

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY EXAM HANDOUT: Spring 2020

1-17-2020

English Proficiency Examination (EPE): Frequently Asked Questions

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What is the English Proficiency Examination (EPE)?

The English Proficiency Examination is a 90-minute essay examination required by the University of Maryland Eastern Shore (UMES) to meet a University System of Maryland (USM) requirement to assure that all undergraduate students are able to write at an acceptable level. This requirement became effective for classes entering the fall of 1998.

This EPE is completed online, usually in Waters Hall computer labs, under the direction of an EPE proctor, who verifies each student's identity before letting him/ her start. Therefore, students must take their HawkCards with them to the EPE. The EPE requires each student to write a 500-600 word, multi-paragraph essay in response to a specific, randomly assigned, persuasive prompt. The essays are administered and evaluated by the College Board using a modified holistic scoring, a procedure used to evaluate the overall quality of writing based on the following 6 dimensions of writing: Purpose and Focus, Organization and Structure, Development and Support, Sentence Variety and Style, Mechanical Conventions, and Critical Thinking. Students taking the EPE are not allowed to use any writing or editing aids, such as dictionaries, thesauri, or Word with its spell-checking and grammar-checking features.

In addition to receiving feedback on each of the 6 dimensions of writing, each student receives a score between 0 and 8 immediately after "submitting" the EPE. A score of 5 or above on the 8-point scale is passing. A passing score is based on "satisfactory" quality: an essay that would earn a C- in ENGL101/ 102. The grades submitted on the transcript are "S" (satisfactory) or "U" (unsatisfactory). Students can verify their EPE grades on their unofficial transcript or Course History in HawkWeb.

What are the course pre-requisites for taking the EPE?

All students must fulfill the following two pre-requisites to take the EPE: (1) have completed ENGL101 with a "C" or above or an "S" and (2) have completed ENGL102 with a "C" or above or an "S" or be taking ENGL102. Most students register for the EPE for the first time when they register for ENGL102. Transfer students who receive credit for ENGL102 when they transfer in to UMES register during their first semester at UMES.

When is the EPE given?

During the fall and spring semesters, the EPE is given during final exam week. It is not given during winter and summer sessions. Students in traditional ENGL102 must take the EPE during their regularly scheduled final exam period. Students who have completed ENGL102 when they take the EPE and students who are in Online ENGL102 (which does not have a scheduled final exam period) select one of various dates/ times offered during exam week.

May ENGL102 students take the EPE at a time other than their scheduled final exam period?

No. Except in the case of a University-approved absence with written documentation, no ENGL102 students may take the EPE at a time other than their scheduled final exam period. The final exam period should be on the students' ENGL102 syllabus, it is posted in the EPE Blackboard class, it is posted on the EPE webpage, and it is not negotiable. An ENGL102 student who does not show up on time for his/ her scheduled exam will receive a "U" for the EPE and must register for it again the following semester.

How do students register for the EPE?

Although the EPE is worth 0 credits and doesn't actually meet as a class, students register for it through HawkWeb as they do for all classes. The EPE is ENGL 001.

How do students get more information about the EPE?

All students who are registered for the EPE are also in a Blackboard class for the EPE. Additional information about the EPE is posted there. Also, there is an EPE website: www.umes.edu/epe

What should students do to prepare for the EPE?

Students in ENGL102 will be prepared for the EPE through their class instruction. Students who have completed ENGL102 should review the materials posted in the Blackboard class and review the basic principles of expository and persuasive writing taught in ENGL101 and ENGL102. A single preparation session for students who are not in ENGL 102 is available through the Writing Center in Wilson Hall 1106.

What should students do if they do not pass the EPE?

They should register for ENGL 001 for the next semester. If they want to review a prior failed EPE, they should go to see Dr. Terry Kundell, the Coordinator of the EPE, prior to the last two weeks of the semester. Her office hours are posted in the EPE Blackboard class.

If a student is unsuccessful in passing the EPE, will he or she still be permitted to graduate?

No. Successful completion of the EPE is required for graduation. Students are strongly encouraged to complete this requirement before they become seniors.

If students have additional questions about the EPE, whom should they contact?

Contact Dr. Terry Kundell, Coordinator of the English Proficiency Examination, for more information. Dr. Kundell's email is tkundell@umes.edu.

