

## Reading to Write Placement Overview

The Reading to Write Placement Test is required for all incoming students who do not meet exemption criteria (see FAQs for information on exemptions). This test helps faculty determine student preparedness in reading and writing.

English Faculty use the Reading to Write 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. Taking this test seriously can prevent you from wasting both time and money by placing you into classes you don't need.

Therefore, before taking the test, read through the **Reading to Write Placement Test preparation** materials at your own pace to ensure understanding of the process and expectations of the test. Preparation materials are provided so that you know what to expect and how faculty will evaluate your test.

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 reviewing the preparation material.

## Reading to Write Placement Test Preparation

The test has several components to complete. You must complete each portion of 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 five reading comprehension questions.
- Next, you will write an essay in response to this passage.
- Finally, based on the provided course descriptions, you will write a short paragraph explaining the English course you believe is a good fit for you.

### Test Preparation

This will help you prepare for the Reading to Write Placement Test. Materials are organized as follows:

1. What to expect
2. About the passages

3. Sample passage
4. Essay expectations
5. Understanding the essay prompt
6. Planning your essay
7. Writing a "well-organized" essay
8. Sample passage, essay, and comments
9. Organizing your time
10. Understanding how your essay will be scored

## 1. What to expect

You can take as much time as you need reading through the preparation material. However, you will have a total of **2.5 hours** to complete The Reading to Write Placement Test. You must complete the test in one sitting – you cannot stop, pause or log out and start again later. The Reading to Write Placement Test asks you to read a short passage, answer multiple-choice questions about the passage, and then respond to the passage by planning and writing a well-organized essay that does the following:

- Demonstrates understanding of and basic critical thinking in response to the passage.
- Organizes ideas and builds connections among them.
- Supports ideas with evidence/examples from the reading and relevant personal experience and observations.
- Demonstrates competence in sentence construction, sentence variety, and word choice.
- Exhibits correct grammar and syntax.

## 2. About the passages

- The passage you read for the Reading to Write Placement Test will be approximately 350 words.
- Passages come from recent newspaper, internet, or magazine articles that are appropriate for first-year college students.
- 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.

## 3. Sample passage

*Adapted from the article "Remedial Civility Training" by Professor Thomas Benton*

I often hear a lot of talk about the academic weaknesses of new students. But those deficiencies don't bother me all that much. I am here to help them become better readers and writers, as well as to learn the particular content of my courses. Even more than that, I want to cultivate in them a sense of pleasure in learning that will enrich their lives. What really troubles me is that schools – no doubt, mirroring the broader culture – have given up emphasizing the ordinary courtesies that enable people to get along without friction and violence. There are the students who refuse to address us appropriately; who make border-

line insulting remarks in class when called upon (enough to irritate but not enough to require immediate action); who arrive late and slam the door behind them; who yawn continually and never cover their mouths; who neglect to bring books, paper, or even something with which to write; who send demanding e-mail messages without a respectful salutation; who make appointments and never show up (after you just drove 20 miles and put your kids in daycare to make the meeting).

But my larger concern here is not just that students behave disrespectfully toward their professors. It is that they are increasingly disrespectful to one another, to the point that a serious student has more trouble coping with the behavior of his or her fellow students than learning the material. We must stop pretending that we are not seeing what is in front of us every day. We must stop shrugging our shoulders at minor discourtesies before they transform into a culture of vulgarity, violence, and general mayhem. In the process, maybe we can win back the trust of serious students and provide a safe learning environment where they can express their enthusiasm for learning without making themselves targets for abuse.

#### 4. Essay expectations

Initial directions for the writing portion of the Reading to Write Placement Test are as follows:

1. A strong essay consists of **several paragraphs**.
2. You should refer to the passage in your essay response.
3. Leave time to revise and edit your essay.
4. **The essay you write here is the *main writing sample* that will determine your placement.**

**Plan and write a well-organized essay in response to the following:**

In your own words, explain the author's most important ideas. Do you agree or disagree with his ideas? Support your ideas by discussing the passage above as well as your own experience and knowledge.

