WRITEPLACER TESTING TIPS

The following suggestions will let you know what to expect during the Writeplacer, a computer-scored placement test that measures your writing skills. While the Writeplacer is usually given as the last part of the Accuplacer, if you are re-testing to improve your score, you may be taking only the Writeplacer. To prepare to retake the test, use the Writeplacer packets available on the NICC website or in the testing center. If it is your 3rd time taking the test, you will need to get approval from the Peosta campus provost after practicing your essay writing skills with a faculty member from the learning center.

During the Writeplacer, you will have 60 minutes to write an essay that will be given a score from 0 to 8. The essay should be 4-5 paragraphs long, with an introduction and a conclusion. Your score will be used to place you in the appropriate writing class. A score of 6 or higher is needed to be eligible to take college-level Composition I, while a score of 4-5 will qualify you for Foundations of Writing.

QUESTIONS BEFORE THE TEST

Before starting the test, you will be asked to enter basic information, such as your name, social security number, and address. You will also be asked for the testing location, your program of study, the campus you will attend, whether you plan to apply for financial aid, and how you prepared for the test. When you click the submit button, you will be asked, "Are you sure you would like to continue?" Click OK to continue. Your answers to these informative questions will not affect your score.

VISUAL ACCESSIBILITY

When you get to the test, if the text on the computer screen is too small to read, you may click on the **magnifying glass** button on the bottom left of the screen to adjust font size and line spacing. Since changing visual accessibility options will not change the size of the text box where you will type your essay, you may also need to zoom in or out. You can zoom by holding <Ctrl> while using the scroll wheel on the mouse until the text is at a comfortable size for you.

PARTS OF THE TEST

Before starting the test, you may click on a link to a short **tutorial** on "How to take an essay test." The tutorial will open in a new window. It will briefly explain how the essay is scored, and will also identify the parts of the Writeplacer. Pay attention to the location of the **writing prompt**. This is the question you will respond to when you write your essay.

Look for the digital **timer** in the upper right corner of the text box where you will type your essay. It will show how many minutes have passed since you started the test. You are allowed up to 60 minutes for the Writeplacer, although you do not have to take the whole time if you finish before then.

Look for the **word count** button in the lower left of the screen. While you are taking the test, you may click on the word count button at any time to see how many words you have written. Your goal is to write 600 words, with a minimum of 300 words for an acceptable essay. Be sure to allow 5-10 minutes at the end of your testing time to proofread and correct errors.

RESPONDING TO THE WRITING PROMPT

After receiving the writing prompt, you are allowed to take around 10 minutes of preparation time. Use this time to make notes on scratch paper, using a pen or pencil to make a list or outline of ideas for your essay. The 60-minute timer will start when you click inside the text box, so be careful to not click inside the box until you are actually ready to start writing.

Read through the writing prompt several times so that you are perfectly clear about the question you should be answering. While the short quotation before the question is meant to get your creativity flowing and give you something to think about, the actual writing prompt will be asked as a question. It is a good strategy to go back to re-read the question as many times as needed while you are writing in order to keep the essay on topic.

The first decision to make after you read the writing prompt is which position to take in your response. Remember that there is no one right answer, and taking one side or another of an argument will not affect your test score. Because you will be scored only on your writing, not on whether your answer is right or wrong, take whatever side is easiest for you to come up with examples that support your position.

WRITING STRATEGIES

Look for key words in the prompt or in the starting quotation to echo in the thesis statement and in the topic sentences of your essay. For instance, if the writing prompt asks, "Can any obstacle or disadvantage be turned into something good?" you may wish to use the word "obstacle" or the word "disadvantage" in your thesis statement or topic sentences. You may also use synonyms, such as "problem," "difficulty," "hurdle," or "drawback." It is also a good idea to echo these key words in the concluding paragraph.

However, do not repeat a complete phrase or sentence from the prompt word-for-word, but use your own words. Because the Writeplacer is computer scored, it is also a good strategy to use transitional words at the start of each paragraph. Use a comma after a transitional phrase that starts a sentence, such as "For example**,** my experience with…" or "Finally**,** I believe that…." Review the guidelines on comma placement in the Writeplacer review packets.

When you write the essay, press *Enter* twice to move to a new paragraph. This will create a blank line to separate paragraphs. Do *not* use the Tab key to indent. Use a single space between words and sentences. Remember that the Writeplacer does not have a built-in spelling or grammar checker, so write your essay with words that you are comfortable spelling, and allow a few minutes at the end of your testing time to check for errors.

AFTER THE TEST

After you finish with the Writeplacer and submit your essay, your Individual Score Report will be available immediately. It will contain a numeric score and how it corresponds to placement in NICC coursework. You will not be allowed to have a copy of your essay, and the testing proctor will ask you to turn in any scratch paper. Remember that the Writeplacer is not a test that you can fail. It is a tool that gives a picture of your writing skills at the moment, allowing you to be placed in the class that most closely matches your skills.