



UExcel[®] College Writing

The UExcel examination in College Writing corresponds to an introductory, one-semester course in college writing. It measures the ability to persuade a reader to pursue a specified course of action, using personal knowledge and experience to support a proposal, and to analyze and respond appropriately to written texts that represent opposing viewpoints, using the Modern Language Association (MLA) style of citation. In general, the examination measures the ability to organize knowledge, ideas, and information; to adopt rhetorical strategies such as narration, illustration, explanation, and description in appropriate ways; to adopt and maintain a tone and point of view appropriate for a specified audience and rhetorical situation; to develop and maintain a controlling idea and a coherent organization; and to write within the rhetorical, syntactic, and mechanical conventions of Standard Written American English.

To Register for UExcel Exams:

Go to www.uexceltest.com. Follow the simple online instructions to register.

You may also register for a test by calling a Pearson VUE call center:

888.224.6383 (in the Americas)

6038319.1085 (in the Asia Pacific Region)

44.161.855.7455 (in Europe, Middle East, and Africa)

For more information on UExcel exams, please visit www.uexceltest.com. The Web site is your one-stop source for information about the UExcel program and includes:

- Free content guides like this one for all UExcel exams (www.uexceltest.com/exams)
- A registration guide with information on policies, procedures, and how to register for an exam (www.uexceltest.com/register)
- Learning resources, including access to textbooks, practice exams, and other preparation materials (www.uexceltest.com/resources)
- Information about how to have a UExcel transcript sent from Excelsior College to the school/university of your choice (www.uexceltest.com/credit)

Learning Outcomes

After you have successfully worked your way through the recommended study materials, you should be able to:

- develop and organize knowledge, ideas, and information in support of a thesis or proposition
- recognize rhetorical strategies and modes (narration, description, and persuasion) and use them in appropriate ways
- establish and maintain a tone and a point of view appropriate for a specific audience and rhetorical situation
- write within the rhetorical, syntactical, and mechanical conventions of standard written American English
- propose a solution to a problem and argue effectively for that solution
- summarize, analyze, and respond to arguments that take opposing positions on a controversial issue

Uses for the Examination

Excelsior College and Pearson VUE, the test developers, recommend granting four (4) semester hours of lower-level undergraduate credit to students who receive a letter grade of C or higher on this examination. The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT) has evaluated and made college credit recommendations for UExcel examinations. Ask your academic advisor to look at how UExcel examinations may fit your degree completion plan. You can also address any questions that you may have regarding the minimum required grade and/or the amount of credit awarded for the examination. Colleges are not required to grant the amount of credit recommended by the developers.

If your desired institution does not yet accept UExcel examinations, ask your academic advisor to consider UExcel examinations as a credit earning option. Your advisor may contact the Center for Educational Measurement at Excelsior College at **888-647-2388 (ext. 166)** for additional information regarding the ACE CREDIT-evaluated UExcel examination series. Should you or your advisor wish to learn more about the ACE College Credit Recommendation Service, visit the ACE Web site at **www.acenet.edu**, then click on the following:

- Programs & Services
- College Credit Recommendation Service
- College & University Services

The ACE College Credit Recommendation Service office, located in the Center for Lifelong Learning, may also be reached by e-mail at **CREDIT@ace.nche.edu** or by phone at **866-205-6267**.

Examination Length and Scoring

The exam consists of two (2) extended response questions (writing prompts). You should expect to prepare college-level essays in response to these prompts. Students who receive high ratings tend to have responses that are approximately 500–600 words in length. This is not to suggest that a long response is automatically a good one. But ratings at the upper end of the scale require demonstration of higher-order analytical and evaluative skills, and the ability to work through complex rhetorical issues in writing. It is difficult to provide good evidence of these skills in few words. You should do your best to respond to all parts of each question. Your score will be reported as a letter grade. Unless your essays must be mailed to human raters for scoring, you will receive your grade upon exiting the testing center. You will have two (2) hours to complete the examination. Your score will be reported as a letter grade.

How Your Responses Are Rated

Each College Writing response is submitted for rating as soon as you complete your exam. An electronic “scoring engine” called IntelliMetric™ analyzes each response according to a complex series of criteria based on artificial intelligence. IntelliMetric™ is calibrated to make the same judgments on the quality of your writing that a human rater would make, and has been proven to match human raters consistently. By using this electronic rating, we are able to provide most test takers with a grade report — including feedback on the dimensions of Focus & Meaning, Content & Development, Organization, Language Use & Style, and Mechanics & Conventions — before they leave the testing center. We expect, however, that a small number of responses will not receive an immediate electronic rating.