From *WritePlacer: Guide with Sample Essays*

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Introduction to WritePlacer

WritePlacer assesses the writing skills of new college students. Test scores help colleges determine whether a student is ready for college-level coursework or would benefit from developmental instruction before taking credit-bearing courses.

Students taking WritePlacer are presented with a prompt and asked to write an essay of 300 to 600 words. A prompt consists of a short passage. Following the passage is an assignment that requires the student to focus on the issue addressed in the passage.

WritePlacer prompts are carefully designed to allow the student to respond quickly and in a variety of ways. They are free of technical or specific literacy references and don't require specialized knowledge. The prompts are designed to stimulate critical thinking and are relevant to any number of fields and interests. Students will be asked to draw on a broad range of experiences, learning, and ideas to support their point of view on the issue in question. Scores on WritePlacer range from 1 to 8. An essay that is too short to be evaluated, written on a topic other than the one presented, or written in a language other than English will be given a score of zero.

Information for Students

WritePlacer gives you an opportunity to show how effectively you can develop and express your ideas in writing. You will first read a short passage and an assignment question that are focused on an important issue. You will then write an essay in which you develop your point of view on the issue. You should support your position with appropriate reasoning and examples. The position you take will not influence your score.

Your essay will be given a holistic score that represents how clearly and effectively you expressed your position. The following six characteristics of writing will be considered:

- Purpose and Focus: the extent to which you present information in a unified and coherent manner, clearly addressing the issue.
- Organization and Structure: the extent to which you order and connect ideas.
- Development and Support: the extent to which you develop and support ideas.
- Sentence Variety and Style: The extent to which you craft sentences and paragraphs demonstrating control of vocabulary, voice, and structure.
- Mechanical Conventions: The extent to which you express ideas using Standard Written English.
- Critical Thinking: the extent to which you communicate a point of view and demonstrate reasoned relationships among ideas.

English Proficiency Examination (EPE) Instructions; Dr. Terry Kundell

1. You are not allowed to leave the room once the exam starts; Use the facilities, get tissues, etc. before exam time.
2. Put away all cell phones, earphones, papers, etc. They should be inside a closed bookbag, purse, etc.
3. You may not have contact with anyone or anything while you are taking the exam except the exam itself.
4. Keep your Accuplacer screen full-screen size. If you ever click outside the screen, your EPE will indicate a security violation and shut down your test.
5. We have logged in for you using a standard log-in. When you sit down at the computer, you will be at the "ACCUPLACER System Privacy Policy." Read and select "Accept" in the lower right corner.
6. You will be at an information screen that requests your student id, your last name, and your birthdate. Fill in that information. Please use correct capitalization: your name starts with a capital letter. If you write in all capitals or in all lower case, your name does not sort with the rest of the test results.
7. Select the button in the lower right-hand corner that enables you to move to the next screen.
8. You will be at an information screen that requests more demographic data. Fill that in and go to the next screen.
9. You will proceed through a series of other screens. You will always select the button in the lower right-hand corner to move to the next screen: it usually says "next," "administer test," "start test session," or something like that. Keep moving through screens at your own pace until you reach the topic screen. If you need help with how to proceed, raise your hand for your proctor to help you.
10. Once you get to your topic screen, you may take notes on the scratch paper given to you by your proctor, or you may start writing in the box. Do NOT include a title; just start with the first sentence. Do NOT indent. To show breaks between paragraphs, leave an empty line between them.
11. **Write a multi-paragraph essay in response to your "Assignment."** Your topic starts with a quotation, but that is to get you thinking. You do NOT need to incorporate the quotation in your essay. Your thesis should take a clear position on one side of the "Assignment." I recommend a 4 or, better, 5-paragraph essay:
 - An introduction that ends in an explicit thesis with 2-3 reasons or 2-3 examples;
 - 2 or 3 body paragraphs, each starting with an explicit topic sentence that states a reason or example for the position you took in your thesis;
 - A conclusion that restates your thesis.

