



Skills Assessment Program

Information for Students

Fall 2007- Summer 2008

Additional sample material available at www.cuny.edu/testing

Office of Assessment
Office of Academic Affairs
The City University of New York

THE CUNY Skills Assessment Program
Information for Students

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Information for Students

www.cuny.edu/testing

CUNY requires its students to be proficient in reading, writing and mathematics. To this end, it assesses the skills levels of applicants to its colleges as part of the admissions process. CUNY offers a wide array of instruction to those students who need some assistance in one or more skills. Through this program of assessment and instruction, the University seeks to insure that students have the basic skills they will need to do well in their college courses.

This booklet describes City University's testing program and its requirements, and provides examples of each of the three tests. If you have any questions after you have reviewed this material, feel free to contact an admissions advisor or the testing coordinator at your first-choice college (if you are applying to CUNY) or the college you are attending.

What are CUNY's basic skills requirements?

You can demonstrate that you meet the University's skills requirements based on your SAT I, ACT, or NY State Regents test scores. Otherwise, you may take the appropriate assessment test offered at the testing center at CUNY colleges.*

Reading and Writing

Students are considered proficient in reading and writing if they can document any one of the following:

- SAT I verbal score of 480 or better *or* Critical Reading Score of 480 or better
- ACT English score of 20 or better
- N.Y. State English Regents score of 75 or higher

Mathematics

Entering students are considered proficient in mathematics if they can document any one of the following:

- SAT I math score of 480 or better
- ACT math score of 20 or better
- N.Y. State Regents score of 75 or higher in one of the following: Math A, Math B, Sequential II or Sequential III

CUNY's Skills Assessment Tests

Students who do not achieve the required scores on SAT I or Regents Exams can satisfy basic skills requirements by passing the CUNY/ACT Basic Skills Tests in Reading, Writing and Mathematics. Detailed information about each of these tests, including sample questions, is available below.

Mathematics Placement Test

All new students—whether or not they are math proficient—are required to take the COMPASS Mathematics Test. Test results will be used to place students in the appropriate mathematics course at their college. At this time, two groups of new students generally are not scheduled for math placement tests:

1. Transfer students from outside CUNY who have completed 45 or more credits;
2. Transfer students from CUNY who are math proficient.

*Holders of a bachelor's degree beginning a second degree program are exempted from the skills testing requirements of the program. However, these students may be required by their college to take the tests upon entry in order to help the college determine their placement in math or language skills courses.

How do skills requirements affect admission to CUNY for freshmen?

Baccalaureate Programs

Candidates for freshman admission to a bachelor's degree program must show that they are proficient in reading, writing and math to be admitted. Candidates who are not proficient in one or more skills have several options:

- Enroll in an immersion program at the senior college;
- Enroll in the Prelude to Success Program;
- Enroll in the necessary remedial courses at a CUNY community college, or in an associates' program at a comprehensive college.

If you are not skills proficient, you should speak to an admissions counselor to get more information about the best choice for you.

Three groups of students may be admitted to a bachelor's program without first demonstrating skills proficiency:

1. applicants who already have a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited program;
2. applicants who demonstrate proficiency in math, who meet the University's definition of ESL and who meet all other admissions requirements may be admitted. These students must pass the reading and writing skills tests within two years of initial enrollment;
3. applicants who qualify for the SEEK program. SEEK students must achieve full skills proficiency within one year of initial enrollment.

Associate Programs

Candidates for freshman admission to an associate program **do not** have to show they are skills proficient to be admitted. However, entering students who are not proficient based on the SAT I, ACT or Regents tests must take the appropriate CUNY assessment tests. Once enrolled in an associate program, students will be required to take one or more remedial courses to build their skills in any areas in which they have not met the University standard. Students usually cannot begin a full program of college-level work in an associate program until they have achieved proficiency in reading, writing and math.

How do skills requirements affect admission to CUNY for transfer students?

Transfer Students from outside CUNY

- Students with fewer than 45 credits at the time of application must demonstrate skills proficiency to be admitted to a CUNY baccalaureate program.
- Students with 45 or more credits are considered skills proficient; they do not have to document proficiency on the basis of SAT I, ACT, Regents or CUNY assessment tests to be admitted to a CUNY bachelor's program. However, ESL students may be asked by their college to take a placement test in reading and writing to assess their English language skills.
- Transfer applicants to associate programs who are not proficient based on the SAT I, ACT or Regents tests must take the appropriate CUNY assessment tests. These applicants do not have to demonstrate proficiency to be admitted.

Transfers from a CUNY college

- All students who wish to transfer from a CUNY associate program to a CUNY bachelor's program must demonstrate skills proficiency to be admitted.

If students need special arrangements for testing, are they available?