You are asked to read the passage carefully because the ability to read, summarize, and analyze college-level literature is key to your success no matter what academic path you pursue.

As you read the passage, you are encouraged to take notes on a separate sheet of paper. As you make these notes, you should find the author's most important ideas. You should attempt to understand why the author has written this passage; what claims the author is making; how the author is supporting these claims; and what larger conversation the author is referencing. Ask yourself key questions, such as:

- In 1-2 sentences, how can you best describe this passage?
- Why did the author write this passage?
- What is the author trying to argue or demonstrate?
- Does the author convince you of his or her points?

- In your own educational history, have you ever encountered what the author is discussing? If so, how?
- How can you relate this passage to a larger discussion about the topic?

## 5. Understanding the essay prompt

The reading passage will be followed by this essay prompt: “In your own words, discuss the author's most important ideas. Do you agree or disagree with the author? Support your ideas by discussing the passage above as well as your own experience and knowledge.”

The question asks you to engage with the reading passage and to offer your own ideas and interpretations of the author's writing.

Consider the **three parts of the prompt**. These parts should not be answered separately but should emerge as part of a well-focused, well-developed essay:

1. **“Discuss the author's most important ideas.”**: This part asks you to communicate the key points of the passage. The author might not always tell you directly what his or her most important points are, so you will have to use your best judgment as you critically assess the passage.
2. **“Do you agree or disagree with the author?”**: This part asks you to make an argument and analyze the passage. You can make an argument by stating your agreement or your disagreement; you can analyze the argument by stating why you agree or disagree with the passage. Obviously, your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the author will be personal; however, as the writer you will want to offer a logical explanation of your thoughts so that the reader can clearly understand your beliefs.
3. **“Support your ideas by discussing the passage above as well as your own knowledge and experience.”**: This part asks you to support your ideas with details from the text as well as your own experience or knowledge. Your goal is to find specific moments from the passage with which you either agree or disagree. Additionally, your own experiences and ideas may also help to support your answer.

In thinking about supporting details, consider the following example: Your friend calls you on the phone and tells you that she has seen a new movie; she thinks the movie is very good, and she thinks that you should go see it at your local theater. Her main idea or argument here is that the movie is very good. Now, if she is going to convince you that the movie is very good, she will need to provide adequate supporting details. Supporting details may include: the strong performances from the actors; the hilarious script; the colorful scenery and costumes; the surprise ending, etc. It's not enough for her to just say that the movie is good. Instead, she has to show you, through these strong supporting details, that the movie is worth seeing.

## 6. Planning your essay

The directions ask you to “**Plan and write a well-organized essay in response to the following passage.**”

What does it mean to “plan” your essay? Most academic writers plan their essays by creating outlines or pre-writing their ideas, and we encourage you to create an outline of your own. You can think of an outline as a blueprint, a map, or a set of directions that you will give yourself for the essay. Outlines help writers isolate their thesis statements or main points and plan what supporting details they will use to develop their ideas. A successful outline for a short essay creates an easy-to-follow model for each paragraph or section of your essay.

As you prepare your outline and plan your response, please note that a well-written academic essay should include the following:

- An introduction that sets up a map for what the rest of the essay will look like
- A thesis statement or main idea, often included in the introduction
- Topics and ideas organized into well-composed paragraphs and units
- Details that support the thesis statement
- A conclusion that summarizes your main points and provides significance (for example, why is this a pressing issue?).

Here is a sample outline:

THESIS SENTENCE: (This is the sentence that states your main point or opinion about the topic.)

