

# **STARK STATE COLLEGE ENGLISH PLACEMENT TEST PREPARATION GUIDE**

## **Taking Your Placement Tests**

### **Are you prepared?**

Placement testing is mandatory for all new students. After you complete your COMPASS® test, you will receive an English score that will help your advisor know what level English course you should take during your first semester.

Taking time to work through this *English Placement Test Preparation Guide* will help you know what to expect on the English portion of the COMPASS® test and result in proper placement in a course(s) that matches your skill level, potentially resulting in a reduction of coursework.

## **Placement Test Preparation**

English assessment is mandatory at Stark State College (SSC) and determines the initial course(s) for which you may register. Taking the placement test seriously and doing well on it will save you time and money because you may have fewer courses to take. You will do better on your English placement test if you review general test taking information and basic English concepts.

Students may use other qualifying assessments, such as ACT scores. Please contact the SSC Admissions Office for more information.

The placement test may be referred to as an assessment test or the COMPASS® test. The COMPASS® placement test is computer-delivered and untimed—that is, you may work at your own pace. After you complete the test, you will get a score and placement report to help you make appropriate choices when you register for classes. Based on your score, you may choose to write an SSC placement essay to further assess your writing skills. To prepare for this possibility, you should review this entire guide, including the review section for the SSC Essay Writing Skills Guide.

To prepare for the placement test, review the following General Test Taking Strategies. Then work through the English Skills Preparation Guide, take the sample test online, and review the SSC Essay Writing Skills Guide.

### **General Test Taking Strategies**

It is normal for you to experience some test anxiety, and it may actually help you focus during preparation and testing. Too much anxiety, however, can negatively affect performance. You should try to think of testing as an opportunity to show what you know. The following testing strategies will help you increase your chances of performing better on the placement tests.

#### ***Start the Night Before***

You will be able to concentrate better on the tests if you get plenty of rest and eat properly. Before testing, eat something healthy to give you energy to solve complex problems and help you focus, but avoid heavy foods that make you groggy.

#### ***Be Prepared***

Work through this preparation guide to help you decide when you are as ready as possible to take the placement tests. When you test at SSC, bring photo identification and your glasses, if you need them.

#### ***Allow Enough Time***

The COMPASS® placement tests are not timed, and individual testing times vary. We suggest that you allow yourself at least 2-3 hours to take all the tests (reading, writing, and math). Don't rush.

### ***Focus***

When you carry extra emotional baggage - "I've got to ace this exam," or "If I mess up, I'll never get into my program" - your performance may suffer. The most constructive approach is to focus on the task at hand, put in as much time preparing as you can, and do your best.

### ***Relax***

The COMPASS® placement test is designed to help you succeed in college. Your scores help you and SSC determine which courses are most appropriate for your current levels of knowledge and skills.

### ***Read Carefully***

Be sure you understand the directions for the test, and be sure to ask questions if you don't.

Read each question, passage, and problem carefully until you understand what the question is asking. If answering an item requires several steps, be sure you consider all of them.

If you have a problem or question during the test, ask the test proctor for help. Although proctors cannot answer specific test questions for you, they can help with other types of problems.

### ***Answering Multiple Choice Questions***

Read the question carefully. Think of an answer before looking at the possible answers. This way the choices given on the test won't mislead you. Read all the answer choices. Eliminate answers you know are not correct.

Select an answer, but don't keep changing your response. Usually your first choice is the best one, unless you misread the question or the choices.

On the COMPASS® placement tests, there is no guessing penalty; therefore, answer every question. However, once you choose your final answer and click submit, you cannot go back to change your answer.

## **COMPASS® Writing Skills Placement Test**

The Writing Skills Placement Test helps determine if you are ready for entry-level college writing courses, or if you require additional writing instruction. You will be tested on punctuation, basic grammar and usage, sentence structure, strategy, organization, and style.

**Depending on your Writing Skills Placement Test score, you also may choose to write an SSC placement essay to determine your English course placement.**

To practice editing sample essays, go to the COMPASS® Sample Test Questions at <http://www.act.org/compass/sample/index.html>

- Find "More Sample Questions" near the bottom of the page.
- Click on the "Writing Skills" link.

- Read the general test information and answer the sample items for all three writing passages.
- Check your answers with the correct answers beginning on page 24 of the sample test. The content categories for the Writing Skills sample items are also listed next to the correct answers. Use the content category to find additional review resources online or at the library.

Please note that in the Writing Skills test sample passages located on the web site above, each section is numbered. In the actual computerized COMPASS® Writing Skills Placement Test, sections are not numbered. What you will see is simply an essay with no extra numbers, breaks in the sentences, etc.

When you take the actual computerized test:

- Read the section looking for errors.
- When you find an error, move the cursor to text where the error is located.
- Click the left mouse button to make the text appear highlighted in yellow, and to show alternative text options.
- Choose the answer that is the best.

**After clicking on a passage, you can still leave the passage unchanged; simply choose not to answer and continue the test, or choose “A,” which will leave the section unchanged.**

**You may also find these online resources helpful.**

Academic Writing

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/section/1/2/>

Grammar and General Writing

<http://www.starkstate.edu/owl/brainstorming-ideas>

## **Test Prep Quick Grammar Guide**

*This guide covers some of the major concepts in the Writing Skills Placement Test. This is not a complete list of all the concepts, but it is a useful tool.*

### **Types of Sentences**

- **Simple Sentence (one Independent Clause)**
  - o Brittany wrote a paper.
  - o Cierra and Brittany wrote a paper.
  - o Cierra and Brittany wrote a paper and then took a walk.
- **Complex sentence (one or more Dependent Clauses and one Independent Clause)**
  - o Although Brittany wrote a paper, Cierra did not.
  - o Cierra wrote a paper although Brittany did not.
  - o Jackie, who is my student, works very hard.
  - o All of the students who take English 0980 work very hard.