Accommodations based on disabilities will be granted to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who wish to request such accommodations should consult their college's Testing Office or Office of Student Services.

What are the CUNY/ACT basic skills tests in reading, writing, and mathematics?

Reading. The COMPASS Reading Test is an untimed, multiple-choice, computer-based test of reading.

Writing. The CUNY/ACT Writing Sample is a 60-minute essay test in which students are asked to respond to a question that they see for the first time when they sit for the test.

Mathematics. The COMPASS Mathematics Test is an untimed, multiple-choice, computer-based test composed of four sections: numerical skills/pre-algebra, algebra, college algebra, and trigonometry.

What scores on the CUNY/ACT Tests in reading, writing, and mathematics must students achieve to demonstrate minimum proficiency?

Reading: a scaled score of 70 or more

Writing Sample: a total score of 7 or more

Mathematics: scaled scores of 30 or more on each of the first two sections of the test: numerical skills/pre-algebra and algebra. Some colleges require students to achieve higher scores before they can register for credit-bearing mathematics courses.

What skills do each of the tests measure?

The COMPASS Reading Test measures reading comprehension. You will be given several readings that may be practical or drawn from prose fiction, the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences. Questions about the readings will ask you to refer to what is explicitly stated and to determine the meaning of words through context. They will also ask you to reason to determine implicit meanings, to draw conclusions, and to make comparisons and generalizations. The readings are like those commonly assigned in first-year courses in college. For each passage you will be asked a set of multiple-choice questions. Sample passages and questions are included below.

The Writing Sample assesses your writing skills based on a sample of your writing. Students are given a choice of two questions, and are asked to write an organized, focused essay. The essay questions are similar to one another in the following way: each one describes a choice that a person in a position of authority must make between two alternatives. The writer is asked to advise the authority on the best choice and explain why the group should agree with the writer's position. The writing sample is scored by two trained readers, using a six-point scale. A sample of the writing assignment (along with the scoring guide and sample papers for each score point) is included in this booklet, along with some tips on taking the Writing Sample Test prepared by CUNY writing faculty.

The COMPASS Mathematics Test is designed to measure students' knowledge of a number of topics in mathematics. The test is organized into four sections: numerical skills/pre-algebra, algebra, college algebra, and trigonometry. Numerical skills/pre-algebra questions range from basic math concepts and skills (integers, fractions, and decimals) to the knowledge and skills that are required in an entry-level algebra course (absolute values, percentages, and exponents). The algebra items are questions from elementary and intermediate algebra (equations, polynomials, formula manipulations, and algebraic expressions). The college algebra section

includes questions that measure skills required to perform operations with functions, exponents, matrices, and factorials. The trigonometry section addresses topics such as trigonometric functions and identities, right-triangle trigonometry, and graphs of trigonometric functions.

Placement into CUNY's required basic math courses is based on results of the numerical skills/pre-algebra and algebra sections. The test covers progressively advanced topics with placement into more advanced mathematics or mathematics-related courses based on results of the last two sections of the test.

Assessment Testing and Remedial Courses

Exit from Remedial and ESL Course Sequences

All students registered in their college's top-level course in Reading, Writing, or ESL will take the test(s) at the end of the semester. Students who do not pass the test(s) will not be able to begin college composition (Freshman English) until they pass. Likewise, no student may be placed in a college-level mathematics course who has not passed or been exempted from the COMPASS Mathematics Test.

Faculty at each college decide the requirements for passing each top-level remedial, developmental, or ESL course. Sometimes, passage of the skills test is required to pass the course; sometimes it is not. In any case, the University expects that students who pass the reading and writing tests will move directly to College Composition I at their next registration.

Retesting

Generally, students must receive at least 20 hours of instruction between retests. They may not be retested more than two times during a semester. Specific rules apply for workshops and summer and winter immersion.

Examples from the COMPASS Reading Skills Test

(with sample screen shots)

Reading Placement Measure

SAMPLE SCREEN SHOT

The COMPASS/ESL Reading Test begins with a practice session that shows students how to take the test and familiarizes them with the kinds of questions they will encounter. The figure below shows a sample item similar to those in the Reading Placement Test and illustrates how a reading test passage and items would appear on the computer screen. Students use the “More” buttons on the left half of the screen to move toward the beginning or the end of the passage. The numbered boxes in the lower right of the screen correspond to the questions associated with the current passage. The student can click on the boxes in any sequence, but must be sure to click on all boxes in order to respond to all relevant test questions. After the student answers all questions, the “Go On” button is enabled and the student clicks on it to proceed to the next computer-selected passage and its associated test questions. The sample items on the following pages illustrate the types of passages and test questions in the reading placement and diagnostic test pools.