Write in 1st ("I," "me," "we," "our") or 3rd person ("people," "they"). Avoid 2nd person ("you").
12. Note that there's an automatic word count that changes as you type. Remember that your goal is 500-600 words. I have seen passing essays in the 400s and 700s, but your goal is 500-600 words.
13. Note that there's a timer in the upper right-hand corner. You have 90 minutes of writing time once you have gotten your topic. You can check your timer at any time, and you must make sure you submit your essay before your time runs out, or the essay will submit for you.
14. When you are satisfied with your essay, submit it. Select "Submit Essay," then "Continue." Your score screen will appear. Scroll down to see your score.
 - A 5 or above out of a possible 8 is passing.
 - A score of "pending" means your essay will be hand scored by trained evaluators at the College Board. It does not reflect on the quality of your essay. You will see your score the next morning in the EPE Blackboard class.
15. I will post your score in BB by 10am the morning after you take it in the EPE Blackboard class. You really don't need a copy of your score today, but, if you want one, you may print it to WEPA, or you may "print" as a pdf file and email it to yourself.
16. Click the "x" in the upper right-hand corner to close your exam. **Return your scratch paper to your proctor whether you used it or not.** You are finished.

NOTE: If you don't pass, add ENGL 001 to your next semester's schedule.
Dr. Kundell will be emailing you to remind to do so.

Sample English Proficiency Exam (EPE) Essay based on the Prompt from The College Board ©2008
by Dr. Terry Kundell, EPE Coordinator

In their promotional materials, the College Board gives one Sample Prompt. This is that prompt and my advice on how to approach it.

Passage

An actor, when his cue came, was unable to move onto the stage. He said, "I can't get in, the chair is in the way." And the producer said, "Use the difficulty. If it's a drama, pick the chair up and smash it. If it's a comedy, fall over it." From this experience the actor concluded that in any situation in life that is negative, there is something positive you can do with it.

Adapted from Lawrence Eisenberg, "Caine Scrutiny."

Assignment

Can any obstacle or disadvantage be turned into something good?

Advice to Students

Read the passage only to start thinking about the topic. Then form a thesis using the wording of the assignment. Because the word "any" is a bit extreme, I believe it would be safe to change it to "many" or "most." Your thesis statement should take a clear position on one side of the assignment. These are two possible thesis statements for this assignment:

- Many obstacles can be turned into something good.
- Most obstacles cannot be turned into something good.

You should develop your essay with reasons or examples. I believe this assignment can more easily be developed with examples. Select a separate example for each paragraph, and state the examples clearly in the topic sentences. You can arrange these examples in chronological order (order of time) or emphatic order (order of importance). If I used the first thesis, "Many obstacles can be turned into something good," I might have these 3 topic sentences arranged in order of time :

- One obstacle I turned into something good was when my best friend in elementary school moved away, and I had to make new friends.
- Another obstacle I turned into something good was when my parents told me they could not afford college so I worked hard in high school to get good grades and earn a scholarship.
- A final obstacle I turned into something good was when I did not get accepted into my first-choice college and, instead, came to a college at which I could do really well.

Once you have created a rough outline for your essay, you need to do the following:

- Write a lead-in to the thesis since the thesis should come at the end of the introductory paragraph;
- Tell the story of each of the obstacles after the 3 topic sentences;
- Write a conclusion in which you restate the thesis and achieve closure for the essay.

**WritePlacer Essay Guide: pp. 5-7 (slightly modified from
<http://www.accuplacerpracticetest.com/writeplacer-essay-guide/>)**

The ACCUPLACER includes the WritePlacer exam, which is the ACCUPLACER essay test. On this portion of the test you are evaluated on organization, focus, development and support, sentence structure, and mechanical conventions. The good news is that your essay is only required to be 500-600 words in length. A simple 5 paragraph essay will be more than sufficient. Scores on WritePlacer range from 1 to 8.

You will have **90 minutes** to plan, write, and proofread this essay.

An essay that is too short to be evaluated, written on a topic other than the one presented, or written in a language other than English will be given a score of zero. Notice that the biggest differences between the low-scoring and high-scoring essays is LENGTH and CLARITY. Aim to achieve multiple paragraphs with good organization, and this essay should be fairly easy!