Factors that might lead a paper to be unscorable include:

- a. Too short
- b. Off topic
- c. Repetitious
- d. Insufficient development
- e. Too many unknown words
- f. Major syntax problems
- g. Copied prompt rather than responding to it
- h. Unknown (for example: paper written in a foreign language or in the form of a poem)
- i. Deleted response (be sure you have not inadvertently highlighted text in your essay and typed over it, deleting what you intended to add to)

By being aware of these scorability factors up front, you may be able to avoid submitting a paper that IntelliMetric™ cannot score. If this does happen, though, you will receive a Grade Report Information form indicating that your examination cannot be scored electronically. In this case, your responses are forwarded to expert human raters. Their ratings are then submitted to Excelsior College, and a grade report will be printed and mailed to you within approximately 30 days of your test date.

How to Study with UExcel Examination Content Guides

A committee of teaching faculty and practicing professionals determines the learning outcomes to be tested on each UExcel exam. UExcel test development and psychometric staff oversee the technical aspects of test construction in accordance with current professional standards. To promote fairness in testing, we take special care to ensure that the language used in the exams and related materials is consistent, professional, and user friendly. Editorial staff perform systematic quantitative and qualitative reviews that address accuracy, clarity, and compliance with conventions of bias-free language usage.

How Long Will It Take Me to Study?

A UExcel exam tests you on material comparable to the content of one or more college-level courses. To prepare, you should study and review as long as you would for a college course. Remember, as an independent student, you are acting as your own teacher. To fully prepare for a UExcel exam requires self-direction and discipline, careful reading and reflection, and systematic review. College professors advise that in each week of a semester, you should spend at least three hours studying for each credit you will earn. For example, for a three-credit course, you should study for nine hours a week, or 135 hours total for a 15-week semester:

$$9 \times 15 = 135 \text{ hours of study for a 3-credit exam}$$

Use this system to determine how much time you should plan to spend studying and reviewing for your UExcel exam:

My exam is:

$$\underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ credits} \times 3 \text{ hours per week} \times 15 \text{ weeks} = \underline{\hspace{2cm}} \text{ total hours of study.}$$

Using the Recommended Resources

The Recommended Resources include regular college textbooks, primary and secondary source materials, publications prepared especially by UExcel staff to support your exam preparation, and in some cases audiovisual or Web-based materials. All questions on UExcel exams are referenced to the Recommended Resources. If you choose to study with a different textbook, you are responsible for ensuring that you have covered all the material adequately. A few alternative textbooks may be listed in the category of Additional or Other Resources.

If you encounter topics in the content outline that are not covered in the resource you are using, or that you feel you need more work on, try using one of the additional resources.

Some textbook publishers sell workbooks or study guides to accompany their texts. If the committee developing your exam has evaluated these materials, you will find them listed in the content guide.

Using the Sample Questions

For each examination, sample questions are provided to illustrate those typically found on the particular examination. The sample questions are not intended to be a practice test, but they may serve as models if you wish to create your own test questions for review purposes.

Study Tips

You should be an active user of the resource material. Aim for understanding rather than memorization. The more active and involved you are when you study, the more likely you will be to retain, understand, and apply the information. As a preparatory activity, you may find it fun to search “learning style” on the web for tools to identify how you learn best. You may also find free college-level course material (sometimes called “open courseware”) on the Web or through iTunesU.

The following techniques are generally considered to be “active learning”:

- preview or survey each chapter
- highlight or underline text you believe is important
- write questions or comments in the margins
- practice re-stating content in your own words
- relate what you are reading to the chapter title, section headings, and other organizing elements of the textbook
- find ways to engage your eyes, your ears, and your muscles, as well as your brain, in your studies
- study with a partner or a small group
- prepare your review notes as flashcards or create audiotapes that you can use while commuting or exercising

When you feel confident that you understand a content area, review what you have learned. Take a second look at the material to evaluate your understanding. If you have a study partner, the two of you can review by explaining the content to each other or writing test questions for each other to answer. Review questions from textbook chapters may be helpful for partner or individual study, as well.

