

Writing Skills Placement Measure

SAMPLE SCREEN SHOT

The figure below shows a sample essay and test item similar to those in the Writing Skills Placement Test and illustrates how these materials would appear on the computer screen. Students are instructed to read the essay and to use the mouse to click on each section of the essay that they believe to be problematic. After a student clicks on a section of text, that section is highlighted, and four alternative text selections are shown in the right half of the screen. Students then select the section they believe best fixes the problem in the text, and then continue in this fashion until they believe they have identified all problems in the essay. They then click on the “Finished editing essay” button and are presented with several questions that address strategy, organization, and style. Students then click on the “Go On” button to proceed to the next computer-selected essay. The sample items on the following pages provide examples of the contents of the Writing Skills Placement and Diagnostic Tests.

The screenshot displays the COMPASS/ESL Writing Test interface. At the top left, the title "COMPASS/ESL Writing Test" is visible, and at the top right, there is a "HELP" button. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains an essay with two paragraphs. The first paragraph reads: "An increasing number of lakes and rivers in the northern United States invaded are being by a mussel no larger than a fingernail." The second paragraph reads: "The zebra mussel probably steamed aboard a transatlantic ship sometime in the mid-1980s from the Caspian Sea into U.S. waters. Despite its growth was explosive, partly because the species was preyed upon by very few native predators in its new environment. As a consequence, the zebra mussels did find a plentiful food supply. They eat huge amounts of phytoplankton, which tiny free-floating sea organisms that dwell in water. Scientists are concerned when the mussels may compete aggressively with other species that depend on the same food supply." A mouse cursor is positioned over the text "Scientists are concerned when the mussels may compete". Above and below the essay text are "MORE" buttons. The right column is titled "Question 1" and contains five multiple-choice options, each with a checkbox:

- A. Scientists are concerned when the mussels
- B. Scientists are concerned that if the mussels
- C. Scientists are concerned wherein the mussels
- D. Scientists are concerned that the mussels
- E. Scientists are concerned as if the mussels

At the bottom right of the interface is a "Finished editing essay" button.

SAMPLE ESSAY (PLACEMENT)

Examinees are presented with an essay similar to the one below and are asked to look for errors in grammar, punctuation, usage, and style. When examinees find what they believe to be errors, they move the mouse pointer to the appropriate part of the text and click the mouse. On the right side of the screen five options appear for revising that area of text. Note that the first option is always identical to the original wording in the text, and thus represents a NO CHANGE option. Examinees can choose to revise any section of the essay. After revising the essay, examinees are routed to two items focusing on rhetorical strategies.

The essay below contains the same number and types of errors that an actual Writing Skills Test unit would contain; however, for demonstration purposes, only a handful of the segments below have been selected for revision. These segments are indicated by bold type, and the items associated with them are shown on the next page. (Note: There are additional errors below that are not in bold that a student in an actual testing situation would need to respond to.)

An increasing number of lakes and rivers in the northern United States invaded are being by a mussel no larger than a fingernail.

The zebra mussel probably steamed aboard a transatlantic ship sometime in the mid-1980s from the Caspian Sea into U.S. waters. Despite its growth was explosive, partly because the species **was preyed upon by very few native predators in its new environment**. As a consequence, the zebra mussels did find a plentiful food supply. They eat huge amounts of phytoplankton, which tiny free-floating sea organisms that dwell in water. **Scientists are concerned when the mussels** may compete aggressively with other species that depend on the same food supply.

Others concerned by the invading species are industry, public utilities, and boat owners. Zebra mussels cluster in huge colonies, being anchored themselves to any hard surface. These colonies can clog your water intake pipes of electric and water treatment plants. Fishery specialists are currently casting about and baiting their hooks to gun down control methods that will cause the lowest amount of damage to water supplies and other aquatic species. Two of the alternatives exploring are interrupting the species reproductive cycle and finding a bacterium harmful only to zebra mussels.

-----End of Essay-----

(Basic Grammar and Usage: Ensuring Grammatical Agreement)

Segment 1

- A. An increasing number of lakes and rivers
- B. An increasingly number of lakes and rivers
- C. A number increasing of lakes and rivers
- D. A number increasingly of lakes and rivers
- E. An increasing of lakes and rivers

(Style: Avoiding Redundancy)

Segment 2

- A.** was preyed upon by very few native predators in its new environment.
- B.** found very few predators in its new environment.
- C.** found very few native predators and was seldom eaten in its new environment.
- D.** was preyed on by very few native predator species in its new environment.
- E.** was seldom eaten or preyed on by native predator species in its new environment.

(Sentence Structure: Relating Clauses)

Segment 3

- A.** Scientists are concerned when the mussels
- B.** Scientists are concerned that if the mussels
- C.** Scientists are concerned wherein the mussels
- D.** Scientists are concerned that the mussels
- E.** Scientists are concerned as if the mussels

(Strategy: Making Decisions about Cohesive Devices)

Item 4 (end-of-passage)

The writer wishes to add a sentence at the end of Paragraph 1 that will serve as a transition between Paragraphs 1 and 2 and will establish the main focus of the essay. Which of the following sentences most effectively fulfills that purpose?