The screenshot displays the COMPASS/ESL Reading Test interface. At the top left is a header box labeled "COMPASS/ESL Reading Test". At the top right is a "HELP" button. Below the header, there are two "MORE" buttons: one above the passage and one below it. The passage text is: "When I'm in New York but feeling lonely for Wyoming I look for the Western movie ads in the subway. But the men I see in those posters with their stern, humorless looks remind me of no one I know in the West. In our earnestness to romanticize the cowboy we've ironically disesteemed his true character. If he's "strong and silent" it's because there's probably no one to talk to. If he "rides away into the sunset" it's because he's been on horseback since four in the morning moving cattle and he's trying, fifteen hours later, to get home to his family. If he's "a rugged individualist" he's also part of a team: ranch work is teamwork and even the glorified open-range cowboys of the 1880s rode up and down the Chisholm Trail in the company of twenty or thirty other riders. It's not toughness but "toughing it out" that counts." To the right of the passage is "Question 1": "According to the passage, cowboys are probably "strong and silent" because:". Below the question are five multiple-choice options (A-E), each with an unchecked checkbox. Below the options are four numbered boxes (1, 2, 3, 4). At the bottom right is a "Go On" button.

COMPASS/ESL Reading Test

HELP

MORE

When I'm in New York but feeling lonely for Wyoming I look for the Western movie ads in the subway. But the men I see in those posters with their stern, humorless looks remind me of no one I know in the West. In our earnestness to romanticize the cowboy we've ironically disesteemed his true character. If he's "strong and silent" it's because there's probably no one to talk to. If he "rides away into the sunset" it's because he's been on horseback since four in the morning moving cattle and he's trying, fifteen hours later, to get home to his family. If he's "a rugged individualist" he's also part of a team: ranch work is teamwork and even the glorified open-range cowboys of the 1880s rode up and down the Chisholm Trail in the company of twenty or thirty other riders. It's not toughness but "toughing it out" that counts.

MORE

Question 1

According to the passage, cowboys are probably "strong and silent" because:

- A. their work leaves them no time for conversation.
- B. they have been cautioned not to complain
- C. they are stern and humorless
- D. there is no one nearby to listen to them.
- E. there work makes them too tired to talk.

1 2 3 4

Go On

SAMPLE HUMANITIES PASSAGE

When I'm in New York but feeling lonely for Wyoming I look for the Western movie ads in the subway. But the men I see in those posters with their stern, humorless looks remind me of no one I know in the West. In our earnestness to romanticize the cowboy we've ironically disesteemed his true character. If he's "strong and silent" it's because there's probably no one to talk to. If he "rides away into the sunset" it's because he's been on horseback since four in the morning moving cattle and he's trying, fifteen hours later, to get home to his family. If he's "a rugged individualist" he's also part of a team: ranch work is teamwork and even the glorified open-range cowboys of the 1880s rode up and down the Chisholm Trail in the company of twenty or thirty other riders. It's not toughness but "toughing it out" that counts. In other words, this macho, cultural artifact the cowboy has become is simply a man who possesses resilience, patience, and an instinct for survival. "Cowboys are just like a pile of rocks—everything happens to them. They get climbed on, kicked, rained and snowed on, scuffed up by the wind. Their job is 'just to take it,'" one old-timer told me. (Adapted from Gretel Ehrlich, *The Solace of Open Spaces*. ©1985 by Gretel Ehrlich.)

Referring

1. According to the passage, cowboys are probably "strong and silent" because:
 - A. their work leaves them no time for conversation.
 - B. they have been cautioned not to complain.
 - C. they are stern and humorless.
 - D. there is no one nearby to listen to them.
 - E. their work makes them too tired to talk.

Reasoning

2. For which of the following statements does the passage give apparently contradictory evidence?
 - A. The cowboy's work takes endurance.
 - B. Cowboys work alone.
 - C. Cowboys are adequately paid.
 - D. Cowboys think of themselves as humorless.
 - E. The cowboy's image has become romanticized in American culture.

SAMPLE PRACTICAL READING PASSAGE

Regular tune-ups of your heating system will cut heating costs and will most likely increase the lifetime and safety of the system. When a service technician performs a tune-up, he or she should test the efficiency of your heating system.

The technician should measure the efficiency of your system both before and after servicing it and provide you with a copy of the results. Combustion efficiency is determined indirectly, based on some of the following tests: 1) temperature of the flue (or chimney); 2) percent carbon dioxide or percent oxygen in the atmosphere; 3) presence of carbon monoxide in the atmosphere; and 4) draft. Incomplete combustion of fuel is the main contributor to low efficiency. If the technician cannot raise the combustion efficiency up to at least 75% after tuning your heating system, you should consider installing a new system or at least modifying your present system to increase its efficiency. (Adapted from Alex Wilson and John Morrill, *Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings*. ©1993 by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.)

