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English as a Second Language (ESL) Tests

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ACCUPLACER English as a Second Language (ESL) Tests

Overview

The ACCUPLACER English as a Second Language (ESL) Tests were developed as a response to an expressed need for an assessment measuring the skills of English language learners (ELLs) whose language skills might not allow them to achieve meaningful and actionable scores on the college placement ACCUPLACER tests. The primary purpose of the ACCUPLACER ESL Tests is to support the placement of ELLs into English language courses so that they may receive appropriate and targeted levels of instruction. Courses into which students could be placed on the basis of ESL performance include ESL and developmental courses in reading, language arts, and English.

ACCUPLACER ESL Tests include Reading Skills, Sentence Meaning, Language Use, Listening, and WritePlacer® ESL. With the exception of WritePlacer ESL, which is an essay test, all ACCUPLACER ESL Tests are computer-adaptive, 20-question multiple-choice tests. (Their corresponding linear, accommodated COMPANION™ tests have 35 questions each. COMPANION tests are available in the form of regular, large print, and brailled booklets; audio CDs are also available.)

Students who have taken a multiple-choice ESL test receive a test score along with a set of proficiency statements describing what they likely know and are able to do in relation to the knowledge and skills assessed on each test. These statements are intended to help students, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders understand what a given ESL test score means.

This document describes the multiple-choice ESL Tests listed below and presents their corresponding proficiency statements:

- [ESL Reading Skills](#)
- [ESL Sentence Meaning](#)
- [ESL Language Use](#)
- [ESL Listening](#)

The guide to WritePlacer ESL (the ESL Essay Test) is available at collegeboard.org.

ESL Reading Skills Test

Test Description

The ESL Reading Skills Test is a computer-adaptive assessment of test takers' developed ability to read and comprehend explicitly stated information as well as infer information not directly stated in a passage. The test is made up of 20 questions and is intended to collect evidence in support of the following claim about student performance:

ELLs can demonstrate their developed ability to read and comprehend appropriately challenging short passages and narratives in a variety of content areas by referring to what the texts say explicitly and drawing reasonable inferences from the passages to compensate for gaps in their lexical and structural control of the language.

Passages on the test cover a range of contexts: science, history/social science, arts/humanities, narratives, psychology/human relations, and practical situations (the last typically dealing with familiar, everyday contexts). Shorter passages are 50 or fewer words and moderate-length passages range from 51 to 90 words. Approximately half the questions on the test assess explicitly stated information, and the remaining questions measure test takers' developed ability to infer information not directly stated in a passage. Questions are multiple-choice in format and are either discrete (stand-alone) or part of sets built around a common passage. Specific knowledge and skills assessed on this test are:

- Literal comprehension
 - Paraphrasing
 - Locating information
 - Vocabulary on a phrase level
 - Pronoun reference
- Inference
 - Main idea
 - Fact versus opinion
 - Cause and effect logic
 - Identifying irrelevant information
 - Identifying author's point of view
 - Applying author's logic to another situation

Quick facts

- The computer-adaptive ESL Reading Skills Test has 20 questions.
- Two COMPANION tests (linear, accommodated) are available.
- Each COMPANION test has 35 questions.
- All questions are multiple choice.
- Questions may be discrete or set-based.
- A single ESL Reading Skills Test score, ranging from 20 to 120, is reported.

The following tables provide a synopsis of key content dimensions of the ESL Reading Skills Test.

Table 1: ESL Reading Skills Test Content Specifications

	Number of Questions	Percentage of Test
Skills assessed		
Literal Comprehension	6–14	30–70
Inference	6–14	30–70
Passages support either one or two questions		
One-question passage	6–6	30–30
Two-question passage	7–7	35–35
Content areas		
Science	2–5	10–25
History/Social Science	2–5	10–25
Arts/Humanities	2–5	10–25
Narratives	2–5	10–25
Psychology/Human Relations	2–5	10–25
Practical Situations	2–5	10–25
TOTAL	20	100

Table 2: ESL Reading Skills Test Question Content

Content Dimension	Description
Literal Comprehension	
	These are straightforward comprehension questions that assess a test taker’s developed ability to comprehend a text and include questions requiring the test taker to identify and locate explicitly stated information and understand paraphrased information. Some literal comprehension questions test understanding of pronoun references.
Inference	
	Inference questions assess test takers’ ability to make reasonable inferences. These include questions that ask test takers to read passages closely and identify main ideas, distinguish facts from opinions, determine cause-effect relationships, and infer the author’s purpose, tone, and point of view. Some inference questions may ask test takers to determine the meanings of words and phrases from the contexts in which they are used.

