

# English Placement Testing

## Assessment Overview

### Why do Assessment Testing?

The Massachusetts Board of Higher Education wants all of us to be proud of the quality and rigor of the college-level programs and courses offered by the public colleges and universities in Massachusetts. The Board is also eager for students to succeed in their college-level work. Thus, the Board requires all students attending public colleges in Massachusetts to take a series of placement tests that assess skills in writing, reading, and mathematics. The tests are not evaluated in terms of passing or failing. Rather, the tests are used to decide which courses should be taken at the beginning of a student's college career. Some students proceed directly into college-level courses, and some students will need to take skills-building courses in one or more areas to prepare for college-level work. Skills-building courses such as Introductory Writing and Preparing for College Reading I and II are designed to help students succeed in their college courses. Although the credits earned by these courses do not count towards graduation, they do count for financial aid purposes.

### What are Assessments?

ACCUPLACER is an assessment developed to help students entering a Community College achieve their educational goals. ACCUPLACER will help you identify your academic strengths and needs so that you can plan an appropriate schedule of course work at Massasoit Community College. ACCUPLACER will give you information about your skills in reading, and mathematics, and will tell you at what level you need to begin your college studies.

### Accuplacer

Accuplacer is administered on a personal computer. You will read the instructions and questions on the computer monitor and will select your answers using the keyboard or mouse. After completing Accuplacer and receiving your scores, you will meet with an academic advisor to discuss your results and plan your schedule of courses.

### What type of questions are on the Assessments?

#### *Essay Writing*

You will be asked to write an essay of about 300 words. You will be given a choice of topics, and you will probably know something about at least one of them. You will have 1 hour in which to write your essay.

The evaluators of your writing sample will hope to see an essay that responds to the question that is asked, that sticks to its main idea, and that uses clear and logical examples to back up the idea. They will expect an essay with a sense of beginning, middle, and end and they will hope to see that the essay is substantially correct in its grammar and usage. (They will not expect perfection because they understand that you have time only to write a first draft.) If your writing sample indicates that essay writing is still a substantial challenge for you, you will be placed into Introductory Writing, if you are ready to succeed in college-level writing, you will be placed in English Composition I.

#### *Reading Comprehension*

This test is designed to measure how well you understand what you read. It contains 20

questions. Some are of the sentence relationship type in which you must choose how sentences are related. Other questions refer to reading passages of varying lengths.

### Tips for taking Assessments

1. Relax! Assessments are designed to help you succeed in school. Your score helps you and your advisor determine which courses are most appropriate for your current level of knowledge and skills. Once you identify your academic strengths and needs, you can get the help you need to improve underdeveloped skills before they can interfere with your learning.
2. You will be able to concentrate better on the test if you get plenty of rest and eat properly prior to the test. You should also arrive a few minutes early so you can find the testing area, restrooms, etc. and gather your thoughts before the test begins.
3. After finishing your essay, read it over carefully, looking for misspellings, omitted words, and other errors. (You can find them more easily if you read from the end of the essay to the beginning, sentence by sentence.)
4. You should understand that Accuplacer is an adaptive test. Questions are chosen for you on the basis of your answers to previous questions. Because the test works this way, you must answer every question when it is first given. You cannot omit any questions or come back to change an answer. You may change your answer on a particular question, but you must do so before continuing on to the next question. If you do not, the answer is accepted and you cannot return to the question.
5. If you do not know the answer to a question, try to eliminate one or more of the choices. Then pick one of the remaining choices.
6. Textbooks, notebooks, dictionaries, calculators, or other paper of any kind, (except scratch paper provided by the Test Administrator for use with the mathematics test), are not allowed in the testing room. Further, anyone who gives or receives help during the test, or uses notes or books of any kind, will not be allowed to continue the test. Following the test period, no test materials or notes may be removed from the room.

