

# CPT PREPARATION: WRITING

*MCC offers a **Writing Center** at both the Bedford and Lowell campuses. Tutoring is available at no charge on weekdays and some evenings. Schedules are posted online at [www.middlesex.mass.edu/tutoringservices](http://www.middlesex.mass.edu/tutoringservices) and in the center. Drop in or make an appointment.*

***Bedford:** Library, 7/7A. Tel: 781-280-3727*

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*The **Writing Center** also offers free two-hour **Writing Refresher Workshops** on both campuses. Check the MCC website for the schedule.*

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## **Welcome and Introduction**

**Welcome** to Middlesex Community College! Whether you are entering directly from high-school or after being out of the academic world for some time, the required courses at Middlesex are an excellent opportunity for you to hone your abilities, experience an interactive college environment, learn critical skills, and, ultimately, earn college credit for your hard work. The Writing Placement Test you are about to take is designed to determine which English course is best suited for your current skills. There are four options for placement: English Fundamentals (ENG065), Basic Writing (ENG071), Composition I (ENG101), and Honors Composition (H-ENG101).

It is our goal to work with you to ensure that you are placed in an environment where you can thrive and succeed. In Composition I, you will earn college credit for your coursework immediately, so this should be your goal while reviewing for the placement test. Do the best you can to familiarize yourself with the set-up and expectations of the test: Your placement will be based on a composite of your reading and writing score.

If you are placed into English Fundamentals or Basic Writing, you will not earn college credit right away, but you will have the opportunity, while in these courses, to learn or refresh all the skills you need to transition successfully to Composition I and succeed in that class. A student can only pass Composition I by earning a C- or higher; therefore, placing someone into a course before he or she is ready would not benefit the student. This is why we are working as a team to place you where you belong and where you can best succeed long-term.

If you demonstrate a sophisticated level of writing and critical thinking, using a solid thesis statement and backing it up with clear topic sentences and examples throughout the essay, then your score may qualify you for the Honors Composition I, which would gain you entrance to the Honors Program and open up some exciting opportunities.

Please do not hesitate to ask us questions about any of these different options, and understand that we are working on your side to ensure that your placement reflects your skills, capabilities, and an eagerness on our part, as faculty, to ensure your success at Middlesex Community College and beyond. Again, welcome and good luck!

## How the Test Is Scored: Elements of a Good Essay

The Formula/Composite is  $3 \times$  the WritePlacer score +  $.4 \times$  CPT Reading Score. This results in your placement score, which will determine the course you will take. The placement cut offs are as follows:

A composite score of 48 and above will place you into ENG101 (Composition I); 60 and above will enable you to take Honors Composition I (as long as you earn a writing score of at least 7); lower than 48 will place you into ENG070 (Basic Writing).

The essay test you will take mimics the type of academic writing you are likely to experience as part of your college coursework; it will also draw on much of your own experience, so for this type of “test,” you already know the answers. The challenge comes with expressing them in the best way you know how. The essay is looking for 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 a generic issue. You will then write an essay in which you develop your own point of view on the issue. You should organize your answer in five clearly differentiated paragraphs organized around a main thesis statement. Support your position with appropriate reasoning and detailed examples. *The position you take will not influence your score.* Your essay will be given a comprehensive score based on the components below:

- ❖ **Purpose and Focus (Thesis):** The clarity with which you maintain your main idea. Address the issue clearly by restating the question in the first line, developing a strong thesis statement that can be illustrated three ways, and supporting it with examples throughout the essay.
- ❖ **Sentence Structure and Organization:** The clarity with which you structure your response and present a logical sequence of ideas. Connect your ideas in an orderly fashion throughout the essay with clear, reasonable transitions and a strong sense of introduction and conclusion. Be sure to break your essay into five paragraphs, including an introduction and a conclusion.
- ❖ **Development and Support:** The extent to which you elaborate upon your ideas and present supporting details. Use concrete details throughout the essay to support the topic sentences, which will provide the main idea of each paragraph. Length is a critical component of the essay, so aim to create a 550-word essay, but be sure to avoid repetitiveness.
- ❖ **Language and Vocabulary:** The extent to which you craft sentences and paragraphs, demonstrating control of vocabulary, voice, and structure. Use multisyllabic words and varied language rather than relying on redundancy or simple words. While you will be working on a computer, you will not have Spell

Check at your disposal, so proofread and do your best with spelling and grammar.