Proficiency Statements

Scaled score of about 57

Test takers at this level demonstrate the following skills and can:

- Locate information in a passage by answering literal comprehension questions on even the longest passages if the question posed and the answer to that question are in the same sentence or in close proximity to one another
- Answer questions in which the wording in the answer is very similar to the wording in the passage or uses minimal paraphrasing
- Answer some questions requiring small inferences (including questions asking for the main idea of the passage) if the options don't require new distinctions
- Answer questions based on maps and charts

Scaled score of about 82

Test takers at this level demonstrate the following additional skills and can:

- Answer questions that require drawing conclusions on the basis of the information presented in the passage or making inferences from the information presented
- Recognize the main idea of a passage even when presented with wrong answer choices mentioned in the passage as supporting information

Scaled score of about 102

Test takers at this level can demonstrate the following additional skills and can:

- Answer questions that require dealing with a passage as a whole or manipulating the information presented in the passage
- Make generalizations on the basis of the information in the passage, recognize what was implied, and answer questions about the author's tone and purpose

ESL Sentence Meaning Test

Test Description

The ESL Sentence Meaning Test is a computer-adaptive assessment of test takers’ developed ability to read and comprehend words and phrases in one- or two-sentence contexts. The test is made up of 20 questions and is intended to collect evidence in support of the following claim about student performance:

ELLs can demonstrate their developed ability to read and comprehend sentences written in a variety of structures on a variety of topics, compensating for gaps in their lexical and structural control of the language by using contextual clues.

Sentences selected for use as stimuli are drawn from the content areas of science, history/social studies, arts/humanities, psychology/human relations, and practical situations (the last typically dealing with familiar, everyday contexts). Some questions ask test takers to render a sentence meaningful or grammatically correct by selecting a word or phrase from given options to fill in a blank. Other questions present a short text made up of one or two sentences and may test students’ developed ability to understand the gist or a detail presented in the sentence. All questions are multiple-choice in format and appear discretely (stand-alone) across the assessment. Four content areas are measured on the Sentence Meaning Test:

- Particles, phrasal verbs, and prepositions
- Adverbs, adjectives, connectives, and sequences
- Basic nouns and verbs
- Common idioms

The following tables provide a synopsis of key content dimensions of the ESL Sentence Meaning Test.

Table 3: ESL Sentence Meaning Test Content Specifications

	Number of Questions	Percentage of Test
Question types		
Fill in the blank	7–13	35–65
4-option multiple-choice	7–13	35–65
Content assessed		
Particles, phrasal verbs, and prepositions	2–6	10–30
Adverbs, adjectives, connectives, and sequences	3–8	15–40
Basic nouns and verbs	8–13	40–65
Common idioms	1–3	5–15
TOTAL	20	100

Quick facts

- The computer-adaptive ESL Sentence Meaning Test has 20 questions.
- Two COMPANION tests (linear, accommodated) are available.
- Each COMPANION test has 35 questions.
- All questions are multiple choice and discrete.
- A single ESL Sentence Meaning Test score, ranging from 20 to 120, is reported.

Table 4: ESL Sentence Meaning Test Question Content

Content Dimension	Description
Fill in the blank	
These questions ask test takers to render a sentence meaningful or grammatically correct by selecting a word or phrase from given options to fill in a blank. Such questions may require test takers to demonstrate an understanding of word order, word meaning, parts of speech, precedents and antecedents, and relationships (e.g., compare and contrast, cause and effect, sequencing, time frame, and chronology of events).	
4-option multiple-choice	
These questions present a short text made up of one or two sentences and may test students' developed ability to understand the gist or a detail presented in the sentence. Such questions may also ask test takers to show they are able to identify paraphrased information.	

