

WRITING

TEST DESCRIPTION

The COMPASS Writing/English Skills Test is a computer-adaptive test designed to help determine whether students possess the writing skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in a typical entry-level English or composition class, or whether they may benefit from developmental coursework in this area. This test simulates the text-editing task by presenting examinees with an essay on the computer screen and requiring them first to *find* errors in grammar, usage, and style, and then to *correct* the errors by selecting the appropriate text segment from among five alternatives. In addition to the items that correspond to item segments, examinees are presented one or two multiple-choice items after each passage. These pose global questions pertinent to the passage.

Items in the Writing/English Skills Test are of two general categories: *Usage/Mechanics* and *Rhetorical Skills*.

Usage/Mechanics items are directed at the surface level characteristics of writing, as exemplified in three major subcategories: *Punctuation*; *Basic Grammar and Usage*; and, *Sentence Structure*.

Punctuation items deal with misplaced, omitted, or superfluous commas; colons; semicolon; dashes; apostrophes; parentheses; question marks; and, exclamation points. Major areas include:

- Punctuating breaks in thought
 - End of a sentence
 - Between clauses of compound sentences when conjunction is omitted or when clauses contain commas
 - Before a conjunctive adverb joining clauses of a compound sentence
 - Parenthetical elements
- Punctuating relationships and sequences
 - Avoiding ambiguity
 - Indicating apposition
 - Indicating possessives
 - Items in a series
 - Simple phrases and clauses in a series
 - Unequivocally restrictive/nonrestrictive clauses and phrases
- Avoiding unnecessary punctuation
 - Between subject and predicate
 - Between verb and object
 - Between adjective and noun
 - Between preposition and object
 - Between noun and preposition
 - Between the intensive and the antecedent
 - Between two coordinate elements
 - Between correlatives
 - Within series already linked by conjunction

Basic Grammar and Usage items deal with agreement between subject and verb, between pronoun and antecedent, and between modifiers and the words modified; formation of verb tenses; pronoun case; formation of comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs; and, idiomatic usage. Major areas addressed include:

- Assuring grammatical agreement
 - Predicate with subjects (including compound subject, collective nouns)
 - Pronouns with antecedent
 - Predicate with a subject in sentences beginning with *there* or *where*
 - Adjectives and adverbs with their corresponding nouns and verbs
- Forming verbs
 - Tenses of regular and irregular verbs
 - Compound tenses
- Using pronouns
 - Using the proper form of possessives and distinguishing them from adverbs and contractions
 - Using the appropriate case of a pronoun
 - Forming comparatives and superlatives of adjectives and adverbs
 - Using the appropriate comparative or superlative form depending on the context
- Observing usage conventions
 - Using the idioms of Standard English

Sentence structure items deal with relationships between and among clauses, the management and placement of modifiers, and unnecessary shifts in construction. Major areas assessed include:

- Relating clauses
 - Avoiding faulty subordination and coordination
 - Avoiding run-on sentences
 - Avoiding comma splices
 - Avoiding sentence fragments
- Using modifiers
 - Constructing sentences so that antecedents are clear and unambiguous
 - Placing modifiers so that they modify the appropriate element
- Avoiding unnecessary shifts in construction
 - Person
 - Number
 - Voice
 - Tense
 - Mood

Rhetorical skills items assess understanding of the purposes and methods of effective writing. The three major subcategories are: *Strategy*; *Organization*; and, *Style*. *Strategy* items deal with the appropriateness of expression in relation to audience and purpose; the effect of adding, revising, or deleting supporting material; and, the effective choice of opening, transitional, and closing sentences. *Organization* items deal with the organization of ideas and the relevancy of statements in context, with regard to order, coherence, and unity. *Style* items deal with precision and appropriateness in the choice of words and images, rhetorically effective management of sentence elements, avoidance of ambiguous pronoun references, and economy in writing.

Free Online English/Grammar Tutorials

<http://home.comcast.net/~garbl/writing/grammar.htm>

http://faculty.goucher.edu/writingprogram/free_online_grammar_and_punctuat.htm

<http://englishpage.com>

<http://library.kcc.hawaii.edu/SOS>

<http://webgrammar.com>

<http://www.refdesk.com/factgram.html>

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>

(These sites have lists of other Colleges and Universities that have helpful tips, exercises, etc.)

The Assessment and Learning Center is located in Lissa & Cy Wagner Hall building room 270. If you have any additional questions, please contact us at (405) 325-4336.