- ❖ **Grammar and Mechanical Conventions:** The extent to which your writing is free of errors in usage and mechanics. Focus on grammar and include quotations, semicolons, commas, and colons where appropriate. Avoid run-on sentences.
- ❖ **Critical Thinking:** The extent to which you communicate a point of view and demonstrate reasoned relationships among ideas. The thesis statement you have created will help keep you focused throughout the essay.

## **Instructions for the ACCUPLACER**

Instructions: Prepare a multiple-paragraph writing sample of about 300-700 words on the topic below. You should use the time available to plan, write, review and edit what you have written. Read the assignment carefully before you begin to write. You will write your essay on the computer, but you will be given pencil and paper to create and outline if you choose and/or to make any notes that might be helpful along the way.

Your writing sample will be scored on a scale of 1-8, with 8 being the highest, on the basis of how effectively it communicates a clear and comprehensive message to the readers in response to the stated purpose. Your score will be based on your ability to express, organize, and support your opinions and ideas, not the position you take on the topic. 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. Do not use inappropriate words, such as profanity or threats. You will receive your score immediately via computer print-out.

A prompt consists of a short passage adapted from some authentic text. Prompts within the ACCUPLACER System have been carefully designed so that students can respond quickly and in a variety of ways. Prompts are free of technical or specific literary references and do not 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.

Be sure to write about the topic you are given and use multiple paragraphs. You may not use any books, notes, or other reference materials during the test. Remember to review your writing and make any changes you think will improve what you have written.

*Note: To leave a blank line between paragraphs, press the Enter key. Do not use the Tab key.*

## Outline Worksheet

### **I. Introductory Paragraph**

- A. Four or five sentences that introduce the reader to the topic and how you will address it.
- B. **THESIS** statement, which directly answers the prompt/question, that appears as either the **first** or **last** sentence of the introduction.

### **II. Supporting Paragraph 1**

- A. Topic Sentence that tells the point of the paragraph
- B. Concrete Example
- C. Explanation of how the example supports the thesis

### **III. Supporting Paragraph 2**

- A. Topic Sentence that tells the point of the paragraph AND has a transition
- B. Concrete Example
- C. Explanation of how the example supports the thesis

### **IV. Supporting Paragraph 3**

- A. Topic Sentence that tells the point of the paragraph AND has a transition
- B. Concrete Example
- C. Explanation of how the example supports the thesis

### **V. Conclusion**

- A. Three or four sentences highlighting the main points of the essay
- B. One sentence that restates the thesis

## **Outline Worksheet**

*(Jot down your ideas for your essay in the space below.)*

### **I. Introductory Paragraph**

A.

**B. Proposed Thesis Statement** *(can appear at the beginning or end of the introductory paragraph):*

### **II. Supporting Paragraph I**

A.

B.

C.

### **III. Supporting Paragraph 2**

A.

B.

C.

### **IV. Supporting Paragraph 3**

A.

B.

C.

### **V. Conclusion**

A.

B.



## **Top Six Tips for Writing a Successful Essay for the CPT Test**

1. **Write a clear thesis statement that can be proven three ways.**

In response to a question that asks what students need to succeed in school, you could write:

***Students who work hard, complete all assignments, and revise their work are likely to succeed in school.***

Or,

***Students who take their school work seriously are likely to succeed in school.***

Body paragraph 1 is about students who work hard.

Body paragraph 2 is about students to complete all assignments.

Body paragraph 3 is about students who revise their work.

2. **Re-state the question as a statement that takes a position in the first line of your essay.**

If the question asks what students need to succeed in school, you can begin your essay as follows: ***Students who work hard, complete all assignments, and revise their work are likely to succeed in school.***

3. **Write a 5-paragraph essay that is at least 550 words.** (You have one hour to complete the exam, so keep writing and editing – avoiding redundancy - until you reach 5 solid paragraphs: introduction, body paragraph 1, body paragraph 2, body paragraph 3, conclusion.)

4. **Use strong vocabulary.** Make sure you have several words that are at least three syllables and be aware of your spelling and word-usage.

5. **Use concrete examples that draw from history, literature, current events, and your own life.** Prior to taking the test, think of and jot down important figures from history about which you've learned, books you've read, key events in the news, and memorable events in your life; all of these can be creatively adapted to almost any writing prompt.

6. **Proofread your work.** You are allowed to edit your essay, so please take the time to read over your work and revise your final version. You will be given scrap paper so you can jot down an outline or notes to keep you on track.

