophy), she becomes less interested in what she's doing. As a result, performance declines.

PASSAGE 3

“Mastering Mass Media” adapted from an article by S. Pinker

New forms of media have always caused moral panics: the printing press, newspapers, paperbacks, and television were all once seen as threats to their consumers’ brainpower and moral fiber. But such panics often fail basic reality checks. When comic books were accused of turning teens into troublemakers in the 1950s, crime was falling to record lows, just as the denunciation of video games in the 1990s occurred at the same time as a decline in crime. The decades of television, transistor radios, and rock videos were also decades in which I.Q. scores rose continuously.

For a reality check today, take the state of science, which demands high levels of thinking and is measured by moments of discovery. These days, scientists are never far from their e-mail, rarely touch paper, and cannot lecture without PowerPoint. If electronic media lowered our intelligence, the quality of science would drop. Yet, discoveries are multiplying like fruit flies, and progress continues.

The effects of electronic media are also likely to be far more limited than the panic implies. Media critics write as if the brain takes on the qualities of whatever it consumes, the informational equivalent of “you are what you eat.” As with primitive peoples who believe that eating fierce animals will make them fierce, they assume that watching quick cuts in rock videos turns your mental life into quick cuts or that reading bullet points and Twitter postings turns your *thoughts* into bullet points and Twitter postings.

Yes, the constant arrival of information packets can be distracting or addictive, especially to people with attention deficit disorder. But distraction is not a new phenomenon. The solution is not to ignore technology but to develop strategies of self-control, as we do with every other temptation in life. Turn off e-mail or Twitter when you work, put away your iPhone at dinner time, ask your spouse to call you to bed at a designated hour.

There is a reason we use new media so much. Knowledge is increasing; human brainpower and waking hours are not. Fortunately, the Internet helps us manage, search, and retrieve information, from Twitter to online newspapers. Far from making us stupid, these technologies are the only things that will keep us smart.

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