Reasoning

3. The passage suggests that the presence of carbon monoxide in the atmosphere:
 - A. can provide information regarding combustion efficiency.
 - B. is found in 75% of heating systems tested.
 - C. can be reduced by decreasing heating system draft.
 - D. is the main cause of low efficiency in heating systems.
 - E. is more reliable than flue temperature as an indicator of combustion efficiency.

Referring

4. According to the passage, when performing a tune-up of a heating system, the service technician should:
 - A. ensure that the combustion efficiency is at least 25%.
 - B. modify the heating system before initially measuring efficiency.
 - C. measure combustion efficiency both before and after servicing the system.
 - D. provide his or her supervisor with a written report of the system's efficiency.
 - E. ignore the age of the heating system.

Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. A 4. C

An Example of a CUNY/ACT Writing Sample Assignment

The question below is an example of the kind of question that students will be given for the CUNY/ACT Writing Sample. This one includes some information about a decision that must be made by a group of people and the criterion that will be used to make the decision. The student is asked to assist the group by choosing one alternative and explaining why it is the better choice.

Sample prompt:

A City Council in a large urban area wants to encourage people to use public transportation. The Council is considering two options but wants to choose the one that will be more effective. One option is to reduce fares for subways and buses. The other option is to improve service by providing more frequent subways and buses. Write a letter to the City Council in which you argue for reducing fares on subways and buses or for improving service by offering more frequent subways and buses, explaining why your choice is more likely to encourage people to use public transportation.

Begin your letter: Dear City Council:

Scoring the Writing Sample

Because this is a test of writing skills, responses should be as well-written as possible in the time allotted. Your response will be evaluated on your ability to address the question you have chosen, to develop and organize your ideas, and to use correct English sentence structure, usage, and mechanical conventions. Your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

Evaluators will use a six-point scale (printed below) to score the papers. Each score point reflects an evaluator's holistic (overall) judgment of the writer's performance in relationship to the skills identified above. Two CUNY evaluators who are carefully trained to score writing using this six-point scale will read each paper.

ACT Scoring Scale

Upper-range papers. These papers clearly engage the issue identified in the prompts and demonstrate superior skill in organizing, developing, and conveying in standard written English the writer's ideas about the topic.

- 6 Exceptional.** These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt and support that position with extensive elaboration. Organization is unified and coherent. While there may be a few errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure, outstanding command of the language is apparent.
- 5 Superior.** These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt and support that position with moderate elaboration. Organization is unified and coherent. While there may be a few errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure, command of the language is apparent.

Mid-range papers. Papers in the middle range demonstrate engagement with the issue identified in the prompt but do not demonstrate the evidence of writing skill that would mark them as outstanding.

- 4 Competent.** These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt and support that position with some elaboration or explanation. Organization is generally clear. A competency with language is apparent, even though there may be some errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure.
- 3 Adequate.** These papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt and support that position, but with only a little elaboration or explanation. Organization is clear enough to follow without difficulty. A control of the language is apparent, even though there may be numerous errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure.

Lower-range papers. Papers in the lower range fail in some way to demonstrate proficiency in language use, clarity of organization, or engagement of the issue identified in the prompt.

- 2 Weak.** While these papers take a position on the issue defined in the prompt, they may show significant problems in one or more of several areas, making the writer's ideas often difficult to follow: support may be extremely minimal; organization may lack clear movement or connectedness; or there may be a pattern of errors in mechanics, usage, or sentence structure that significantly interferes with understanding the writer's ideas.
- 1 Inadequate.** These papers show a failed attempt to engage the issue defined in the prompt, lack support, or the problems with organization or language are so severe as to make the writer's ideas very difficult to follow.

Level 6 Essay

Dear City Council:

The choice you are facing is a daunting one. The number of users of the public transportation system has been plummeting, and something must be done. Two options are on the table. The first one, reducing fares, is no doubt attractive. It will greatly benefit the lower and middle income customers who form the majority of your customer base. It will only produce marginal gains, however, in terms of overall ridership. The better option is the second one, increasing the frequency of trains and buses and expanding routes. This option will increase your customer base by making the public transportation system more convenient and reliable.

The principal hurdle for most people who choose not to use public transportation is convenience. Let's view the public transportation system from the perspective of the average working person. If time is money, then time spent waiting for trains and buses is money lost. Additionally, infrequent trains mean crowded trains, which can result in further delays as well as considerable inconvenience. The average working person wants to arrive at work well rested, ready to attack the work day. This just isn't possible if you've just spent the past hour standing in an overcrowded train jostled by the people around you, wondering if you're going to be late for work. Let's face it, given the hassles one faces on the public transportation system, it's much more convenient to drive or take a cab. Even if you get stuck in traffic, you still have a reasonable amount of space and privacy and might even be able to get a bit of work done during your trip to work.