- A.** The zebra mussel will provide a difficult challenge for public utility managers.
- B.** The zebra mussel is only the latest in a series of newly introduced species to thrive in the U.S.
- C.** No one knows how far south and west the zebra mussel is likely to spread, but scientists think they may be on the trail of important clues.
- D.** Although small in size, the zebra mussel may become a huge problem for pleasure boat owners in North American waterways.
- E.** Despite its size, however, the zebra mussel may have a dramatic effect on North American waterways.

Writing Skills Diagnostic Measure

(Punctuation: Punctuating Breaks in Thought)

1. What time is it I am afraid we are going to be late.
- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. it, I
 - C. it. I
 - D. it? I

(Organization: Establishing Logical Order of Sentences)

2. Which of the alternatives places the following group of sentences in the most logical order?

(1) When I arrived, fifty customers were waiting outside. (2) I read in the newspaper that Bill's Furniture Mart was having a big sale. (3) "The store hasn't opened yet," one of them said. (4) I got in my car and drove to the store.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. 1, 4, 3, 2
- C. 2, 4, 1, 3
- D. 4, 3, 2, 1

(Relationships of Clauses: Avoiding Squinting Modifiers)

3. In which of the following sentences is the meaning most clear?
- A. Hiking in the mountains, thunder was heard in the distance.
 - B. While hiking in the mountains, we heard thunder in the distance.
 - C. In the mountains while hiking, thunder could be heard in the distance.
 - D. When on a hike in the mountains, in the distance sounded a clap of thunder.

(Spelling: Recognizing the Correct Spelling of Commonly Misspelled Words)

4. Insert the correctly spelled word in the following sentence:

Alicia _____ the proper way to install the software.

- A. demmonstrated
- B. demonstrated
- C. demmenstrated
- D. demenstrated

(Capitalization: Finding Errors in Capitalization)

5. Find the capitalization error in this sentence:

For my science project last Spring, I made a scale model of the planet Saturn.

(Examinees move the mouse pointer to the incorrect word and click the mouse to change the word from lowercase to uppercase, or vice versa.)

(Verb Formation and Agreement: Forming Tenses of Regular and Irregular Verbs)

6. Which of the sentences below is NOT grammatically correct?

- A. The curtain had just rose, and the play was supposed to begin, but Danny could not remember his lines.
- B. The curtain had just risen; the play was supposed to begin, but Danny could not remember his lines.
- C. The play was about to begin; the curtain rose, but Danny forgot his lines.
- D. As the curtain was rising and the play was about to begin, Danny panicked and forgot his lines.

(Style: Avoiding Ambiguity, Wordiness, and Redundancy)

- 7.** In which of the following sentences is the meaning expressed most clearly and effectively?
- A.** Because the day seemed to be a good one for these activities, Tracy and Chris went to the park, which was a long walk from downtown, for an outdoor picnic lunch and an afternoon of going to fly kites, which Tracy liked, and which Chris liked, too.
 - B.** An outdoor repast, or picnic, and an afternoon of recreation was experienced approvingly by Chris as well as her younger sibling, or brother, Tracy.
 - C.** Chris and Tracy, who is her younger brother, equally enjoyed the food and the fun outdoors, which was a fun and enjoyable event.
 - D.** Both Chris and her younger brother Tracy enjoyed their walk to the park for a picnic and an afternoon of kite flying.

(Punctuation and Usage: Forming Possessives, Using Pronouns, and Observing Usage Conventions)

- 8.** We will have to make more food because _____ are coming to dinner.
- A.** Toms brothers son's
 - B.** Tom's brother's sons
 - C.** Toms' brother's sons'
 - D.** Tom's brothers sons
- 9.** Amy thought that _____ should study together.
- A.** her and Sarah
 - B.** herself and Sarah
 - C.** she and Sarah
 - D.** themselves
- 10.** After working so hard on the project, she was pleased _____ the results.
- A.** on
 - B.** to
 - C.** for
 - D.** with

Answers to Sample Items

Numerical Skills/Prealgebra Placement Test

1. C 2. C 3. A 4. B

Algebra Placement Test

1. D 2. D 3. B 4. A 5. E

College Algebra Placement Test

1. A 2. E

Geometry Placement Test

1. E 2. C

Trigonometry Placement Test

1. C 2. E

Numerical Skills/Prealgebra Diagnostic Test

1. E 2. E 3. C

Algebra Diagnostic Test

1. C 2. A 3. A

Reading Placement Test: Sample Passage 1—Humanities

1. D 2. B

Reading Placement Test: Sample Passage 2—Practical Reading

1. A 2. C

Vocabulary Diagnostic Test

1. B 2. D 3. E 4. C

Reading Comprehension Diagnostic Test

1. B 2. D

Writing Skills Placement Test

1. A 2. B 3. D 4. E

Writing Skills Diagnostic Test

1. D 2. C 3. B 4. B 5. spring 6. A 7. D 8. B 9. C 10. D