

Student Academic Success Center

English Writing Proficiency Exam (EWPE) Student Guide

A requirement for graduation, the English Writing Proficiency Exam tests students' abilities in three major areas: *vocabulary*, *the written essay*, and the *objective test* of grammar. The following information will consist of test taking strategies and a brief refresher of grammatical rules. Although students can utilize this information to assist them in independent study, they are encouraged to work in conjunction with the Writing Center staff. These tutors can help with difficulties that the students are experiencing. **The Writing Center is located in Berkshire Cottage, 103.**

- ❖ Students can find additional information in the Beacon Handbook, ISBN 0395779928, Harbrace College Handbook, ISBN 015507285, and Freshman Composition text, Writing With a Purpose.

All of these texts provide specific information, as well as practice exercises.

The Vocabulary Test: An official copy of the vocabulary list can be obtained in the Student Academic Success Center and on-line at the SASC webpage. **Students must earn a score of 70% out of 100 to pass this test.** Students, generally, receive a copy of the official vocabulary list during their freshman year at Tougaloo College. It is extremely important that students define the words carefully and precisely.

An inappropriate definition: abate – to diminish in amount

This definition does not display either the full meaning(s) of the word or the part of speech. Several words on the list will have similar meanings. It is, therefore, extremely important to define the words carefully.

An appropriate definition:

- abate-v. 1. to reduce in intensity, amount, or degree; to lessen
2. to deduct from an amount; subtract
3. (a) to put an end to (b) to make void

syn. wane, subside, die, let up, fall off

By providing the part of speech and synonyms, students enhance their chances of mastering the word. For example, without the part of speech present, students might assume that the word “abrupt” is a verb.

An incorrect sentence: “He abruptly my conversation.”

The word “abrupt” is an adjective and “abruptly” an adverb.

He was abrupt in his lecture.

The conversation ended abruptly.

- ❖ Students should attempt to make associations with the words by locating the words within readings, both in and out of their respective majors. Newspapers and magazines are great sources for finding vocabulary words. It would also be helpful to write sentences with words on the list. All of these strategies will allow students to establish contexts for the words.

The Written Essay: The student will write an essay of 400-450 words on a topic selected from the official list which can be found in the SASC or on-line at the SASC webpage.

- ❖ Students are advised to pick up copies of the topics and read all topics carefully. Students should consider, at minimum, constructing a thesis statement for each question. The thesis statement will give structure and direction to a student's train of thought. Some students find it useful to construct a very specific thesis statement.

Example: I like studying English because it will improve my communication skills, broaden my job opportunities, and prepare me well for the demands of law school.

- ❖ Several of the essay topics require advanced study and/or research, so students should therefore review the topics prior to taking the exam. Some students will not know enough about the topic to adequately answer the question. Advanced research is extremely important!
- ❖ Students should also read the questions carefully; many students have failed to master the exam because of a failure to read the topics thoroughly. For example, one topic asks students to write a speech on the significant differences between being well educated to pursue a career and well trained to do a job. Because of its length and wording, ***many students fail to notice that they have been asked to write a speech.*** Reading the questions carefully is essential to successfully mastering the exam.
 - The essay should contain ***a minimum of five paragraphs.***
 - One to two sentences do not equal a paragraph. ***A paragraph consists of no less than three sentences, preferably five sentences.***
 - Abbreviations like etc. and e.g. should be avoided. ***Always complete a thought.***
 - Always make the appropriate transitions. ***Transitions note changes in the direction of the discussion.*** It is necessary to note these changes with transitional words, phrases, and/or sentences. The transitions should allow the discussion to flow smoothly from one topic to another.
 - Students should ***write legibly.*** If the reader(s) cannot read the students' hand-writing, then the essay cannot be properly assessed. In this case, the essay will receive a failing grade.

- *Always proofread* the essay carefully. If possible, *write a first draft*, and then, rewrite the essay.