The convenience factor doesn't apply just to working people. It applies to people who are going out for evenings. It applies to school children. It applies to parent running household errands. Society today runs at an exceptionally fast pace, and we are all trying to find ways to cut corners and buy a minute or two. This applies to people from all age groups and income levels. If the public transportation system can start helping us make our lives more efficient and convenient, then we will see a dramatic increase in ridership because more frequency of buses and trains will mean a more reliable system even if one bus or train is late or missing. People will be able to plan ahead, and their expectation that a bus or train will come very soon after they arrive at the bus stop or the subway station will be fulfilled. For new Yorkers, the reduction in the daily stress of commuting will be a great benefit.

Decreasing fares will not have the same impact. People who are forced to use the train for economic reasons will continue to use it for economic reasons. Those who drive or take cabs do so in spite of the cost. Money doesn't matter to them; convenience does. This doesn't mean that I'm not sympathetic to the notion of lowering fares. I am. It's just not a priority. In fact, there may be a way for us to have our cake and eat it too. If you adopt my proposal to increase ridership by providing more frequent trains and increasing the number of stops, we may be able to increase ridership to the point where the public transportation system begins to operate more efficiently. At this point, reducing fares might become feasible.

Sincerely,

Comments on Level 6 Essay

This exceptional essay takes a clear position on the issue described in the prompt and supports that position with the superior elaboration that deals with both the author's main points and the counterpoint effectively. The organization is clear and unified, and the language, in spite of some minor errors, is polished and persuasive.

Level 5 Essay

Dear City Council:

I understand that you want to encourage residents to use public transportation and that two proposals have been issued to get the attention of the people to use the subway or bus. The first plan, reducing subway and bus fares, may be enticing for some residents. The alternative plan, however, truly surpasses the first in terms of attractiveness by increasing reliability and allowing better time management. Improving service by providing more frequent trains and buses will ultimately do the most to encourage people to use public transportation.

Today, many people don't even consider using subways and buses for their transportation needs. People feel more comfortable riding in their cars or even like to walk. Other people are afraid to ride the buses and subways because they think the subway stops are uncomfortable and unsafe. The train stations are infested with rats, roaches, and even thrown trash. Additionally, there are many muggings that take place at train stations in early morning and late at night. By providing more frequent bus and subway service, people won't have to spend as much time in the train station. They won't have as much time to get disgusted with their surrounding. They'll also reduce the chance of getting mugged. The more frequent service will also make the public transportation more convenient. The more service we have, the more satisfied a person will be.

Time management is another reason why providing more frequent trains and buses will increase the use of mass transit. Today, many people have trouble getting to work and school on time when they use public transportation. Most employers and professors do not tolerate lateness and simply fine the tardy employee or dismiss the student from the day's lessons. Also, in many cases, the time schedule doesn't accommodate people's transportation needs. People are getting up much earlier than they should need to in order to get to work on time, then having to sit around for 30 minutes before they can begin work. Or, if they miss a train, they might wind up 30 minutes late. Adding more frequent service will ultimately suit the needs of these people by allowing them to arrive on time and to avoid wasting time.

I can't say that reducing fares is a bad idea. In fact, I'd be glad if I didn't have to pay as much as I do now. However, reducing fares, alone, doesn't encourage people to ride the subway or bus. People are far more concerned about arriving on time than they are about paying an extra \$.50 for a ticket. After all, what is \$.50 when someone might lose an hours wage or get fired. That's why increasing the number of trains and buses will do the most to increase the number of people using public transportation.

I hope you take my reasons into full consideration when you are making your decision.

Comments on Level 5 Essay

The author of this paper takes a clear position on the issue and supports that position with moderate elaboration that presents his/her argument clearly and thoroughly. This organization is clear and effective: the author is able to move clearly from point to point and deals with the counterargument successfully. Language use is strong, though the author lacks the polished diction and command of sentence structures that are often characteristic of a 6.

Level 4 Essay

Dear City Council:

Although, providing more frequent subway and buses to encourage people to use community transportation sound like a great idea; it is not good enough to bring the commuters back to our main transportation. The option to reduce fares for subway and buses is a better choice. The prices went skyrocketing since the 90's and the commuters are running away from public transportation.

