

## CLEP® College Composition: At a Glance

### Description of the Examination

The CLEP® College Composition examination assesses writing skills taught in most first-year college composition courses. Those skills include analysis, argumentation, synthesis, usage, ability to recognize logical development and research. The exams cannot cover every skill (such as keeping a journal or peer editing) required in many first-year college writing courses. Candidates will, however, be expected to apply the principles and conventions used in longer writing projects to two timed writing assignments and to apply the rules of Standard Written English.

The College Composition examination contains multiple-choice items and two mandatory, centrally scored essays. Twice a month, the essays are scored by English faculty from throughout the country via an online scoring system. Each of the two essays is scored independently by two different readers, and the scores are then combined. This combined score is weighted approximately equally with the score from the multiple-choice section. These scores are then combined to yield the candidate's score. The resulting combined score is reported as a single scaled score between 20 and 80. Separate scores are not reported for the multiple-choice and essay sections. The College Composition examination contains approximately 50 multiple-choice items to be answered in 50 minutes and two essays to be written in 70 minutes, for a total of 120 minutes testing time.

### Knowledge and Skills Required

The exam measures candidates' knowledge of the fundamental principles of rhetoric and composition and their ability to apply the principles of Standard Written English. In addition, the exam requires familiarity with research and reference skills. In one of the two essays in the exam (in the mandatory essay section of the College Composition examination), candidates must develop a position by building an argument in which they synthesize information from two provided sources that they must cite. The requirement that candidates cite the sources they use reflects the recognition of source attribution as an essential skill in college writing courses.

The skills assessed in the College Composition examination follow. The numbers preceding the main topics indicate the approximate percentages of exam questions on those topics. The bulleted lists under each topic are meant to be representative rather than prescriptive.

### 10% Conventions of Standard Written English

This section measures candidates' awareness of a variety of logical, structural and grammatical relationships within sentences. The questions test recognition of acceptable usage relating to the items below:

- Syntax (parallelism, coordination, subordination)
- Sentence boundaries (comma splice, run-ons, sentence fragments)
- Recognition of correct sentences
- Concord/agreement (pronoun reference, case shift and number; subject-verb; verb tense)
- Diction
- Modifiers
- Idiom
- Active/passive voice
- Lack of subject in modifying word group
- Logical comparison
- Logical agreement
- Punctuation

### 40% Revision Skills

This section measures candidates' revision skills in the context of works in progress (early drafts of essays):

- Organization
- Evaluation of evidence
- Awareness of audience, tone and purpose
- Level of detail
- Coherence between sentences and paragraphs
- Sentence variety and structure
- Main idea, thesis statements and topic sentences
- Rhetorical effect and emphasis
- Use of language
- Evaluation of author's authority and appeal
- Evaluation of reasoning
- Consistency of point of view
- Transitions
- Sentence-level errors primarily relating to the conventions of Standard Written English

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### 25% Ability to Use Source Materials

This section measures candidates' familiarity with elements of the following basic reference and research skills, which are tested primarily in sets but may also be tested through stand-alone questions. In the passage-based sets, the elements listed under Revision Skills and Rhetorical Analysis may also be tested. In addition, this section will cover the following skills:

- Use of reference materials
- Evaluation of sources
- Integration of resource material
- Documentation of sources (including, but not limited to, MLA, APA and Chicago manuals of style)

### 25% Rhetorical Analysis

This section measures candidates' ability to analyze writing. This skill is tested primarily in passage-based questions pertaining to critical thinking, style, purpose, audience and situation:

- Appeals
- Tone
- Organization/structure
- Rhetorical effects
- Use of language
- Evaluation of evidence

### The Essays

In addition to the multiple-choice section, the College Composition exam includes a mandatory essay section that tests skills of argumentation, analysis and synthesis. This section consists of two essays, both of which measure a candidate's ability to write clearly and effectively. The first essay is based on the candidate's reading, observation or experience, while the second essay requires candidates to synthesize and cite two sources that are provided. Candidates have 30 minutes to write the first essay and 40 minutes to read the two sources and write the second essay.

The essays must be typed on the computer.

### Study Resources

Most textbooks used in college-level composition courses cover the skills and topics measured in the College Composition examination, but the approaches to certain topics and the emphasis given to them may differ. To prepare for the College Composition exam, it is advisable

to study one or more college-level texts, such as readers, handbooks and writing guides. When selecting a text, check the table of contents against the knowledge and skills required for this test.

To become aware of the processes and the principles involved in presenting your ideas logically and expressing them clearly and effectively, you should practice writing. Ideally, you should try writing about a variety of subjects and issues, starting with those you know best and care the most about. Ask someone you know and respect to respond to what you write and help you discover which parts of your writing communicate effectively and which parts need revision to make the meaning clear. You should also try to read the works of published writers in a wide range of subjects, paying particular attention to the ways in which the writers use language to express their meaning.

### Sample Test Questions

The following sample questions do not appear on an actual CLEP examination. They are intended to give potential test-takers an indication of the format and difficulty level of the examination and to provide content for practice and review. For more sample questions and information about the test, see the *CLEP Official Study Guide*.

### Conventions of Standard Written English (10%)

**Directions:** Read each sentence carefully, paying particular attention to the underlined portions. You will find that the error, if there is one, is underlined. Assume that elements of the sentence that are not underlined are correct and cannot be changed. In choosing answers, follow the requirements of Standard Written English.

If there is an error, select the one underlined part that must be changed to make the sentence correct.

If there is no error, select No error.