The Objective Test of Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics: Students must earn a score of 85 to pass this test. This diagnostic test will test a student’s ability to recognize common errors in grammar and punctuation, their ability to recognize and arrange paragraphs and essays in a coherent and appropriate manner, and their knowledge of the format for business letters.

Language Expression

Sentence Fragments – A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence possessing both a capital letter in the first word and a period at the end.

Example: I realized I had forgotten to do my homework. When I arrived at school this morning.

- ❖ **Correct:** I realized I had forgotten to do my homework when I arrived at school this morning.

Run-on Sentences - A run-on sentence occurs when two sentences are joined without a conjunction and/or the appropriate punctuation.

Example: I love going to college it is more intellectually challenging than high school.

- ❖ **Correct:** I love going to college because it is more intellectually challenging than high school.

Or

I love going to college. It is more intellectually challenging than high school.

Subject-Verb Agreement – A subject and a verb within the same sentence must agree in number. If a sentence contains a singular subject, it must also contain a singular verb.

Example: Everyone of the boys are going to the movies.

- ❖ **Correct:** Everyone of the boys is going to the movies.

The first sentence is incorrect because “everyone” is a singular subject and must have a singular verb. The prepositional phrase is irrelevant to the determination of subject-verb agreement.

Example: He give me my change.

- ❖ **Correct:** He gives me my change.
“Gives” is the singular version of the verb “to give.”

Verb Form – Verb form changes to show when an action occurred.

There are essentially three principle parts of verbs: Present, Past, Past Participle

Using the infinitive “to write,” the principle parts are present tense—write, past tense—wrote, and past participle—have/has/had written.

There are also six “traditional tenses” in English; three simple and three complex. The simple tenses are the present, past, and future, while the complex tenses are the present perfect, past perfect, and future perfect:

- ❖ Present: Notes action happening now. **I write poetry.**
- ❖ Past: Action happened in the past, but does not occur in the present. **I wrote poetry.**
- ❖ Future: Action will occur at some point in the future. **I will write poetry.**
- ❖ Present Perfect: Action began in the past but continues in the present.
Example: I have written poetry for over two years now.
- ❖ Past Perfect: Action occurs before a “specific” time in the past.
Example: I had written poetry until I discovered the joy of play writing.
- ❖ Future Perfect: Action occurs before a “specific” time in the future.
Example: I will have written thirty poems by the time I turn twenty-seven.

Pronoun Case Form – Pronouns take the place of nouns in a sentence. They can take on several different cases. For the purpose of this discussion, we will only focus on the nominative and objective case forms because they are the ones so often misused.

--**Nominative Case** acts as the subject of the sentence.

{**I, you, he, she, it, we, you, they**}

He is my best friend.

This is **he**.

In both sentences, the nominative case form must be used. In the first, “he” is the traditional subject; in the latter, “he” is predicate pronoun. It tells who “this” is in the sentence, and can, at any time, substitute for “this.”

My brother told us that **he** was going to the movies.

Notice that we use “**he**” instead of “**him**.” Although it is part of a dependent clause, “he” is still the subject of the verb phrase “was going.”

--**Objective Case Form** acts as the object, direct or indirect, of the sentence.

{ me, you, him, her, it, us, them }

--**Direct objects** receive the action/indirect objects note to or for whom the action was committed.

*She gave the ball to me. **Ball** is the direct object. **Me** is the indirect object.*

--**Incorrect usage**: Mary told me to give the ball to either **he** or his best friend,

Mark.

Correct: Mary told me to give the ball to either **him** or his best friend, Mark.

Here the pronoun “He” is used incorrectly; it should be “him.” A good test for this would be to reduce the sentence down to a more simplified form. For example, “give the ball to he.” As you can see, we have removed all of the surrounding words. Read the sentence aloud; clearly “he” sounds awkward and out of place.

Punctuation

There are too many punctuation rules to explore; however, here is a brief overview of some of the more commonly misunderstood rules.

An **independent clause** is a complete sentence. It possesses a **subject** and a **verb** and can stand entirely on its own. There are several ways to join two independent clauses.