## Strategies for Taking the Writing Assessment Test

The following strategies will help you perform to the best of your abilities on the writing portion of Massasoit's placement exam:

### **1. Read the Questions or Prompts Carefully.**

Take a few minutes to read and understand the writing prompts before choosing which one you will address. Some students find recopying the question in their blue book a helpful strategy for understanding the question. Please note, however, readers of your essay should not need to know the question you were asked to understand the content of your essay.

### **2. Plan Your Essay.**

Many writers benefit from brainstorming, free writing, outlining, clustering or otherwise planning their work. If you find this strategy helpful, please use it. Use the first page or inside cover of your blue book to map your assignment. Pre-writing is a part of the writing process, so we encourage you to demonstrate it if it is a tool you find useful.

### **3. Consider Your Audience.**

Think about your intended audience as you write your essay. Thinking about your audience helps you make important decisions about how to organize your writing, and decide what context (background) or information your reader needs to understand your essay. When thinking about your audience, also consider what tone and vocabulary are appropriate. For instance, slang or abbreviations are acceptable in a text message to friends, but in a formal essay they would likely seem out of place.

### **4. Show What You Know.**

This essay is an opportunity for you to demonstrate what you know about writing. Show readers that you know the parts of an essay. The "parts" include elements like: a title, an introduction, a point, focused and developed paragraphs, a conclusion.

Please note that your essays are scored holistically. This means that readers consider your writing as a whole piece as they evaluate it. In other words, they are not marking off for a missed comma or an underdeveloped paragraph. Rather, they are considering the overall essay.

### **5. Edit and Proofread Your Work.**

We suggest leaving time to edit and proofread your essay. This step will add clarity and demonstrate pride in your work. Make any corrections neatly; we can accept arrows, slashes, "X"s or whatever marks you deem necessary for improving your writing.

### **6. Take Your Time.**

We encourage students to use the entire 60 minutes to complete their essay.

## 7. Understand the Essay's Purpose.

Students do not pass or fail this essay. Our writing placement exam is meant to find the writing course that best suits your academic needs. If you'd like to review some writing handouts, please visit the Writing and World Language Center located in the Academic Resource Center on the bottom floor of the Student Center (SC) building.

Below you will find sample directions and a prompt that is very similar to what you will encounter during your assessment. By familiarizing yourself with this structure, you will be much more comfortable and prepared on the day of your writing assessment.

Directions:

Dear Student,

Below are a few guidelines from the English department that will help you write your essay. Please take a few minutes to read these tips before you start writing.

*Reading:*

1. When reading the prompt, use your (word structure, context clues) strategies to determine unknown vocabulary. If you cannot understand all of the vocabulary, then try to get a general understanding of the prompt.
2. Read it at least two or three times. Feel free to annotate it like you would any other reading.

*Writing:*

1. After reading the prompt, spend 5-10 minutes brainstorming and planning your essay. A brief outline or word web generally works well for this part of the writing process. Start writing!
2. In your introduction, include a clear thesis that responds to the prompt with a thoughtfully developed argument.
3. Next, develop several focused body paragraphs with examples that support the thesis.
4. Finally, compose your conclusion restating your thesis and giving your essay a feeling of closure.
5. Be sure and proofread. Your essay needs to be written in clear language that does not impede the reading of your work and it should contain few to no run-ons or fragments. The essay should be approximately 400 words.

Remember, this essay will determine your placement into one of several English writing courses and should be an example of your best work.

[Sample Essays and Rubric](#)

Sample Prompt:

Please compose an essay that response to the ideas found in the following passage from the columnist Bob Lutz. Your essay should state whether you agree or disagree with the writer's position.

“Financial transactions, purchases, games, movies...all rendering travel to banks, stores, sports events or theaters redounded. Generation Y stands at the forefront of the next chapter in mankind's evolution: experiencing everything while going nowhere. Meeting members of the opposite sex for a rare bit of fun? The smart phone will do it! Why hang out at some expensive joint? And, with the shyness of face-to-face contact removed, virtual romances can proceed quickly from one stage to the next....{T}he exchange of intimacy and trust is fast, anonymous, does not cost a bunch of expensive dinners. It also must be categorized as 'safe.' No dangerous back-seat contortionism here. Break-ups simply involve an e-mail or two, followed by activation of the 'delete' button.