1. Readers make a deal with the author that, for the  
A  
time the readers take to read the story, the readers  
B  
will replace their own belief with the convictions  
C  
expressed by the writer and will accept the reality  
D  
created by the writer. No error  
E

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### Revision Skills (40%)

**Directions:** The following passage is an early draft of an essay.

Read the passage and then answer the questions that follow. Some questions refer to particular sentences or parts of sentences and ask you to improve sentence structure or diction (word choice). Other questions refer to the entire essay or parts of the essay and ask you to consider the essay's organization, development or effectiveness of language. In selecting your answers, follow the conventions of Standard Written English.

### Questions 1–4

(1) Haiku is a form of verse that began in Japan during the seventeenth century, where it is still the country's most popular form of poetry. (2) However, haiku poetry does not rhyme and has a total of seventeen syllables arranged in three lines. (3) The first line contains five syllables, the second line has seven syllables, and the third line has five syllables.

(4) The first haiku poems were written about the seasons, the time of day and the landscape. (5) However, the form has become more commonplace and has also become less restricted in topic. (6) Today, haiku poems are often used in elementary school classrooms to introduce various topics.

(7) To analyze a haiku poem we must first decide if it follows the same form. (8) In other words, does it follow the right format? (9) Nevertheless, in analyzing a haiku poem a person must pay attention to the words they use in the poem. (10) The words should convey as much meaning as possible since haiku poems use a limited number of words. (11) The subject of a haiku poem should be serious but it is not necessary to conform to the original idea of writing about the seasons, the time of day or the landscape. (12) The theme of a haiku poem should not be hidden but should be discernable.

(13) Just because haiku poems are short in length does not mean that they need to be short on meaning. (14) By using strong words that will have a great impact and create great images, a haiku can be a beautiful work of art and poetry.

1. Which is the best replacement for "began" in sentence 1 (reproduced below)?

*Haiku is a form of verse that began in Japan during the seventeenth century, where it is still the country's most popular form of poetry.*

- (A) arrived
- (B) originated
- (C) opened
- (D) circulated
- (E) spread
- (OR)

2. In context, which is the best placement of "in Japan" in sentence 1?

- (A) after the word "Haiku"
- (B) before the comma
- (C) at the end of the sentence
- (D) leave it as it is
- (E) at the beginning of the sentence

3. Which of the following sentences is best to add after sentence 6 (reproduced below)?

*Today, haiku poems are often used in elementary school classrooms to introduce various topics.*

- (A) A school in Arizona used a haiku poem to help students write their essays about Japanese culture.
- (B) Teachers use haiku poems to activate students' background knowledge so they can remember a new lesson they have learned.

(C) For example, the poem "Rain" was used in a third-grade classroom to familiarize students with the water cycle.

- (D) Haikus are used by new elementary school students because the poems are easy to understand.
- (E) Since haiku poems are easy to write, students can create them very quickly and easily.

4. The passage as a whole could be more effective by adding which of the following?

(A) An example of a modern haiku poem showing its form and its contemporary topic orientation

(B) Another paragraph that offers a comparison of haiku and other forms of poetry

(C) A brief paragraph that includes background information on how haiku poetry originated in Japan and the Japanese culture

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(D) An example showing how authors go about writing haiku and the most effective methods for choosing the correct number of syllables

(E) Step-by-step instructions on how to write an effective, contemporary haiku poem

### Ability to Use Source Materials

**Directions:** The following questions test your familiarity with basic research, reference and composition skills. Some questions refer to passages, while other questions are self-contained. For each question, choose the best answer.

5. fleet *n.* **1:** The largest organized unit of naval ships grouped for tactical or other purposes **2:** The largest organization of warships under the command of a single officer **3:** A number of naval vessels or vessels carrying armed crew members **4:** A large group of ships, airplanes, trucks, etc., operated by a single company or under the same ownership **5:** A large group of airplanes, automobiles, etc., moving or operating together *adj.* swift; rapid. *v.* to move swiftly; fly, to change position; shift; archaic *a:* to glide along like a stream *b:* to fade; vanish **6:** To cause time to pass lightly or swiftly

Which of the following statements is NOT supported by the definition above?

- (A) The word “fleet” has only nautical meanings.  
 (B) The word “fleet” refers to vehicles that carry people.  
 (C) “Fleet” can be a noun or an adjective.  
 (D) The word “fleet” can refer to something that happens quickly.  
 (E) An organized “fleet” can progress simultaneously
6. Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, *The War: An Intimate History, 1941–1945* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 52

What information is provided in the parenthesis?

- (A) The last printing of the book by the publisher  
 (B) The place where the book can be purchased  
 (C) The time and place that the book was first published  
 (D) The publisher and original copyright date of the book  
 (E) The location, publisher and date of publication

### Rhetorical Analysis (25%)

**Directions:** The following questions test your ability to analyze writing. Some questions refer to passages, while other questions are self-contained. For each question, choose the best answer.

### Credit Recommendations

CLEP uses a common recommended credit-granting score of 50 for all CLEP exams.

This common credit-granting score does not mean, however, that the standards for all CLEP exams are the same. When a new or revised version of a test is introduced, the program conducts a standard setting to determine the recommended credit-granting score (“cut score”).

A standard-setting panel, consisting of 15 to 20 faculty members from colleges and universities across the country who are currently teaching the course, is appointed to give its expert judgment on the level of student performance that would be necessary to receive college credit in the course. The panel reviews the test and the test specifications and defines the capabilities of the typical A students, as well as those of the typical B, C and D students. Expected individual student performance is rated by each panelist on each question. The combined average of the ratings is used to determine a recommended number of examination questions that must be answered correctly to mirror classroom performance of typical B and C students in the related course. The panel’s findings are given to members of the test development committee who, with the help of Educational Testing Service and College Board psychometric specialists, make a final determination which raw scores are equivalent to B and C levels of performance.

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