WritePlacer Tips and Strategies

- **Understand that the WritePlacer exam will NOT require any outside knowledge.** You are not expected to have any specific technical know-how or understanding of specific books or authors. The essay will be based off a provided prompt meant to spark your creativity. Everything you need to answer the question will be part of the prompt!
- **Select one side only.** Unlike real life where most of our opinions are a mix of gray, the ACCUPLACER essay requires you to take a strong stand on one side and one side ONLY of the issue. You won't be able to adequately argue a middle-of-the-road approach, and you risk appearing indecisive and muddling your essay.
- **Remember that you will not be scored on your opinion.** Don't worry if you feel you are choosing a less commonly held position on the topic. The reader will NOT give you a lower score based on personal bias.
- **Don't change your position mid-essay.** Even if you feel you're running out of steam and you're regretting your position on the topic, stay strong and finish the essay anyway. Don't waffle, and don't try to take a "middle of the road" approach. You don't have time to go back and re-write the whole thing.
- **No example is "too" specific.** As long as you can argue logically that it supports your thesis, no example is "too" specific. Most essays are way too general. Aim to make the reader think, "wow, what extreme detail!" as they read. If you are using an example from personal experience, using some names, dates, places, and other concrete details can go a long way. Replace abstracts with absolutes.
- **Incorporate the opposing side.** A great way to strengthen your own argument is to acknowledge that there *is* in fact complexity to the issue. However, if you bring up and describe the opposing side, make sure to criticize it effectively and reiterate that *your side* is the only one that is valid. This is a great tool to use in your conclusion, although many students include it in an additional body paragraph.
- **Keep the introduction and conclusion brief.** Don't take forever to get to the topic. The function of an introductory paragraph is to introduce the reader to the topic in the prompt, and then to clearly and forcefully state your position on it. More than 3-4 sentences is too long. In the conclusion, 1-2 sentences is great to reiterate your position and leave the essay with a closing idea. Save your writing-time for your body paragraphs!
- **Use Transition Words.** Scroll down to the bottom of this article to see a good list of common transition words. Be sure to use them as you move between paragraphs! Always make sure the reader will understand why you are moving from one paragraph to the next paragraph!

WritePlacer Template

This is a sample outline for the ACCUPLACER Essay. Notice we are aiming for 5 paragraphs total. You may opt for a shorter 4 paragraph version if 5 paragraphs are too many for you to write, but aim for 5 paragraphs if you can. If you have trouble completing 5 paragraphs, see if you can streamline your body paragraphs. They can often be bloated with unnecessary wordiness. Keep the introduction and the conclusion short and sweet.

Paragraph 1 – Introduction (3-4 sentences)

You will want to begin your essay with one of the following: a generalization about the topic, a quotation, a short anecdote to set-up the correctness of your position, a historical framework, or a piece of news illustrating the contemporariness of the issue. **Admit the complexity of the issue.**

You have two goals in the beginning part of the essay: to introduce the topic, and to express your opinion on it. Be sure to place your thesis as the final sentence in your introduction.

Paragraph 2 – First Example (4-6 sentences)

Start with your most-powerful or relevant example. Be specific. Your example can be from history, science, politics, business, entertainment, pop culture, current events, personal experience, etc. Anything can be an example, but choose ONE only for each paragraph. It needs to be something you are knowledgeable about and also something that you believe strongly supports your thesis. You have three tasks in your body paragraphs:

- Introduce your example.
- Describe it.
- Explain how it fully supports your thesis.

You should spend the majority of your body paragraph accomplishing the the third step: **explaining how it fully supports your thesis**. Aim to convince the reader through very concrete details how your position on the issue is correct.

Paragraph 3 – Second Example (4-6 sentences)

Use a transition phrase to introduce the second example. Describe it, and explain again how it fully supports your thesis. You may refer to your first example if you need to, but prioritize a focus on your new example. Don't mention your third example until you get to the third paragraph.

Paragraph 4 – Third Example (4-6 sentences)

Use a transition phrase again in the first topic sentence. Describe the example. Explain how it supports. Make sure you are elucidating for the reader how each example relates to the topic.

Paragraph 5 – Conclusion (2-4 sentences)

In your conclusion, introduce the opposing side. Explain their position in general terms. Refute their position. Then reinforce the correctness of your own thesis. This takes care of having to come up with a conclusion- you'll already know what to do! Here's how it might look:

Although _____ is demonstrably correct, some have argued that _____, believing that _____. However, this viewpoint on the present issue is negated by _____. Rather, _____. Therefore, in the long run,

ACCUPLACER Essay Practice

Be sure to write at least 2-3 sample essays before your exam so you are comfortable with the format. Have a teacher, friend, or trusted relative read through your exam and give you feedback. Below you'll find a list of three possible ACCUPLACER essay prompts. Choose at least TWO of these ACCUPLACER essay topics and write a practice essay, attempting to follow the above template to the best of your ability.