It has long been my contention that, with the rise of electronic interactivity and the ever more convincing, more satisfying level of virtual reality, the human need for actual travel will diminish. In 100 years, it may be almost entirely redundant, as we sit in our rooms, chatting, every participant except one's self a highly realistic hologram. We will become sedentary, largely-immobile nuclei in a personal virtual world of which we are the masters. And brand badges on cars will, in the future, have as much meaning as the names of famous steam locomotive my father used to glowingly tell me about. It's going to take a while, and it will be gradual...but the more distant future, in the opinion, does not bode well for the 'mine's cooler, mine's faster, mine's more expensive care culture we've experiences up to now.”

(“Generation Y Going Nowhere and They're Fine with That” By Bob Lutz. Forbes Magazine online 7/16/12)

What do you think about Lutz's argument? Will computers and iPhones replace real travel and real human interaction with virtual travel and virtual relationships? If you agree with Lutz, be sure to offer evidence that supports your ideas. If you disagree, be sure to offer evidence to show why you disagree. Make sure that your essay directly addresses – and makes use of - the passage from Lutz's column.

## *English Composition I Sample Essay*

The passage from Bob Lutz explains how over time the smart phones will take over, slowly but surely they will start to replace everyday tasks and activities, social encounters and more. Phones are able to do mostly anything, just as Lutz said “The smart phone will do it” and I agree!

Communicating is much easier to do through a smart phone. This leads people who are anti-social, busy plain lazy to remain where they are. Over time people will be unhealthy, never make time to see others and avoid face-to-face contact, it happens already. Why go out of your way when you could just send a text, make a call or talk face-to-face on video chat? Lutz stated “And with the shyness of face-to-face contact removed, or virtual romances can proceed quickly from one stage to the next.” Relationships will move so quickly because you can’t get those nervous butterflies behind a screen, you won’t be scared to speak your mind because you don’t actually have to see their reaction or be nervous to say it. You can talk 24/7 which may cause you to think you actually know the person but let me tell you... people hide behind screens. They may not be who they say they are. Without physical attraction and a physical bond, actually seeing someone’s body language and how they act, how could you know if you truly like them for the real them?

Smart phones are able to search images as clear as day and to connect to things you watch which make you feel like you are truly there. Lutz quotes “...with the rise of electric interactivity and the ever more convincing, more satisfying level of virtual reality, the human need for travel will diminish.” Virtual reality allows you to ride rollercoasters, swim with exotic sea creatures, stand on top of Mt. Washington, mostly anything you could physically do yourself. This world is already filled with lazy people who will fully take advantage of this. People who can’t afford trips will benefit from this which is one good reason for it but it isn’t the same as physically being there is actually experiencing the real thing. It ruins the value of it, the actual experience that inspires amazes and excites you.

There are so many reasons as to why this is going to destroy our world. Businesses will close because things will just be online, people will be lazy and obese, there will be barely any face-to-face encounters, fake and fairytale relationships and more. As everything, smartphones have its pros and cons but in my opinion, more cons. Just as everything in life that is made too easy, it gets taken advantage of.

### *Discussion:*

In the sample essay in which the student placed into English Composition 1, you will notice that in the introduction this addresses the prompt and states her position clearly. In the following two paragraphs she starts with clear topic sentences with indicate her argument for each paragraph and then fully develops the paragraphs with textual evidence, examples, and analysis. Finally, she concludes her essay by reiterating her thesis in her conclusion. See the rubric for placement criteria for all English courses.

## *Introductory Writing Sample Essay*

I think that technology takes a big part of our daily lives and will eventually be replaced by computer and iPhones. Those devices affect dating websites who become the way that people meet. This evolution also applies to financial transactions. The car industry won’t be necessary

in the future. These are the reasons why computers and iPhones will be replaced and decrease human interaction to another.