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1. First Major Supporting Detail: \_\_\_\_\_

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a. Minor Supporting Details: \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Minor Supporting Details: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Second Major Supporting Detail: \_\_\_\_\_

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a. Minor Supporting Details: \_\_\_\_\_

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b. Minor Supporting Details: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Concluding Thoughts: \_\_\_\_\_

## 7. 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**.

You may have learned in previous courses about the 5-paragraph essay. Your essay for this exam does not have to be 5 paragraphs or 3 paragraphs or any pre-determined length. The length and structure of your essay should make sense for your individual response. What's most important is that there is a logic to how you separate and organize your ideas.

*Using transitions to organize:*

In thinking about organization, consider the following example: Imagine you are having a conversation with a friend who is talking very quickly about the problems he has had in the past month. Your friend starts talking about school, then without making any shift he starts talking about dogs, and then he starts talking about his car, and then he starts talking about traffic in Chicago and then he starts talking about ice cream. As he discusses these different subjects, you, the listener, feel very confused because you cannot see how the speaker is making connections. The connections do not seem natural or logical, and the speaker is not telling you why he is discussing these issues, and why in this order. However, the speaker might do a better job of communicating his ideas if he inserted some organizational structure and transitional phrases into his speech. He could do this by saying things like:

- “*The next issue* I want to discuss is...”
- “*Furthermore*, my life has been more complicated because of my dogs...”
- “*Another* problem I have had is....”
- “*Moreover*, traffic has also been a problem for me....”
- “*Finally*, I have been eating too much ice cream lately...”

The words and phrases in italics can be thought of as **transitional devices**. That is, they help your writing because they signal to the reader that you are moving from one idea to another.

## 8. Sample Passage, Essay, and Comments

*Please note that the passage you will be given to read and respond to during the test will be twice the length of this sample passage.*

*Excerpt from “Celebrity Approval?” by Sue Jozui*

Advertisers frequently use the testimony of a celebrity to support a claim: a football star touts a deodorant soap, an actress starts every day with Brand A coffee, a tennis pro gets stamina from Brand X cereal, a talk-show host drives a certain kind of car. The audience is expected to transfer approval of the celebrity to approval of the product. This kind of marketing is misleading and insults the intelligence of the audience. Am I going to buy the newest SUV because an attractive talk-show host gets paid to pretend he drive one? I don't think so. We should boycott this kind of advertising and legislate rules and guidance for advertisers.

#### SAMPLE STUDENT ESSAY WITH FACULTY COMMENTS

American culture is unavoidably and irreversibly immersed in the media. Men, women, teenagers, and children are subject to the powerful influence of media today. As consumers, we are enmeshed in a flourishing atmosphere of subliminal messages. While some strive to be like those they see on television or in the movies, it is vital to realize in our active lives that a billboard with a favorite celebrity sprawled across it does not always deserve respect and extensive praise. As consumers we need to become more aware of the negative influences advertising has on our society. In the passage by Sue Jozui, she argues that new laws need to be developed in order to curtail such obvious manipulation of the viewing audience and misrepresentation of the product being sold. However, legislating rules and guidelines for advertisers as Jozui suggests seems like an extreme measure to take.

Jozui points out how marketing is misleading, and she is correct. Marketers want us to buy their products, and if it means advertising the product with celebrity X, they will use that celebrity. There is no doubt that Americans have given advertisers the power to throw any kind of marketing scam at us, usually without us even noticing their goal: to make money. Advertisers and marketers target all ages, races, ethnicities, etc. No one is truly immune from advertising. For example, many famous actresses who have beautiful skin market Proactive Acne solution. Many people are fooled by marketing ploys. For instance, a friend of mine was won over by the celebrity endorsements and went out and bought the product. She believed that the actress in the commercial was really helped by Proactive Acne. As you might guess, the product did not help; it only made her acne worse, but in the end she has learned from this mistake.

Many of us want to relate to celebrities, and advertisers know this. We watch a tennis player win the US Open and admire her perseverance. Then, we consider buying Brand X cereal because this tennis player endorses it as the source of her "stamina." You could look it as Jozui does as advertisers and marketers insulting consumer intelligence. She questions, "Am I going to buy the newest SUV because an attractive talk-show host gets paid to pretend he drives one? I don't think so." She may feel offended and not be persuaded, but this is just big business doing its job. The most appropriate solution is to simply make ourselves and children more aware of the marketing strategies that confront them.