ACCUPLACER Essay Topics

- 1) Do works of art have the power to change people's lives? Some people say a book or a movie has the power to do just that. Are they exaggerating, or can art have such a large impact of individuals?

- 2) Is an education a requirement for a successful career? Explain the topic and either agree or disagree with the statement, offering support for your position.

- 3) Scientists and politicians argue over whether global warming and climate control present a real threat to human welfare. Take a position on this issue and explain whether or not you believe this to be a serious problem for humanity.

Transition Words List

<p><u>Agreement Words</u> in the first place not only ... but also as a matter of fact in like manner in addition coupled with in the same fashion / way first, second, third in the light of</p> <p><u>Opposition Words</u> in contrast different from of course ..., but on the other hand on the contrary at the same time in spite of but (and) still</p>	<p><u>Causation Words</u> in the event that for the purpose of with this intention with this in mind in the hope that in order to If ... then in case</p> <p><u>Example Words</u> in other words to put it differently for one thing as an illustration in this case for this reason to put it another way that is to say with attention to</p>
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UMES' Simple Practice EPE Topics without Passages

1. Is it more important to be rich or to be happy?
2. Is it more important to be a realist or to be an optimist?
3. Is it more important to work hard or to have fun?
4. Is it better to have pets or not to have pets?
5. Is it better to have children or not to have children?
6. Can you be friends with people who have different beliefs than yours?

UMES' Sample Practice EPE Topics with Passages

Acknowledgements: Several years ago, Melissa Green, former ENGL102 Coordinator, generated this excellent list of Sample EPE Topics following the quotation/ assignment model of the actual EPE. Since then my Writing Center tutors and I have modified them somewhat, but I want to share them with you because they serve well as practice topics for the EPE. They are called topic set 1. Since then, my lead EPE tutor, has generated another list of excellent topics. They are called topic set 2.

All of the topics for the EPE essay will be in the following format. You will be given a passage with a quotation to read and contemplate. After the quote, the actual "assignment" to which you will respond will appear. Make certain that you keep the 5-paragraph essay format in mind. All assignments are on rather philosophical topics, such as these, and will require that you establish a clear position in a thesis and then support your position with examples or reasons.

Topic Set 1

1. Passage: 1 Timothy 6:10: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."
 - Assignment: Do you believe the love of money does or does not cause problems?
2. Passage: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." - Martin Luther King Jr.
 - Assignment: Is peace or violence more effective in creating change?
3. Passage: "To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment." - Ralph Waldo Emerson
 - Assignment: Is it possible to be yourself in today's society, or does today's society force you to be someone else?
4. Passage: "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything." - Malcolm X
 - Assignment: Should your values be fixed or should they be flexible to the lessons of society and life?
5. Passage: "I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." - Albert Einstein
 - Assignment: Which is more important, imagination or knowledge?
6. Passage: "That which does not kill us makes us stronger." - Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche
 - Assignment: Do negative life experiences make us stronger, or do they damage us irreparably?

Topic Set 2

1. Passage: "Do not dwell in the past, do not dream of the future, concentrate the mind on the present moment." -Buddha

- Assignment: Is it better to live in the present or dream of the future?

2. Passage: "We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves." -Buddha

- Assignment: Do our thoughts make us what we are today?

3. Passage: "If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude." -Maya Angelou

- Assignment: Is it better to try to change a bad situation or to try to change your outlook on the situation?

4. Passage: "I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend." -Thomas Jefferson

- Assignment: Are differing views a good reason to stop being friends with someone?

5. Passage: "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt." -Abraham Lincoln

- Assignment: Is it better to keep your opinion to yourself or say it regardless of what it makes someone else think?

6. Passage: "Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be." -Abraham Lincoln

- Assignment: Do you believe that happiness is something you can decide to have or is it caused by external factors?

7. Passage: "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." -Mahatma Gandhi

- Assignment: Does forgiveness make you strong or weak?

8. Passage: "We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we are less prone to hate our enemies." -Martin Luther King, Jr.

- Assignment: Does everyone contain a little bit of evil and good, or is everyone either all evil or all good?

9. Passage: "Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught." -Oscar Wilde

- Assignment: Is education the only important thing, or should learning come from other sources?