Dating someone online is not the same as a physical presence and be around this person. Once again, computers and Ipads are the easiest, quickest way for this to happen without spending a fortune. According to the passage: "Meeting members of the opposite sex...fun? The smart phone will do it!". People will no longer meet face to face but will see each other from a screen. While financial transactions used to be going to the bank to get check your balance for example. Nowadays, just a click away to view your balance online to make different kinds of purchases for our needs. From the passage:" Financial transaction, purchases, games...Redounded", "...experiencing...going nowhere". Computers and iPhones have a big impact on everything that we do without physical presence.

The car industry will definitely change as well and will no longer be in use. That could be total difference from traveling from place to place from the text:"...the human need for actual travel will diminish." "In 100 years, it may be almost...realistic hologram."

Technology has taken a huge part of everyday's doing. From dating someone online, going actually to the bank or even the way we commute every day. Computers and Ipads will definitely change everything around us and will decrease human contact all around the world.

#### Discussion:

In the sample essay in which the student placed into Introduction to Writing, you will notice that the student states his argument in the introductory paragraph. In the following paragraph, he includes two of his three topics in one paragraph which leaves the paragraph unfocused and both paragraphs underdeveloped. While the third paragraph is focused and includes textual evidence, it could use further development which might include additional examples and analysis. In the conclusion, the student restates his thesis. Overall, this essay is on the right track, but needs some additional reorganization and development. See the rubric for placement criteria for all English courses.

Writing Placement Rubric  
**Massasoit Community College English Department**

Essay Score	Essay Characteristics
<b>ESL recommendation**</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· This essay includes multiple errors in English language that interfere with the essay’s focus, development, expression, and/or organization. The essay demonstrates problems in second language acquisition which may require ESL support. These may include consistent difficulties with:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verb tense and verb agreement,</li> <li>• Sentence structure (fragments and run-ons),</li> <li>• The spelling of difficult words,</li> <li>• Preposition use,</li> <li>• Transitions (may be misused or overused),</li> <li>• Parts of speech (confusing adjectives and adverbs, for example), and/or</li> <li>• Articles (may be missing or incorrect).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><i>** This is not a score, but indicates a referral for ESL testing.</i></p>
<b>1 or 2 Intro Writing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The essay’s focus may be on the general topic, but not the particular prompt. Or, the essay may state its focus with limited development or vague support.</li> <li>· The essay responds to the general topic of the reading, but demonstrates a weak sense of the reading’s argument; it may include a quote or detail from the reading as an isolated skill with only a weak connection to the essay’s point.</li> <li>· The essay may include a traditional beginning, middle, and end and uses paragraphs to separate general ideas.</li> <li>· The essay contains many mechanical errors, which are frequently distracting and may sometimes interfere with meaning; it may have ESL-related errors, but not enough to warrant ESL support.</li> </ul>
<b>3 or 4 English Composition I</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The essay maintains a focus that responds to the prompt; the essay is developed sufficiently to support the thesis.</li> <li>· The essay has a beginning, middle, and end and evidences a planned order of paragraphs.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The essay refers directly to the reading and may integrate the text with the writer’s own ideas; it gives background information on the reading but goes beyond summarizing the reading; the essay uses the reading to support the writer’s argument.</li> <li>· The essay may have mechanical errors, but these errors do not interfere with meaning.</li> </ul>
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<b>5 English Composition II</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· The essay has an engaging thesis that responds to the prompt with a thought-provoking argument.</li> <li>· The essay’s organization is non-formulaic; it is dictated by the writer’s ideas, which are original and show evidence of critical thinking and engagement with the text.</li> <li>· The essay displays high-level thinking from start to finish in response to the reading and uses a unique voice; this voice assumes a mature, un-intimidated position within the academic conversation of the issue suggested by the reading; the essay deftly argues a nuanced position.</li> <li>· The essay has clear control over language and mechanics and even demonstrates finesse with language and style.</li> </ul> <p><i>** Students who score a 5 may take the CLEP College Composition Exam administered at Bridgewater State University in order to receive 3 credits for English Composition I (see below for more information on the CLEP).</i></p>
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The CLEP Composition Exam can be taken at Bridgewater State University. It assesses first-year composition skills, including analysis, argumentation, synthesis, usage, and research. The exam consists of 50 multiple choice questions to be answered in 50 minutes and two essays to be written in 70 minutes; the entire exam is two hours. One essay is based on the student’s prior reading or experiences; the second provides two sources and asks the student to synthesize and respond to them using research citations. Students considering this option must be strong readers, writers, thinkers, and researchers accustomed to testing and writing within a time limit. Given the complexity of the exam, it is advisable for placement scorers to be careful about considering a Massasoit placement essay, which is non-researched, a “4,” or to judiciously counsel students about taking the CLEP test and its implications for their transcript and transfer to other colleges. More information about the exam can be found on the [College Board website](#).