The city has increasing the fare almost every year. How can we keep up with the increase of the fares? It's almost impossible to use the public transportation, if the city doesn't do something quickly. For example, my cousin Anna decided last year, after the unbearable increase of the subway fare, to buy a bicycle to use in her daily transportation to work. She said that she could not take anymore. She's saving four dollars every day now. That's why people are getting so upset, the raise of fares doesn't keep up with our income.

If we take a closer look, we can see that the new fare is not fair at all. Around 1985, the price of round subway trip was about one-dollar-and-fifty cents. The year of 2003 marked the increase of subway round trip to four dollars, it's almost three-hundred per cent of increase. Do you think that the people who rides on the subway had this kind of increase in their salary? The answer is no, that's why subway and buses are getting so empty in these days. I beg to you Dear Council to lower fares on the mass transportation.

How can the city thinks about increasing more rides on the subway and buses, if we don't even have enough passengers for rides today. I repeat one more time, we can not keep using the public transportation with such a umberable fare.

I strongly believe that the mass transportation is used by lower income people, at least more than fifty percent of the riders have to take the subway no matter what. Why can't the city give a break to those people, and lower the fare? The lower fare will bring people back to the mass transportation, and also will help lower income people to have a better life.

Comments on Level 4 Essay

This competent response takes a position on the issue defined in the prompt and remains focused on the criterion throughout. Three supporting points are offered, and the writer provides some elaboration for each of them. (The combination of personal anecdote—the story about Anna—and more conventional argument/analysis is a strength of this response.) Organization is generally clear, and a competency with language is apparent.

Level 3 Essay

Dear Council:

Hello! I am a well-known community worker who has heard about the two options that were given, one was to reduce the subway and bus fare and the other was to provide more frequent subway and bus service. Both sound very interesting but I agree with option #1 more. Only one can be put into effect.

I think reducing the subway and bus fare is a great idea. This will encourage more people to ride the subway and bus. People can get to places they want and also safe and secure. People would also love that they can go where ever for a low fare without having to spend a lot of money. Knowing they can ride the bus or subway would help the elderly and disabled. There would be no problems with the young children or school children. It would really be a great idea if we reduce the fare.

The second opinion is to provide more frequent subway and bus service. This will provide more buses and subway trains to come early or come to pick up extra people in bad weather during the bad weather. This option sounds good but option will bring a better way for people to get from A to point B in a short period of time. But I feel option one seems more accurate.

The reason I say option A is better is because if the fare is reduced 50% for the bus and subway everyone would love it. This will make the elderly want to travel more and the working people feel more important.

Everyone loves to travel so if you and a couple of friends wanted to go to the movies. They would get on the bus and pay a low fare. Then everywhere they go there would not be a problem.

In conclusion having the fare reduced will make the public feel like the metro transit authority really cares about the public.

Comments on Level 3 Essay

This response takes the position that reducing subway and bus fares is the more desirable option, and it provides a little elaboration for its supporting points. Organization is clear enough to follow without difficulty, although there is some repetition in the discussion. A basic control of language is apparent, though there are errors in usage and sentence structure.

Level 2 Essay

Dear City Council

Public transportation is a convenient resource for the urban community. Reducing fares can only make public transportation more convenient and more commuters will be encouraged to spend more time on bus and subway for less money.

More buses and subway cars are also convenient but they cost money. This may eventually lead to higher rates which leads to higher fares and discouraged commuters. Therefore I suggest that we reduce fares to a reasonable rate so that urban commuters are encouraged to use public transportation and our public transportation system is maintained. Thank you for your consideration.

Comments on Level 2 Essay

Score = 2: This paper takes a position on the issue defined in the prompt, but support is minimal. There are also problems with organizational coherence (see the first two sentences in paragraph 2). While the language errors do not prevent reader understanding, they are distracting.

Level 1 Essay

Dear Sir or Madam of the City Council.

The subways are dirty and smelly. On the buses there are broken glass everywhere. It's not safe to travel at night home.

To improve this problem we must have pride in our lives by keeping the subways clean; and ban any kind of drinks on buses. Have police and security guard at every bus stop and subway station.

Thank you from,

Comments on Level 1 Essay

Score = 1: This response fails to take a position on the issue, other than to say that buses are smelly and dirty. There is no logical progression of ideas and no coherent sense of organization. Language control is so poor that readers have difficulty following the author's train of thought. ("Have police and security guard at every bus stop and subway station.") The result is a paper that is deemed inadequate.