- ❖ Two independent clauses can be joined with a comma when using one of the coordination conjunctions—*and, or, but, nor, so, for, yet*.
Example: I like walking in the park, but my cousin likes walking at the track..
- ❖ Two independent clauses cannot be linked with a comma without the coordinating conjunction.
Example: I like walking, he likes fishing. This is what is called comma splice run-on sentence.
- ❖ Two independent clauses can be joined with a semicolon as long as they are related in meaning.
Example: My mother plants flowers; it is her favorite activity.

A **semicolon** may be used to join independent clauses with the conjunctive adverbs like *however, nevertheless, or therefore*.

Example: She is my friend; however, she is not my only friend.

The **semicolon** must be used before the adverb and the comma after. When using these words within one sentence, only commas will be needed.

Example: He is, however, a candidate for this job.

Commas never come directly after words like *although, before, even though, because, and after*. These words always precede dependent clauses and/or phrases.

Example: Although I work on the weekends, I will ask for Saturday off.

Before I go to the movies, I will read my book. Remember – before and after may also be prepositions.

After the rain stops, we can have our picnic.

Capitalization

Although these are relatively easy sections, students often underestimate their value. They, therefore, do not put in the necessary amount of time into answering these questions. Capitalization rules are fairly straight forward; it would be useful for you to review the rules in a grammar book. Here are few of the more misunderstood rules.

When naming a specific street, river, ocean, or school, you should always consider capitalizing.

Non-capitalized

river
road
ocean
high school
college

Capitalized

Mississippi River
County Line Road
Indian Ocean
Callaway High School
Tougaloo College

With reference to school subjects, only those that are already proper nouns should be capitalized. English, French, and Spanish are all capitalized because although they are all subjects, they are also proper nouns. Other subjects like math, science, biology, and music should not be capitalized unless they refer to a specific course, i.e. Biology 101, Math 211, or Music 334.

Spelling

Students must rely on their instincts with reference to the spelling section. Those who would like to prepare for the exam should review a list of commonly misspelled words. Often, words on this test come from the lists. However, when dealing with this section, it might be useful to spell all of the words out on a scratch sheet of paper. By relying on the book spellings, students in many cases defeat the purpose of respelling the words. By spelling the words from memory, students are, in many instances, able to catch the misspelled words.

The Paragraph and the Essay

These sections will focus on the students' ability to comprehend reading selections. They will test how well students understand the structure and organization of the paragraph and the essay. Students will be given passages and asked to identify the topic sentence or the paragraph that best fits the given statement.

They will also be tested on their ability to arrange sentences within paragraphs and paragraphs within an essay. To do this, students should watch for transitional words. In many cases, the transitional words will lead smoothly from one topic to another. With regard to the essay, students should find it easy to locate the introductory paragraph. It is usually the most eye-catching passage because it will be geared toward catching the reader's attention. Once the introductory paragraph has been located, students should find the thesis statement. This statement is like a road map; it will show exactly where to go in locating the body paragraphs. Finally, the conclusion will restate in some form the ideas expressed in the introduction. In most instances, its wording will be more specific than the introduction.

For each question, read the passage carefully, and find the common idea being expressed, i.e. what binds the ideas together.

The Business Letter

The remaining questions will focus on how well students can recognize the components of a business letter.

- ◆ The first rule is to avoid abbreviations. In presenting the inside address or the return address, words like Street, Drive, and even state names like Mississippi should be spelled out.
- ◆ When typing the heading, at the top, never include a name, only the street address, city, state, and zip, and then, the date.
- ◆ In the salutation of a business letter, always punctuate with a colon. For example: Dear Sir or Madam:
- ◆ In a business letter, the complimentary closing should resemble the following:

Sincerely,	Yours truly,*
()*
Jane Doe	Jane Doe

- ❖ **Note that **truly** is not capitalized because the second word in a two word closing is never capitalized. *Signature meaning one's name as written by oneself, or personally signed by you.*