Tips for Taking COMPASS® Tests

1. Relax! The COMPASS tests are designed to help you succeed in school. Your scores help you determine which courses are most appropriate for your current level of knowledge and skills. Once you identify your academic strengths and weaknesses, you can get the help you need to improve underdeveloped skills before they interfere with your learning.

2. You will be able to concentrate better on the test if you get plenty of rest and eat properly before the test. You should also arrive a few minutes early so you can find the testing area, bathrooms, etc., and have time to gather your thoughts before the test begins.

3. Be sure you understand the directions for each test before that test session begins. Ask questions if you need to.

4. Read each question carefully until you understand what the question is asking. If answering an item requires several steps, be sure you consider them all.

5. Be sure to answer every item. You are not penalized for guessing. Your score will provide more useful placement information if you answer every item, even if you guess.

6. Don't be afraid to change an answer if you believe that your first choice was wrong.

7. If you have a problem or question during the test, raise your hand and the test administrator or proctor will help you. Although they cannot answer test questions for you, they can help you with other types of problems.

Tips for Taking the Writing Essay Test (e-Write)

Pace yourself

The standard e-Write test setting gives you 60 minutes to read and think about the issue in the prompt and to plan and write your essay. You should plan your writing time accordingly.

When asked to write an essay, most writers find it useful to do some planning before they start writing, and to do a final check of the essay when it is finished. It is unlikely that you will have time to draft and fully revise your essay. Therefore, taking a few minutes to plan your essay or make an outline before you begin writing is a good strategy.

Plan before you write

Some writers like to plunge right in, but this is seldom a good way to do well on an essay writing task. Planning and prewriting gets you thinking about the issue, suggests patterns for presenting your thoughts, and allows you to come up with ideas for introducing and concluding your essay. Before writing, carefully read the prompt and make sure you understand it—reread it if you aren't sure. Decide how you want to answer the question in the prompt.

If you choose to do some prewriting, you may use scratch paper provided by the Testing Center to organize your thoughts. This prewriting might simply be a list of ideas, reasons, and examples that you will use to explain your point of view. Write down what you think others might say in opposition to your point of view and think about how you would respond to their arguments. Think of how best to organize the ideas you are going to present in your essay. You can refer back to these notes as you write the essay on the computer. Budget your time - You must be finished planning and writing in the 60-minute time limit.

Please note that because COMPASS e-Write is a secure test, testing center staff will need to collect any notes you've made after you have completed testing.
Write

Once you're ready to write your essay on the computer, proceed with the confidence that you have planned your writing. At the beginning of your essay, make sure readers see that you understand the issue. Explain your point of view in a clear and logical way. If possible, discuss the issue in a broader context. Address what others might say to refute your point of view and present a counterargument. Use specific examples. Vary the structure of your sentences, and use varied and precise word choices. Make logical relationships clear by using transitional words and phrases. Do not wander off the topic. End with a strong conclusion that summarizes or reinforces your position.

Your essay will be evaluated according to how well you:

- Formulate a clear and focused position on the issue defined in the prompt
- Support that position with reasons and evidence appropriate to the position taken and the concerns of the reader/audience
- Develop the argument in a coherent and logical manner
- Express ideas using clear, effective language

Students often ask whether it is a good idea to organize the essay by using a formula, like "the five-paragraph essay." Points are neither awarded nor deducted for following familiar formulas, so feel free to use one or not as you prefer. Some writers find formulas too limiting, while other writers find them to be useful.

At the end of the writing prompt, there is a suggestion that you write a multi-paragraph response of about 300–600 words. It's important to note that this suggestion is included to encourage you to write a fully formed response, rather than simply writing one or two sentences. However, the exact numbers of words and paragraphs in your essay are less important than the clarity and development of your ideas. Writers who have something to say usually find that their ideas have a way of sorting themselves out at a reasonable length and in the right number of paragraphs.

As you write, remember that you have been asked to write a letter to a specific person or group who is looking for feedback regarding a specific issue. Your response is being written to persuade a person or group, so it's important that your essay be focused on your readers and their concerns. Begin your letter with an introduction; end your letter with a conclusion that summarizes the points you've made. Make sure that the audience understands your position at both the beginning and the end of your essay.

Review your essay

Take a few minutes before submitting your essay to read it over. Correct any mistakes in grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling. Within the 60-minute time available, try to make your essay as clear, as focused, and as polished as you can.

Helpful Websites for Practice Tests and More Information

http://www.act.org/compass/sample/index.html

http://www.compass-tst-practice.com

https://web.gsc.edu/fs/mhorton/L_Senglish/compasspractice/passage1/compass1.html

http://www.highlands.edu/wcotter/COMPASS/math_practice.htm