- **Compound Sentences (two or more Independent Clauses)\***
  - o Brittany wrote a paper, and Cierra checked it over.
  - o Brittany wrote a paper; Cierra checked it over.
  - o Brittany wrote a paper; next, Cierra checked it over.

**\*Run-on Sentences occur only in compound sentences when you do not punctuate them correctly, as above.**

### **Comma Usage**

- **Use a comma to separate introductory words, phrases, and clauses from the rest of the sentence.**
  - o *Darn*, I will not be there.
  - o *Working hard on the project*, Mark will be tired most of the week.
  - o *After he opens his account*, he will send you a check.
- **Use a comma to set off non-essential adjective clauses. Essential adjective clauses are not set off with commas.**
  - o Greg Smith, *whom I met last night*, will not be appearing on center stage.
  - o The man *whom I met last night* will not be appearing on center stage.
- **Use commas to separate items in a series. When a conjunction is placed between every item in the series, no commas are used.**
  - o Roger, Billy, Matt, and Susan are in place.
  - o Don't worry, fret, or be anxious.
  - o Bill and Sam and Ray are gone.

**Wordiness: A sentence may be grammatically correct, but it may contain too many words that make it awkward or even too confusing to follow.**

- **Wordy** – As far as I am concerned, the major weakness of the hair salon in question is that the owner is rude, in a matter of speaking.
- **Correct** – The major weakness of the hair salon is the rude owner.
- **Wordy (and redundant)** – Many unskilled workers who have no training in a particular job are unemployed and do not have any work.
- **Correct** – Many unskilled workers are not employed.

**Watch out for the following phrases which contribute to wordiness and redundancy:** at this time period, at the present time, because of the fact that, circle around, there is, there are, as far as I am concerned, in my opinion, last but not least, more or less.

**Avoid unnecessary information.** Leave out phrases in a sentence which detract from the main thought.

- **Incorrect:** My boss, who wears a hearing aid, is a very fair person.
- **Correct:** My boss is a fair person.

## Types of Agreement

- **Subject /Verb**

**In present tense, singular subjects agree with verbs plus “s.” Plural verbs agree with the verb without “s.”**

- o *John* writes a paper.
- o *Sally and Blake* write a paper.
- o *The presidents* of each community work long hours.

- **Pronoun/Antecedent**

**Pronouns need to agree in gender and number with the nouns they are replacing.**

- o I need to give *each person* *his or her* book.
- o Please tell the *members* of the team that *they* must return *their* books.
- o *Everyone* left *his or her* book behind.
- o The *man who* lives next door is creepy.

- **Parallelism**

**Items in a series must be of the same grammatical form.**

- o Place all the *containers, dishes, and placemats* in the bin.
- o They worked hard to *remove the pollutants, rebuild the fisheries, and restock the ponds.*
- o We will place them *in mailboxes, on porches, and on cars.*

- **Tense**

**Tenses should remain consistent unless the actions happen at different times.**

- o Last year I *gave* her my favorite dress. I *was* very generous.
- o As we *go* along, we *see* many colorful plants.
- o I *picked* her up at her house. *Nowadays*, I *pick* her up at the bus stop.

## SSC Essay Writing Skills Guide

In the event that you wish to contest the results of your COMPASS placement, you will have the option of writing an essay that will be read and assessed by Stark State's English Department.

You will be given a writing task (prompt) framed within a familiar context. Your prompt will be related to a current cultural topic. The prompt requires that you think critically about its topic and to refer to specific experiences, examples or evidence that help frame your perspective on the issue. Your score will not be affected by the point of view you take on the issue but instead on how clearly and effectively you convey your perspective to your audience of readers

### Suggestions for Composing Your Placement Essay

**1. Budget your time wisely.** Allow time for each step in this process. Below is a general idea of the steps you should consider:

Read the directions and select a topic.  
Read the directions again, brainstorm, and organize your thoughts.  
Write the placement essay.  
Revise the placement essay.

**2. Use the writing process.** Here are some important strategies to help you comprehend the directions fully:

- a) **Remember to write about only one of the topics listed.** Placement essays that respond to multiple topics will not be as successful as ones that focus on a single prompt.
- b) **Plan your essay before composing it.** Writing an effective essay often requires a writer to consider his/her options, choose a course of action, and then plan for the essay by taking notes, devising outlines, listing important ideas, etc. Prewriting can be done with pencil and paper or on the computer. Many writers, unfortunately, choose to start writing without a plan, and the resulting essay is often unfocused and disorganized.
- c) **Upon choosing a topic and carefully prewriting, write your placement essay.** Remember that you're being asked to compose an essay that displays the important principles of writing clearly and concisely, like developing a central, main idea and then supporting that idea in a way that's focused and well developed through examples, experiences, and evidence over a series of logically organized paragraphs.
- d) **Leave yourself time to revise your placement essay.** Revision is an opportunity to improve upon what you have already written. Your placement essay will undoubtedly benefit from an extensive review before you finish. Writers who revise their work will--for starters--generate new ideas, catch errors, enhance details, reconsider word choices, and evaluate paragraph placement and focus.