~ **Relax, stay focused and remember one hour is more than enough time to write a good essay!** ~

**GOOD LUCK!**

## Sample Essays with Scorers' Commentary

### Sample Question #1

#### 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 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?*

### Sample Essay #1 – Score of 2

I live in a house that every body in it came from acting. I remember my mom telling me this it you infind your self bad situation, don't forget your smile with "you". I think she ment that what ever is thedifficulty think always positive. For an example, I grow up in place that full with bad poeple and onetime some body try to convinse me to smoke. And smoking it very bad thing. So I started to telljoukes on people that canser and after 2 minutes I change the subject. Or that every time I am gettingsick and fill not so good. I am trying to see comedy movies as much as I can. Because I have been toldthat comedy is the best cure. I think that as an actor on the stage you need to be always ready forsomething rong, and if you ready and prepard. It will be good and life for your self in you all life andnot only there. This experience importent for your benfits, always a positive person and people willlove you and get along with you. This mark it the best.

#### Scorers' Commentary

- This essay is not clearly written.
- The sentences are confusing.
- Words are misspelled and used improperly.
- The thesis statement is unclear.
- The essay is only one big paragraph instead of 5 paragraphs.
- The essay needs the following:
  - a clear introductory paragraph;
  - strong supporting paragraphs with topic sentences with transitions and concrete details; and
  - a solid conclusion.
- This essay falls short in every category and receives a score of 2.

### Sample Essay #2 – Score of 4

I think that most of life's obstacles or disadvantages can be turned into something good. The way you look at situations determines the outcome of a situation because if you look at the situation negatively you don't have any hope that the outcome would be positive; but if you look at the situation positively you would have a better chance at being successful at what you do. The writer in the passage saw the chair in his way as

an obstruction to his performance but the producer had a broader perspective saying that he could use the chair according to what the genre of the play was. For bad things to work out we need to stop being so narrow minded and broaden our perspective on life. If you committed a crime and got caught don't just concentrate on the bad that happened in your life, use that experience to share with others showing them the hardship that goes with that type of lifestyle discouraging them not to do it. The outcome of a situation is determined by how you look at it.

### **Scorers' Commentary**

- The thesis statement is clear.
- The essay is only one big paragraph instead of 5 paragraphs.
- The essay needs the following:
  - a clear introductory paragraph;
  - strong supporting paragraphs with topic sentences with transitions and concrete details; and
  - a solid conclusion.
- This essay is on the right track, but there is not enough concrete evidence to support the student's point.
- Overall, the essay has a few strengths but misses key marks and earns a score of a 4.

### **Sample Essay #3 – Score of 6**

Obstacles and disadvantages are in our lives every second of the day. Whether it is a big test in school in an important subject or a traffic jam keeping us from getting to work on time, we can always count on something going a wry. However, even the biggest obstacles can be turned into something good if enough work is put into it.

Small obstacles, like the big test in school, can be overcome with hard work and determination. If you spend enough time studying beforehand, and doing practice questions to build your confidence, chances are you will do very well. On the other hand, if you procrastinate and do not prepare for the test until the night before it, chances are you will do poorly.

Large obstacles can be overcome with hard work and determination as well, but depending on the size of the obstacle, carefully planning, organization, and coordination are needed as well. For example, in World War II the Allied powers were fighting the Axis powers in battle after battle. The Allies needed to get into Western Europe through France and through a heavily fortified enemy. With careful planning, organization, and coordination, they launched the largest amphibious invasion in history and took the beaches of Normandy in what would be called D-day, and liberate France soon thereafter.

In conclusion, any obstacle can be overcome into something good. Tests can be studied for, traffic jams can be overtaken by detours, and wars can be won against impossible odds. Since obstacles confront us everyday of our lives, we need to be able

to overcome them. If we could not, then life would not be enjoyable.

### Scorers' Commentary

- The thesis statement is clear.
- The essay is 4 paragraphs (5 would be better).
- The essay has the following:
  - a clear introductory paragraph;
  - solid supporting paragraphs with topic sentences and concrete details; and
  - a solid conclusion.
- The essay includes a few typos/grammar errors.
- The essay does *not* include transitions between paragraphs.
- Overall, the essay is pretty strong and receives a score of 6.

### Sample Essay #4: Score of 8

In times of desperation, it is often difficult to see the positives in a situation. More often than not, our survival instinct demands that we obliterate any obstacles in our path, without heeding the potential consequences. However, using examples from Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and early American history one can see it is indeed possible to use these apparent disadvantages as a means to improve yourself.