Although Jozui recommends boycotting advertising, I find this request impossible to fulfill. We simply could not effectively boycott all celebrity-oriented advertising. Advertising holds much too broad of an influence on culture today. Media education and a little self-control can help protect consumers from manipulation by the media. We must work towards a modern day America where we, as citizens, realize the influence of media upon us and acknowledge its presence. Without needing to propose new legislation, we should be able to educate ourselves on what these products really have to offer regardless of what recognizable face is presenting the item.

**Comment [HSTC1]:** Up to this point the student is establishing background for the topic-- media influences consumers.

**Comment [HSTC2]:** Here, the writer is transitioning into his thesis statement. The idea of negative influences is pulled from the Jozui excerpt.

**Comment [HSTC3]:** Writer takes a position by responding to the writing task-- Do you agree or disagree with the author?

**Comment [HSTC4]:** Writer's first point addresses one of Jozui's claims.

**Comment [HSTC5]:** Writer concedes to her point.

**Comment [HSTC6]:** Writer includes an example to support his claim.

**Comment [HSTC7]:** Again, the reasons the writer provides connect well to the reading (i.e. celebrities and advertising)

**Comment [HSTC8]:** Unlike the last paragraph, here the student writer diverges from Jozui's argument.

**Comment [HSTC9]:** This paragraph continues to build on the writer's critique of Jozui's proposition.

## 9. Organizing your time

As previously stated, you will have 2.5 hours to complete the test and we recommend that you use all the time you are given, using the following strategy:

**Demographic Questions:** Devote about 15 minutes to reading and responding to brief questions to help us better understand your academic and personal background (this is not part of the overall 2 hour time limit).

**Reading Passage and Answering the Reading Comprehension Questions:** There are multiple-choice questions based on the passage. Devote about **15 – 30** minutes to reading the passage and answering these questions.

**Reading and Taking Notes:** Devote about **15 minutes** to carefully reading the passage, taking notes, and marking important ideas. As you read the passage, ask yourself:

- What is the passage about? (the subject or topic)
- What is the author's main point about the subject? What is the author trying to argue or demonstrate?
- What supporting evidence or details does the author use to make his or her point?
- Did the author convince you of his or her points? Do you agree or disagree with him or her? Why?
- In your own educational history, have you ever experienced what the author is discussing?

**Outlining, Planning, and Pre-Writing:** Devote about **10 minutes** to outlining your response, or pre-writing. Your notes and outlines 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:** Devote about **45 minutes** to writing your essay. Make sure to follow the directions and make sure that you 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:** Devote about **10 minutes** to 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?
- Do I provide enough details to really develop my thesis or main idea?
- Am I using proper punctuation, including the proper use of periods and commas?
- Do all of my sentences make clear, grammatical sense?



**Self-Placement:** Devote about **15 minutes** to reading the English course descriptions and writing a short paragraph explaining the level of English you believe is a good fit for you.

## 10. Understanding how your test will be scored

There are **five main components** that the faculty readers will be looking for in your essay. Your exam will be scored holistically. This means that we will look at your ability to combine or synthesize these different components in your essay.

**1. Critical Response to the Writing Task:** This category looks at your ability to complete the writing task by critically discussing the reading passage and integrating your own ideas into the response or by creating a coherent narrative that is adequately supported with relevant details.

What do we mean by “critically discussing” the text? In college, you may hear the term “critical analysis” or “critical writing” or “critical thinking.” Outside of academic environments, the word “critical” normally has a different meaning. It normally is used when one person has unfavorable opinions about another, as in this sentence: “I don’t like Joe. He’s so critical of me.” In colleges and academic writing, however, “critical” refers to one of its other definitions, and it’s more about stating your ideas in relation to academic topics. With this in mind, your “critical” ideas do not necessarily need to be negative, although that is possible. “Critical thinking” and “critical writing” refer to your ability to show that you are able to state intelligent, logical, convincing and well-supported ideas about the materials you will encounter in your college classes.