Description of Questions

The examination includes two questions representing the types of writing prompts described below. Each type of prompt requires you to demonstrate a number of interrelated writing abilities.

Proposal Writing

This type of prompt tests your ability to persuade a reader to pursue a specified course of action, using your knowledge and experience to support your proposal. It tests your ability to select and effectively use such rhetorical strategies as narration, illustration, explanation, and description to support your proposal.

Analysis and Response

This type of prompt tests your ability to summarize and analyze two texts that present opposing viewpoints; to respond to a controversy effectively; to use sources inventively and responsibly by quoting and/or paraphrasing; to use the Modern Language Association (MLA) style of citation when referring to the words and/or ideas of others; and to write within the rhetorical, syntactic, and mechanical conventions of Standard Written American English. You are directed to read two texts presented in the prompt and to write an essay in which you identify each author's position on an issue, analyze and evaluate these positions, and respond to the issue. You are asked to assume that your audience does not have access to the texts, so that part of your task is to summarize the arguments in such a way that your audience will understand them. You may choose how to respond to the issue. You may, for instance, defend the position of one of the authors, find a compromise position between them, explain why the controversy cannot be resolved, or suggest a way to resolve the controversy.

Sample Questions

The essay questions (writing prompts) that follow illustrate those typically found on this examination. These sample questions are included to familiarize you with the types of questions you will find on the examination. Space has been left after each question for you to practice writing or organizing an answer if you wish to do so. The course guide in the guided learning package includes scoring guidelines and examples of student answers for each type of prompt, as well as a detailed study plan for using all the materials to prepare for the examination.

Proposal Writing

Your community's planning committee has set aside funding for the renovation of a vacant building or lot to be used for the whole community. The goal is for this new public space to be used frequently and by as many people as possible. The committee is asking people to suggest a site in their community and recommend a use for it. Write a letter to the community planners. Be sure that you:

- propose that they purchase a specific vacant building or lot, explain why it is the best location for a community space, and describe how it should be used to achieve their goals;
- explain carefully and in detail why your proposal should be accepted;
- argue persuasively to the community planners that the proposal you have suggested is a wise investment

Analysis/Response

Read the two texts presented on the following pages. The texts give different opinions on the language that college students and professors use when speaking to each other, and whether or not their speech should be regulated. The first text is taken from the editorial page of a newspaper; the second is a letter to the editor. Write an essay for an audience of college students in which you:

- identify each author's position on the issue "university speech codes." You should assume that your audience does not have access to these texts, so part of your task will be to summarize the arguments in such a way that your audience will understand them;
- analyze and evaluate these positions;
- respond to the issue. You may choose how to respond to the issue. You may, for instance, defend the position of one of the authors, find a compromise position between them, explain why the controversy cannot be resolved, or suggest a way to resolve the controversy.

Be careful to avoid plagiarism. These texts represent sources, so when paraphrasing or quoting from them, you should use the Modern Language Association (MLA) system of citation. You do not need to prepare a list of works cited.

P.C. University Goes Too Far

If you are heading for college or graduate school and are sensitive about being male, female, black, white, Asian, young, old, married, unmarried, gay, straight, Catholic, Jewish, evangelical Protestant or a veteran, think about going to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. You will be protected there against offense to your group sensibilities. That is the purpose of a new code of behavior proposed by the university's administration and its union of graduate student employees. It would punish as "harassment" a wide range of speech by faculty members or students — including "epithets, slurs and negative stereotyping" — that may offend groups. ...The proposed code, circulated at the Amherst campus last month, would ban speech that offends "on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, marital status, veteran status or disability." The graduate students' union said it would add to that list "citizenship, culture, HIV status, language, parental status, political affiliation or belief and pregnancy status." Orwell is the name that comes to mind as one reads this proposal. It would create a totalitarian atmosphere in which everyone would have to guard his tongue all the time lest he say something that someone finds offensive. (The code would let anyone who heard a doubtful remark about some group bring a complaint, even if he was not a member of the group.)

Do the drafters have no knowledge of history? One wonders. No understanding that freedom requires, as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "freedom for the thought that we hate"? And if not, what are they doing at a university? ...The chancellor at the Amherst campus, David K. Scott, responded to criticism by suggesting that a code was required by federal Department of Education regulations. They threaten to withhold federal aid from any university with a "hostile environment" in terms of race — and similar gender rules are being prepared. If so, the federal regulations need revision. It is time to stop letting the elastic concept of a "hostile environment" menace freedom of speech, at universities of all places.