Strategies for Taking the CUNY/ACT Writing Sample Essay

The Writing Sample Essay is a 60-minute test that measures your ability to write a college-level essay. When taking the Writing Sample Test, the following strategies may be helpful:

1. You need to know that in evaluating your essay, readers focus on four elements of your writing: taking a position on the issue identified in the question; supporting the position with evidence; organizing ideas; and using language that clearly conveys the writer's ideas.
2. The first choice you will be making is: which question do I want to write about? One asks you to write about a school-based issue, the other about a community-based issue. You will probably write a more effective essay if you choose the question you have more ideas and information about, or feel most comfortable with or interested in. Make this choice after reading both questions and thinking about them for a few minutes.
3. Completing this writing task successfully is in large part a function of how you use the allotted time. You may want to spend your time this way:

Planning and pre-writing: Spend about 10 minutes planning. Your booklet gives you two blank pages for planning notes. Consider the position you are taking, a few good reasons for choosing the alternative you prefer, some evidence or explanation that support these reasons, some effective details you might include, and the order you might use to present your points most effectively.

Writing: Spend about 40 minutes writing your essay, being sure to use the lined pages in the booklet. Refer to your plan, remembering that the task requires you to take a position, explaining your reasoning in some detail. You need also to consider the criterion specified so that your essay is convincing to the audience you are addressing. The language you choose should communicate your ideas clearly and appropriately.

Revising and editing: Spend about 10 minutes reviewing your writing, adding or deleting as necessary and making any changes needed to enhance clarity.

4. Each question describes a situation involving a choice between two alternatives. You need to make clear the alternative you favor, offering a few good reasons for your choice and explaining your reasoning in some detail. That means that as you assert reasons for your choice, you should develop explanations for each, including such things as evidence, examples, or other suitable information. You are not required to discuss the other alternative, but if you chose to, you need to explain in some detail why you do not consider it as good a choice as the one you are supporting.
5. Each question specifies an audience, such as a City Council or a college or school official. Be sure to address your response to that audience, and remember that the purpose of your writing is to convince your audience that you have chosen the better alternative and that your advice is persuasive.
6. Each question specifies a criterion for judgment which should guide your choice and your reasoning, for example: which alternative will best serve the community or which will enhance student life for the most students? Be sure to consider the criterion in your essay, so that your audience knows that you are not just thinking about the benefit to you:
 - for the community-based question, you might think about how your chosen alternative would affect different groups or what perspectives different people (such as old, young, male, female, parents, children) might have on the question.
 - for the school-based question, you might think about how your choice would benefit most students or different types of students (or even parents or teachers).

COMPASS MATHEMATICS

Sample Problems*

The COMPASS Mathematics Test is an untimed, multiple-choice, computer-based test composed of four sections: numerical skills/pre-algebra, algebra, college algebra, and trigonometry. Students' need for mathematics remediation is based on results of the first two sections of the test: numerical skills/pre-algebra and algebra. Students must achieve scaled scores of 30 or more on each of these two sections to demonstrate minimum proficiency. Some colleges require students to achieve higher scores before they can register for credit-bearing mathematics courses.

The test covers progressively advanced topics with placement into more advanced mathematics or mathematics-related courses based on results of the last three sections of the test. Minimum scores for these sections are set by the individual colleges based on their requirements and curricula.

Students are not permitted to use calculators while taking the test.

1. NUMERICAL SKILLS/PREALGEBRA

Content areas from which items are drawn: basic operations with integers, fractions, and decimals; exponents, square roots, and scientific notation; ratio and proportion; percentages; averages (means, medians, modes); conversions between fractions and decimals; multiples and factors of integers; absolute values of numbers; order concepts (greater than, less than); estimation skills; number theory; counting problems and simple probability; range.

Averages: means, medians, and modes

1. What is the average (arithmetic mean) of 8, 7, 7, 5, 3, 2, and 2?
- A. $3\frac{4}{7}$ B. $4\frac{5}{6}$ C. $4\frac{6}{7}$ D. 5 E. $6\frac{4}{5}$

Basic operations with decimals

2. Ben is making wooden toys for the next arts and crafts sale. Each toy costs Ben \$1.80 to make. If he sells the toys for \$3.00 each, how many will he have to sell to make a profit of exactly \$36.00?
- A. 12 B. 20 C. 30 D. 60 E. 108

Basic operations with fractions

3. How many yards of material from a 24-yard length of cloth remain after 3 pieces, each $3\frac{1}{2}$ yards long, and 5 pieces, each $2\frac{1}{4}$ yards long, are removed?
- A. $2\frac{1}{4}$ B. $4\frac{1}{4}$ C. $4\frac{5}{6}$ D. $10\frac{1}{4}$ E. $10\frac{5}{6}$

Percentages

4. Phillip charged \$400 worth of goods on his credit card. On his first bill, he was not charged any interest, and he made a payment of \$20. He then charged another \$18 worth of goods. On his second bill a month later, he was charged 2% interest on his entire unpaid balance. How much interest was Phillip charged on his second bill?
- A. \$8.76 B. \$7.96 C. \$7.60 D. \$7.24 E. \$6.63

2. ALGEBRA

The algebra section comprises topics from three major mathematics curricular areas:

Elementary Algebra: substituting values into algebraic equations, setting up equations for given situations, basic operations with polynomials, factoring of polynomials, solving polynomial equations by factoring, formula manipulation and field axioms, linear equations in one variable, exponents and radicals, linear inequalities in one variable.