## Strategies for taking the Accuplacer Reading Comprehension Test

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The following test-taking strategies will help you perform to the best of your abilities on the reading comprehension test and other standardized reading tests:

#### 1. Read the Question *Before* You Read the Passage.

Always read the question before you read the passage (but *never* read the answer choices until *after* you have read the passage, as this will confuse more often than clarify the question). Knowing what the question is asking will prepare you for what you need to notice as you read the passage. You will be reading with a specific purpose in mind.

#### 2. Note the Key Word in the Question.

Often a question will include a key word that identifies the kind of information you'll need to look for. For example, if the question asks, "What does the passage emphasize?" the key word is "emphasize," a word that signals you to identify the main idea of the passage. If the question asks, "What is the author's purpose in this passage?" the key word is "purpose," a word that signals you to pay attention to an author's tone and reason for writing a passage.

*Beware of negative words in the question* (except, not, but, least). These words signal that you are actually looking for the only answer among the choices that is *not* acceptable. If the question reads, "All of the following ideas are presented in the passage except. . ." the word "except" is the key word.

#### 3. Read the Passage and Take Notes.

Once you've carefully examined the question, read the passage, making notes on your scrap paper that relate to the question. For example, if you have been asked the main idea of a passage, write down key ideas from the passage or try to summarize the passage in your own words.

Reading test passages are generally short. **If need be, use your scrap paper to rewrite the entire passage (and even answer choices).** The very act of writing, and of seeing the words on paper rather than on a computer screen, can increase your comprehension.

Pay special attention to words such as but, yet, although, since, except moreover, unless, nonetheless, however. The ideas that follow these words are usually important to the overall meaning of the passage.

#### 4. Use Your Own Words to Answer the Question.

Before you look at the answer choices, use your own words to answer the question on your scrap paper. For example, if you have been asked the main idea of a passage, write down what you

think the main idea is in your own words. Don't just do this in your head, as you're likely to be influenced by the answer choices and forget your original thought. Write it down!

### **5. Read All of the Answer Choices.**

Carefully read each of the answer choices and see if any match what you have written. Even if you find a match, don't assume you are right! Read and consider *all* of the choices.

### **6. Learn to Spot Incorrect Answers.**

Wrong answers tend to be either:

- 1) too broad: the answer may be true but covers too much, isn't specific enough;
- 2) too narrow: the answer may be true, but isn't complete—there's a better choice;
- 3) irrelevant: the answer may be true, but is not directly related to the question;
- 4) incorrect: the answer contradicts facts in the passage, or
- 5) illogical: the answer is not supported by facts in the passage.

### **7. Use the Process of Elimination.**

Use the process of elimination to rule out wrong answers. Since you are working from a computer screen and not a pen and paper test, write a, b, c, d on your scrap paper. Eliminate any obviously wrong answers by visibly crossing out the corresponding letter on your scrap paper. The visible act of crossing out wrong answers will save you confusion and help clear your mind, particularly if you are a visual learner.

