

## Placement Exams in English or Math? Don't Go in Cold!

Every UMUC student takes Placement Exams before beginning the study of English or Math. Some students feel that the purpose of the exam is to dump you into a remedial course—a kind of purgatory where you review arithmetic and grammar, but for which you get no credit. Nothing could be further from the truth. The purpose of the exam is to help you succeed. Why risk a bad grade in a course not designed for your needs?

No placement exam is perfect. We know that. But the one we use at UMUC, called Accuplacer™, is the very best available and is amazingly effective. Some students don't know they can increase their chances of doing well on the placement test by preparing for it.

So what do you do? Find a dusty old volume in the local library, grit your teeth, and plow through a thousand meaningless grammar rules, exceptions, and mathematical formulas? No. You do what a lot of you do every day anyway: you click on Google. Do a search for “English skills,” or “Math skills,” or whatever clever phrase comes to mind. You will find many, many interactive sites where you can practice and learn efficiently—some will give you instant feedback, score your results, and lead you to further study. A few good sites are listed below.

Remember that ACCUPLACER™ is an adaptive test. This means that the 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 can change your answer to a particular question before moving on to the next question, but you cannot leave a question out or come back to it later to change your answer. Once you go on to the next question, you cannot return to the question. If you do not know the answer to a question, try to eliminate one or more of the choices then select your answer. Then pick from the remaining choices.

### Accuplacer™ English Test

**SENTENCE SKILLS TEST** This test measures your understanding of sentence structure—how sentences are put together and what makes a sentence complete and clear. In some questions you will be asked to select the best version of the underlined part of the sentence.

### Sample Question

Ms. Rose planning to teach a course in biology next summer.

- planning
- are planning
- with a plan
- plans

The correct answer is d. plans. The sentence should be “Ms. Rose plans to teach a course in biology next summer.”

**READING COMPREHENSION TEST** This test measures your ability to understand what you read. Before you begin there will be two sample questions with the correct answers indicated. Some questions will ask you to read the statement or passage and then choose the best answer to the question. Answer the question on the basis of what is stated or implied in the passage.

### Sample Question

There are two types of pottery that I do. There is production pottery—mugs, tableware—the kinds of things that sell easily. These pay for my time to do the other work, which is more creative and satisfies my needs as an artist.

*The author of the passage implies that*

- artists have a tendency to waste valuable time
- creativity and mass-production are incompatible
- most people do not appreciate good art
- pottery is not produced by creative artists

The correct answer is b. *creativity and mass-production are incompatible*. The author implies that creativity and mass-production are incompatible.

In other questions, two sentences are followed by a question or statement. Read the sentences, then choose the best answer to the question or the best completion of the statement.

### Sample Question

- The Midwest is experiencing its worst drought in fifteen years.
- Corn and soybean prices are expected to be high this year.

*What does the second sentence do?*

- It restates the idea found in the first.
- It states an effect.
- It gives an example.
- It analyzes the statement made in the first.

The correct answer is b. *It states an effect*.

**ESSAY TEST** The essay test you take asks for the type of academic writing you are likely to experience as part of your college coursework.

**Instructions for the Essay:** Prepare a multiple-paragraph writing sample of about 300-600 words on the topic below. Your writing sample will be scored on the basis of how effectively it communicates a whole message to the readers for the stated purpose. Your score will be based on your ability to express, organize, and support your opinions and ideas. The following five characteristics of writing will be considered:

*Focus:* The clarity with which you maintain your main idea or point of view.

*Organization:* The clarity with which you structure your response and present a logical sequence of ideas.

*Development and Support:* The extent to which you elaborate on your ideas and the extent to which you present supporting details.

*Sentence Structure:* The effectiveness of your sentence structure.

*Mechanical Conventions:* The extent to which your writing is free of errors in usage and mechanics.

**Sample Essay Topic** Some schools require each student to participate in an organized school sport chosen by the student. People at these schools argue that athletics is an important part of the educational experience and that there should be a rule requiring participation. Others argue that students should be free to decide whether or not they wish to participate in organized school sports.

**Instructions** Write an essay for a classroom instructor in which you take a position on whether or participation in organized school athletics should be required. Be sure to defend your position with logical arguments and appropriate examples.