Proficiency Statements

Scaled score of about 61

Test takers at this level demonstrate the following skills and can:

- Handle sentences with simple structures characterized by everyday subjects and simple vocabulary, including common nouns, adjectives, and verbs
- Select the appropriate vocabulary in sentences that provide multiple contextual clues

Scaled score of about 88

Test takers at this level demonstrate the following additional skills and can:

- Handle vocabulary in sentences that have compound or complex structures or present more complex situations than the sentences at the level above
- Handle the following kinds of vocabulary:
 - Two-word verbs
 - Adverbs of comparison
 - More extended idiomatic expressions
 - Longer descriptions
- Select appropriate vocabulary in sentences that provide a single contextual clue

Scaled score of about 106

Test takers at this level demonstrate the following additional skills and can:

- Handle vocabulary in sentences with complex structures that are characterized by abstract statements or idiomatic expressions
- Demonstrate knowledge of idioms that are two-word verbs or the use of idioms to express the appropriate meaning
- Deduce the appropriate vocabulary from an entire sentence rather than from specific contextual clues, often in situations where grammar and vocabulary intersect

ESL Language Use Test

Test Description

The ESL Language Use Test is a computer-adaptive assessment of test takers’ developed ability to identify and apply learned conventions of standard written English. The test is made up of 20 questions and is intended to collect evidence in support of the following claim about student performance:

ELLs can demonstrate their developed ability to identify and apply learned conventions of standard written English grammar, usage, and punctuation to a range of English sentence structures on a variety of topics.

Questions on the test are presented in two formats: filling in the blank with a word or phrase, and choosing a sentence that best combines two discrete sentences. All questions are multiple-choice in format and appear discretely (stand-alone) across the assessment. Specific grammatical conventions assessed are:

- Nouns, pronouns, and pronoun case structure
- Sentence structure, including prepositions, parallelism, and sentence fragments/run-ons
- Subject-verb agreement
- Adjectives/adverbs, including modifiers and comparatives
- Verbs, including verb tenses and regular and irregular verb forms
- Subordination/coordination

Quick facts

- The computer-adaptive ESL Language Use Test has 20 questions.
- Two COMPANION tests (linear, accommodated) are available.
- Each COMPANION test has 35 questions.
- All questions are multiple choice and discrete.
- A single ESL Language Use Test score, ranging from 20 to 120, is reported.

The following tables provide a synopsis of key content dimensions of the ESL Language Use Test.

Table 5: ESL Language Use Test Content Specifications

	Number of Questions	Percentage of Test
Question types		
Fill in the blank	10–10	50–50
Sentence combining	10–10	50–50
Content assessed		
Nouns, pronouns, pronoun case structure	2–3	10–15
Sentence structure	4–5	20–25
Subject-verb agreement	2–2	10–10
Adjectives/adverbs	2–3	10–15
Verbs	4–4	20–20
Subordination/coordination	3–4	15–20
TOTAL	20	100

Table 6: ESL Language Use Test Question Content

Content Dimension	Description
Fill in the blank	
These questions require test takers to make a sentence grammatically correct by filling in a blank with a word or phrase from the choices provided.	
Sentence combining	
These questions present test takers with two sentences and ask them to select from the choices presented the sentence that best combines them while maintaining the meaning and intent of the two discrete sentences.	

Proficiency Statements

Scaled score of about 55

Test takers scoring at this level can choose correct grammatical forms when they are controlled by the basic rules of grammar. For example, in simple sentences, they can recognize basic grammatical structures such as subject-verb agreement, pronoun case and form, noun forms (including recognizing subject, case, and number), and verb forms. They can handle questions involving word order, prepositional phrases, and simple clauses.

Scaled score of about 82

Test takers scoring at this level can handle a variety of complex structures such as comparatives at the phrase level such as “so tall that,” relative clauses, structures at the clause level such as “not only ... but also,” simple subordination, and function at the whole-sentence level.