**2. Development of Writer's Ideas:** This category looks at your ability to develop your ideas in a clear and organized way. Your response should include both general statements and specific details and examples. By “develop your ideas,” we want to emphasize the importance of including details and providing enough ideas in your writing so that your point can be adequately made. Again, think back to the example of the friend who is trying to convince you to go see the movie. If she only provides one reason for why the movie is worth watching (e.g. the strong performances of the actors), then you might not be so inclined to see it. On the other hand, if she provides four or five logical reasons why the movie is worth watching, then you will most likely be more interested. By providing several reasons for why you should see the movie, she is, in academic terms, providing a well-developed defense of her thesis or argument.

**3. Organization:** This category evaluates your ability to organize ideas into a coherent essay that supports a thesis, or a central idea. First, it is important to note that your thesis, or central idea, should be stated towards the beginning of the essay, and that the rest of the essay should work to support this thesis.

**4. Language Use: Sentence and Word Choice:** This category evaluates the degree to which you demonstrate sentence control and variety in sentence structure. By “variety in sentence structure,” we mean that in academic writing, it is appropriate to use a variety of patterns in your sentences; not all of your sentences should begin the same way.

By “using appropriate vocabulary,” we mean your ability to write in what your English teachers might call an 'academically appropriate voice or style.' What this means is that in your college courses, there is a standard way of speaking and writing that may be different from how you speak or write in other environments (with friends and family, at the gym, etc.). An appropriate vocabulary for college courses is one which is more formal, and avoids slang speech or abbreviations, such as “u” for “you.”

It's important to note here that we are not saying that one form of speaking is better than another. We are simply saying that in an academic environment, your language is expected to conform to certain formal standards.

It's also important here to mention the use of the word “I.” Many students have learned at one point in their studies that it is not appropriate to use “I.” In college, your teachers will have mixed opinions about this. Some may think it is appropriate and some may not. In your English courses, we tend to think that it is okay to use “I”, especially if you are talking about yourself or your ideas. Having said that, you do not have to use it too much. For the purposes of your placement essay, though, we want to make clear that it is okay to use “I” and that this is considered an acceptable practice in this particular academic context.

## 5. Language Use: Syntax, Grammar and Mechanics

This category looks at your ability to follow the conventions of standard American English language use in terms of grammar and mechanics, so that meaning is clear. For example, it is expected in academic writing that your writing should be free from several types of errors:

**“Run-on” Sentences:** These are sentences that are either fused sentences or comma splices. In the case of fused sentences, proper punctuation (periods or commas) is missing and the sentence just 'runs on and on.' For example, “I love going to the park and I like to play fetch with my dog while I am there.” A comma splice is two sentences that are only joined together with a comma when a coordinating conjunction (or replacing the comma with a period or semicolon) is necessary to correct the sentence(s). An example of a comma splice is: “I hope to earn a certificate in Early Childhood Development, my hope is to open up my own daycare center.”

**Sentence Fragments:** These are incomplete sentences that lack a subject, a verb, or both. An example of a sentence fragment to avoid is: “Because I did not get to school on time.” One way to make this a complete sentence would be to write: “Because I did not get to school on time, I could not talk to my teacher.”

**Subject-Verb Agreement:** This is when there is not correspondence between the subject and the verb in a sentence. An example of a sentence with a subject-verb agreement error is: “The kids loves pizza.” The subject (kids) does not agree with the verb (loves). The sentence can be corrected by writing: “The kids love pizza.”

**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. There is no autocorrect or spell check, so you need to check carefully.

**Punctuation and Sentence Control:** As you write, be careful to use appropriate punctuation in your sentences. Make sure to include commas, when necessary, and to use periods to separate sentences.