### **8. Choose an Answer and Move On.**

The computer allows you to choose one answer and confirm it. Once you confirm the answer, the computer moves on to the next question and does not allow you to go back to the previous question. It is important for you to move on psychologically as well. Dwelling on past questions may impact your ability to answer future ones.

[Now let's practice!](#)

## What do your scores mean?

### Placement by Outside Testing:

Assessment	Score	Placement
SAT	1110	Placement into English Composition I
ACT	22	Placement into English Composition I
International Baccalaureate		
GPA	2.7+	Placement into English Composition I

### Transfer Credit:

College Composition CLEP Exam	50	Counts as transfer credit for English Composition I
Analyzing and Interpreting Literature CLEP Exam	50	Counts as transfer credit for English Composition II
<a href="#">CLEP Exams Accepted at Massasoit Community College</a>		
AP	3	Counts as transfer credit for English Composition I and II
<a href="#">AP Exams Accepted at Massasoit Community College</a>		

\* Students who score a 5 may take the CLEP College Composition Exam in order to receive 3 credits for English Composition I. The CLEP composition Exam can be taken at Bridgewater State University. It assesses first-year compositions skills, including analysis, argumentation, synthesis, usage, and research. The exam consists of 50 multiple choice questions to be answered in 50 minutes and two essays to be written in 70 minutes; the entire exam is two hours. One essay is based on the student's prior reading or experiences; the second essay provides two sources and asks the student to synthesize and respond to them using research citations. Students considering this option must be strong readers, writers, thinkers, and researchers accustomed to testing and writing within a time limit. Given the complexity of the exam, it is advisable for placement scorers to be careful about considering a Massasoit placement essay, which is non-researched, a

“4,” or to judiciously counsel students about taking the CLEP test and its implications for their transcript and transfer to other colleges. More information about the exam can be found on the [College Board website](#).

Placement by Massasoit Testing:

MCC TESTING		
Writing Sample	1 or 2	Placement into Introduction to Writing
Writing Sample	3 or 4	Placement into English Composition I
Writing Sample	*5	Placement into English Composition II
Accuplacer	245 +	No reading required
Accuplacer	213 - 229	Placement into Preparing for College Reading I
Accuplacer	230 - 244	Placement into Preparing for College Reading II

### Reading and Writing Courses

ENGL091 Preparing for College Reading I

**3 credits**

This course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to improve their reading comprehension, to increase their vocabulary, and to expand their general knowledge. An additional one-hour lab in the Academic Resource Center may be a required part of the course.

**NOTE:** Credits earned in this course cannot be applied toward graduation.

**Prerequisite:** Reading for ESL students (ENSL 111) or waiver by placement testing results, or departmental approval.

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ENGL092 Preparing College Reading II

**3-credits**

This course is designed to afford students an opportunity to increase the accuracy of comprehension and to further develop general knowledge, vocabulary, study skills, and critical reading skills. An additional one-hour lab in the Academic Resource Center (ARC) may be a required part of the course.

**NOTE:** Credits earned in this course cannot be applied toward graduation.

**Prerequisite:** Placement into Preparing for College Reading II, or Placement out of Preparing for College Reading I, or Verbal 500 on SAT, or undergraduate level ENGL 091 (Preparing for College Reading I) with a minimum grade of “D-.”

#### ENGL099 Introductory Writing

##### **3-credits**

This course is designed to strengthen basic student writing. It includes the study of usage, mechanics, and sentence development. It involves intensive practice in writing clear, unified paragraphs and includes practice in writing essays that indicate readiness to succeed in English Composition I (ENGL 101).

**NOTE:** Credits earned in this course cannot be applied toward graduation.

**Prerequisite:** College ESL II (ENSL 102) or waiver by placement testing results, or Departmental Approval.

#### ENGL101 English Composition

##### **3-credits**

English Composition I is a course designed to help students develop and organize extended pieces of writing. Students will focus on the correct and appropriate use of language and the organization and development of paragraphs and essays. Research techniques, documentation of sources, and a short research paper will be included. Constant reading and frequent writing will be required.