## Accuplacer™ Math Test

You must answer every question when it is first given. You can change your answer to a particular question before moving on to the next question, but you cannot leave a question out or come back to it later to change your answer. Once you go on to the next question, you cannot return to the question. If you do not know the answer to a question, try to eliminate one or more of the choices then select your answer. Then pick from the remaining choices.

A pop-up calculator is provided for those questions where the use of a calculator will not help you answer the question. For example, if you are asked to calculate the area of a rectangle, you must know the formula (length times width) for calculating the area. The calculator is available in this case as a tool for multiplying the length times the width. It will not help you if you do not know the formula.

### Elementary Algebra Test

This 12 question test measures your ability to perform basic algebraic operations and to solve problems that involve elementary algebraic concepts. Topics include: integers, absolute value, square roots, factoring, rational expressions, polynomials, quadratic equations, inequalities, geometric reasoning, graphing, and applied problems.

### Sample Questions

1. Factor:  $x^8 - 1$

- a.  $(x^4 + 1)(x^2 + 1)(x + 1)(x - 1)$
- b.  $(x^2 + 1)(x^2 + 1)(x + 1)(x - 1)$
- c.  $x^2(x^6 - 1)$
- d.  $(x^4 + 1)(x^4 - 1)$
- e. Prime

2. Multiply:  $(x - 4)^2$

- a.  $x^2 + 4x - 16$
- b.  $x^2 + 16$
- c.  $x^2 - 16$
- d.  $x^2 - 8x + 16$
- e.  $x^2 + 8x + 16$

3. Simplify:  $|5 - 8| - |-2|$

- a. -1
- b. 1
- c. 5
- d. -5
- e. 6

4. Simplify:  $5\sqrt{6} - 7\sqrt{6} + 9 - (\sqrt{6})^2$

- a.  $-2\sqrt{12}$
- b.  $-2\sqrt{36}$
- c.  $-2\sqrt{6} + 3$
- d. 9
- e.  $-35\sqrt{6} + 3$

Solutions to sample math questions are on the following page.

Solutions to Math Questions:

1. A  $x^8 - 1 =$   
 $(x^4 + 1)(x^4 - 1) =$   
 $(x^4 + 1)(x^2 + 1)(x^2 - 1) =$   
 $(x^4 + 1)(x^2 + 1)(x + 1)(x - 1)$   
 $(x - 4)^2 =$

2. D  $x^2 - 4x - 4x + 16 =$   
 $x^2 - 8x + 16$

3. B  $|5 - 8| - |-2| =$   
 $|-3| - 2 =$   
 $3 - 2 = 1$

4. C  $5\sqrt{6} - 7\sqrt{6} + 9 - (\sqrt{6}) =$   
 $-2\sqrt{6} + 9 - 6 =$   
 $-2\sqrt{6} + 3$

**Web sites to Help You Improve Your English and Math Skills**

<http://library.ad.umuc.edu/plcmnttest/practice.cfm> UMUC Web site where you will find the practice tests above as well as links to several more skills development centers in both math and English.

[http://www.umuc.edu/prog/ugp/ewp\\_writingcenter/wc\\_home.shtml](http://www.umuc.edu/prog/ugp/ewp_writingcenter/wc_home.shtml) UMUC's On Line Writing Lab. An excellent place to discover the "what" and "how" of writing.

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/lab/owl/factsheet.html> Purdue's Online Writing Lab (OWL), probably the most popular on-line site for developing English writing skills.

<http://englishplus.com/grammar/> Grammar Slammer. Quick guide to a thousand little challenges for the beginning writer (especially for those using English as a second language).

<http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/index.htm> Guide to Grammar and Writing. Easy-to-use guide when you have a question about grammar and usage.

<http://www.necc.mass.edu/departments/assessment/studyguide.php> Northern Essex Community College practice test questions in both English and math.

<http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/mathrv/placement/placetest.html> Montgomery College practice test in math.

<http://faculty.ccbcmd.edu/%7Egwillgin/mathtest.htm> Community College of Baltimore County practice tests in math; links to other tests.

<http://www.purplemath.com/modules/index.htm> Purplemath—Your Algebra Resource. Practical algebra lessons in a comprehensive website. The lessons are cross-referenced to find related material.