The hero of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff, was by any account, a man of humble origins. Not only was he an orphan without a last name, but he was also abused and tormented by other children in his new household. Constantly frustrated at every turn in life, Heathcliff as a boy could not marry Catherine, whom he loved, partially because of his lowly social status. After Catherine left to marry her new husband, Heathcliff undertook a journey in which he amasses a good deal of money and seemingly elevates his place in society.

Although these changes are superficial, Heathcliff used the adversity facing him as a boy as motivation to improve himself, to marry Catherine; thus his early obstacles were turned into something good (at least for him). From Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, it is evident that obstacles can be transformed into motivation, a very positive emotion.

In the early 1770s, America was under the rule of a tyrant in England. Legislation, such as those that were called the "Intolerable Acts" that forbid such practices as forming a militia in Massachusetts, and the infamous "Stamp Act," which was essentially a tax forced on Americans to gain revenue for the British Empire, was passed continuously against Great Britain's colonies in America. The Quartering Act forced Americans to allow British soldiers to live in their homes, which resulted in many fights and the situation was not good. However, the early American political leaders used these dire times to rally the American people.

The country, incensed by British practices, joined those rebellious leaders, such as

Patrick Henry, George Washington, and John Adams, to fight in the Revolutionary War against a corrupt monarchy. If the American people had not suffered through these indignities leading up to the Revolutionary War, the United States of America probably would not exist today.

Clearly, when one is faced by obstacles at every turn, it is extremely difficult to try to twist negative experiences into positive ones. However, if one takes the model shown by Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights* and America's early political leaders, one can use these bad experiences to significantly change one's life for the better.

### **Scorers' Commentary**

- The thesis statement is clear and effective.
- The essay is 6 paragraphs (paragraphs 1, 3 and 5 could be expanded).
- The essay has the following:
  - a clear introductory paragraph (but it is too brief);
  - solid supporting paragraphs with topic sentences and strong concrete details; and
  - a solid conclusion.
- The essay includes very few typos/grammar errors.
- The essay includes a few transitions. Paragraphs 4 and 5 need stronger transitions but are otherwise well executed.
- The essay demonstrates sharp critical thinking skills.
- Overall, the essay fulfills the majority of criteria and receives a score of 8.

# Appendix: Tip Sheets

## A. Writing a Thesis Statement

Diana Hacker, English language expert and author of *A Writer's Reference* stylebooks, explains that, “For most writing tasks, your introduction will be a paragraph of 50 to 150 words. Perhaps the most common strategy is to open the paragraph with a few sentences that engage the reader and to conclude it with a statement of the essay’s main point. **The sentence stating the main point is called the thesis**” (13).

Here are some basic suggestions to consider when creating your thesis statement:

1. Narrow your topic to a single main idea.
2. Choose a statement that can be supported by details, facts and examples.
3. Assert your position clearly and firmly.
  - a. Make a claim about your topic.
4. Use accurate language.
  - a. Avoid vague references.
  - b. Make a point.
5. Tailor your thesis to fit the assignment guidelines.

*Hints:* Ask yourself the following questions, and use the answers to refine your thesis.

- Do I know enough about my topic?
- Why is this topic of interest to me?
- What do my readers need to know about the topic?
- Is my idea for a thesis too broad, or too narrow?
- Does my idea for a thesis apply directly to my assignment?

If you are still unsatisfied with your thesis, try to begin your preliminary writing. Often, a more suitable idea will present itself after you attempt to develop a rudimentary draft.

\*Consider the examples listed below. Note the clarity of language, lack of excess wording, and strength of expression in each statement.

The information below can be found in *Keys for Writers: A Brief Handbook*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, by Anne Raimes, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002.

**A good thesis may be one or more of the following:**

1. *a strong, thought-provoking, or controversial statement*

Bilingual education has not fulfilled its early promise.

2. *a call to action*

All inner-city schools should set up bilingual programs.

3. *a question that will be answered in detail in the essay*

What can bilingual education accomplish for a child? It can lead to academic and personal development.

4. *a preview or reflection of the structure of the essay*

Bilingual education suffers from two main problems: a shortage of trained teachers and a lack of parental involvement.

## B. Using Transitional Words and Devices

Transitional words and phrases tie the ideas of a composition together. Transition words and sentences develop a relationship between ideas and help thoughts flow smoothly, making the reader feel that the ideas are connected rather than isolated. Transition words make reference both to the preceding idea and the idea that follows.

The following are ten of the most frequently used, effective transition words and phrases:

1. First
2. Second
3. Third
4. On the other hand
5. However
6. Another
7. Conversely
8. As a result of
9. In conclusion
10. Also