Scaled score of about 100

Test takers scoring at this level demonstrate the following additional skills and can:

- Recognize irregular verb forms such as “draw/drawn,” fairly unusual idioms such as “couldn’t get over it,” and indirect object structures such as “gave her one”
- Handle questions involving transformations of declarative sentences into questions, the conditional, and mood parallelism
- Choose appropriate structures to state complex ideas, often in complex sentences using subordination or coordination

ESL Listening Test

Test Description

The ESL Listening Test is a computer-adaptive assessment of test takers' developed ability to listen to a series of connected discourses, including lectures and conversations involving multiple speakers, and answer questions that assess comprehension of the information and ideas conveyed. The test is made up of 20 questions and is intended to collect evidence in support of the following claim about student performance:

ELLs can demonstrate their developed ability to understand ideas and information presented in connected discourse on a variety of topics, compensating for gaps in their lexical and structural control of the language by using contextual clues.

Listening passages on the test cover a range of contexts, including lectures and conversations that take place in academic environments, such as locations on a school or campus (e.g., a computer lab or library), and may reference academic content students are expected to encounter in college. Conversations may include exchanges among students or between a student and a professor or college administrator. Such exchanges typically reflect language that college students can expect to hear either on campus or in social interactions, such as common idioms and appropriate tone and register. Other conversations may reflect those that occur in everyday environments, such as interactions that may happen at a restaurant, a doctor's office, at work, or at social events. Less challenging listening segments typically contain familiar contexts and structures, high-frequency words and phrases, and clear underlying organization. More challenging ones tend to be longer; focus on more complex discourse on less familiar topics and situations using less familiar vocabulary; and use a wider and less predictable range of grammatical, syntactic, and organizational structures.

As a direct measure of listening skills, the test presents test takers with pictures of the speakers and then plays a conversation or lecture. Test takers then hear questions related to the lecture or conversation and are asked to select the best answer from four options. Questions are multiple-choice in format and are discrete (stand-alone). Specific listening knowledge and skills assessed on this test are:

- Literal Comprehension
 - Identifying the main subject of a conversation or lecture
 - Identifying details and explicitly stated information
 - Understanding instructions
- Implied Meaning
 - Understanding relationships between ideas (e.g., cause and effect, compare and contrast)
 - Identifying speakers' purpose, tone, and point of view
 - Making reasonable inferences and predictions based on information heard

Quick facts

- The computer-adaptive ESL Listening Test has 20 questions.
- As a direct measure of listening skills, the ESL Listening Test does not have corresponding COMPANION forms.
- All questions are multiple choice and discrete.
- A single ESL Listening Test score, ranging from 20 to 120, is reported.

The following tables provide a synopsis of key content dimensions of the ESL Listening Test.

Table 7: ESL Listening Test Content Specifications

	Number of Questions	Percentage of Test
Skills assessed		
Literal Comprehension	8–12	40–60
Implied Information	8–12	40–60
Passage types		
Conversation	14–16	70–80
Lecture	4–6	20–30
TOTAL	20	100

Table 8: ESL Listening Test Question Content

Content Dimension	Description
Literal Comprehension	
	These questions focus on core listening skills ELLs need for access to and success in college-level courses, including skills that aid understanding of information that is expressed explicitly.
Implied Meaning	
	These questions focus on listening skills ELLs need to make reasonable inferences, including those that aid in identifying implied information (e.g., main idea, speaker’s purpose and point of view) in utterances and spoken discourse on a range of topics in both academic and social contexts.

Proficiency Statements

Scaled score of about 50

Test takers at this level may show reasonable proficiency in literal comprehension but are likely to encounter difficulty following instructions and may find it difficult to draw inferences. Although they may show proficiency in understanding common everyday situations and simple academic situations, they are likely to have difficulty comprehending more complex life situations and many academic situations. At this level, they have a relatively small vocabulary of basic words.

Scaled score of about 70

Test takers at this level typically are skilled in literal comprehension and can make the more direct inferences but may lack the ability to make more complex inferences and to follow instructions. Although they may show proficiency in understanding most everyday situations and common academic situations, they may have difficulty comprehending more complex academic situations, including lectures. At this level, they have a working vocabulary to handle many everyday situations but will have difficulty with more complex or infrequently used words.

Scaled score of about 90 or higher

Test takers at this level are able to comprehend both literal and inferential meaning of spoken material. They typically show proficiency in understanding everyday situations and all types of academic situations. At this level, they can understand a large number of words and can handle more complex vocabulary.