

The CUNY Skills Assessment Program

# The COMPASS Reading Test



**The COMPASS Reading Test** is an untimed, multiple-choice, computer-based test that measures reading comprehension as a combination of referring and reasoning skills. Five types of reading comprehension passages, varying somewhat in length, are included: practical reading, prose fiction, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The passages are representative of the level and kinds of reading commonly encountered in college first-year courses. Each passage is accompanied by a set of multiple-choice test items; the passage is displayed on one half of the screen with the test questions and answer choices on the other half. Test items require students to derive meaning from several texts by (1) referring to what is explicitly stated and determining the meaning of words through context, and (2) reasoning to determine implicit meanings, to draw conclusions, and to make comparisons and generalizations. The passing score is a scaled score of 65.

# Examples from the COMPASS Reading Test

For more information and additional samples go to  
[www.act.org/compsdd/sample/index.html](http://www.act.org/compsdd/sample/index.html)

## SAMPLE SCREEN SHOT

The COMPASS/ESL Reading Test begins with a tutorial section that shows students how to take the test. 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 on the left is a "MORE" button. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains a passage box with the text: "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." Below the passage box is another "MORE" button. The right column contains a "Question 1" box with the text: "According to the passage, cowboys are probably 'strong and silent' because:" followed by five multiple-choice options: 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, and E. their work makes them too tired to talk. Below the question box are four numbered boxes (1, 2, 3, 4) and a "Go On" button at the bottom right.

### 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.

<b>Answers: 1. D 2. B 3. A 4. C</b>
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