* For additional sample problems see www.cuny.edu/testing

Intermediate Algebra: rational expressions, exponents and radicals, systems of linear equations in two variables, quadratic equations, absolute value equations and inequalities.

Coordinate Geometry: linear equations in two variables, distance formulas in the plane, graphing conics (circle, parabola, etc.), graphing parallel lines, graphing perpendicular lines, graphing relations in the plane, graphing systems of equations and rational functions, midpoint formulas.

Elementary Algebra: linear equations in one variable

1. A student has earned scores of 87, 81, and 88 on the first 3 of 4 tests. If the student wants an average (arithmetic mean) of exactly 87, what score must she earn on the fourth test?

- A. 85 B. 86 C. 87 D. 92 E. 93

Elementary Algebra: basic operations with polynomials

2. Which of the following expressions represents the product of 3 less than twice x and 2 more than the quantity 3 times x ?

- A. $-6x^2 + 25x + 6$ B. $6x^2 + 5x + 6$ C. $6x^2 - 5x + 6$
D. $6x^2 - 5x - 6$ E. $6x^2 - 13x - 6$

Elementary Algebra: substituting values into algebraic expressions

3. If $x = -1$ and $y = 2$, what is the value of the expression $2x^3 - 3xy$?

- A. 8 B. 4 C. -1 D. -4 E. -8

Intermediate Algebra: rational expressions

4. For all $r \neq \pm 2$, $\frac{r^2 - 5r + 6}{r^2 - 4} = ?$

- A. $\frac{r-3}{r+2}$ B. $\frac{r-2}{r+2}$ C. $\frac{r-2}{r+3}$ D. $\frac{r+3}{r-2}$ E. $\frac{r+3}{r+2}$

Coordinate Geometry: linear equations in two variables

5. What is the equation of the line that contains the points with (x, y) coordinates $(-3, 7)$ and $(5, -1)$?

- A. $y = 3x - 2$ B. $y = x + 10$ C. $y = -x + 4$
D. $y = -\frac{1}{3}x + 8$ E. $y = -\frac{3}{2}x + \frac{11}{4}$

3. COLLEGE ALGEBRA

Content Areas: functions, exponents, complex numbers, arithmetic and geometric sequences and series, factorials, matrices (basic operations, equations, and determinants), systems of linear equations in three or more variables, logic and proof techniques, roots of polynomials.

Complex Numbers

1. For $i = \sqrt{-1}$, if $3i(2 + 5i) = x + 6i$, then $x = ?$

- A. -15 B. 5 C. $5i$ D. $15i$ E. $27i$

Functions

2. If $f(4) = 0$ and $f(6) = 6$, which of the following could represent $f(x)$?

- A. $\frac{2}{3}x - 4$ B. $x + 2$ C. $x - 4$ D. $\frac{3}{2}x + 6$ E. $3x - 12$

4. TRIGONOMETRY

Content Areas: trigonometric functions and identities, right-triangle trigonometry, trigonometric equations and inequalities, graphs of trigonometric functions, special angles (multiples of 30 and 45 degrees), polar coordinates.

Trigonometric Functions and Identities

1. Which of the following is equivalent to $\frac{1 - \cos^2 \theta}{\cos^2 \theta}$?

- A. $\sec^2 \theta$ B. $(\csc^2 \theta) - 1$ C. $\tan^2 \theta$ D. $\sin^2 \theta$ E. $-\frac{1}{\sin^2 \theta}$

Right-Triangle Trigonometry

2. From a point on the ground the angle of elevation to a ledge on a building is 27° , and the distance to the base of the building is 45 meters. How many meters high is the ledge?

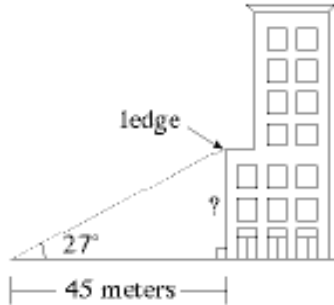
A. $\frac{45}{\sin 27^\circ}$

B. $\frac{45}{\tan 27^\circ}$

C. $45 \sin 27^\circ$

D. $45 \cos 27^\circ$

E. $45 \tan 27^\circ$



Answers

Numerical Skills/PreAlgebra

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

Algebra

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

College Algebra

1. A 2. E

Trigonometry

1. C 2. E