(Lewis, Anthony. "P.C. University Goes Too Far." *The Oregonian* 28 Nov. 1995: C7.)

Response to “P.C. University Goes Too Far”

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to Anthony Lewis’s recent editorial regarding the University of Massachusetts at Amherst’s proposed speech code. Anthony Lewis is wrong. Such a speech code is not an “Orwellian” or “Nazi” tactic. Rather, it is a directive asking that people speak with politeness and consideration for others. How can that be wrong? I am a female student at Astoria State University, and I have quite often felt the stings of harassment in the speech of others. I once had a professor say to me, “Why don’t you stay home and have children? That’s all you’re suited to do.” Maybe he was joking — he said it with a laugh — but I was devastated. More than once I have heard male students refer to females using terms that your newspaper wouldn’t print.

I have heard other students refer to African Americans using racial epithets. Because this speech was not corrected or checked, fraternities have also engaged in outright racist behavior, such as dressing in white sheets imitating the Ku Klux Klan. What does it take for the administration to see that there is a problem — a lynching? A college campus should provide a safe environment for learning. If students feel that they are hated by others or that their presence is not wanted, how can that student begin to learn and grow as a person?

We are all entitled to an education in the United States, not just white males who resemble Anthony Lewis. Student retention at universities like UMass is usually worse for students who are minorities of one type or another. Perhaps it is time to create a safe place for all of us to learn.

–Nadine Williams
Astoria, Oregon

(Williams, Nadine. *Astorian Journal* 2 Dec. 1995: B12.)

Learning Resources for this Exam

The study materials listed below are recommended by UExcel Examinations developers as the most appropriate resources to help you study for the examination. For information on ordering from the UExcel Bookstore, go to www.uexceltest.com/bookstore. You may also find resource materials in college libraries. Public libraries may have some of the textbooks or may be able to obtain them through an interlibrary loan program.

You should allow sufficient time to obtain resources and to study before taking the exam.

Recommended Resources

Excelsior College (2010). *Course Guide for UExcel College Writing (2nd ed.)*. Albany: Excelsior College.

The units in the Course Guide, along with the two textbooks, are designed to 1) move you from simpler narrative and descriptive writing tasks to the kinds of analytical and persuasive writing that you will be expected to do in your college experience; 2) help you improve your mechanical skills; 3) provide explicit experience with the types of questions you will encounter when you sit for the College Writing exam. The Guide contains a Detailed Study Plan, laid out like a course syllabus with weekly assignments, that shows how the learning presented in the units of the Course Guide links with the expectations set out in the exam questions.

Axelrod, Rise B. and Charles R. Cooper (2010). *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing. (9th ed.)*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference. (7th ed.)*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.

MY Access!™ Learning Tool

MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition is an on-line learning tool for students wishing to improve their academic writing skills. MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition uses the same “scoring engine” — called IntelliMetric™ — that is used in scoring your exam at the testing center, but you can use it again and again to practice different aspects of writing and receive detailed diagnostic feedback that will help you to improve. MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition will truly enable you to be your own writing teacher! While the prompts provided in the MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition program are not exactly like those on the College Writing examination, studies have shown that the more guided writing you do, the better your writing becomes. In addition to the prompts and five categories of feedback (focus and meaning, content and development, organization, language use and style, and mechanics and conventions), MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition provides a complete suite of writer's tools like grammar and spelling checkers, a thesaurus, and a writing portfolio. All of this is housed on the Web, so it is available to you 24/7, wherever you can log on to the MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition Web site. You can also use MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition to practice writing tasks you may face in other courses.

To use MY Access!® College: UExcel® Edition as a practice exam for the College Writing examination, you can purchase a license through the UExcel Web site at www.uexceltest.com/resources.

UExcel Examination Development Committee in College Writing

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When you're ready to test, you can schedule to take your exam at a Pearson testing center through our Web site:

www.uexceltest.com.

UExcel Examinations Offerings

Calculus	4 lower-level credits
College Writing	4 lower-level credits
Introduction to Psychology	3 lower-level credits
Introduction to Sociology	3 lower-level credits
Physics	6 lower-level credits
Political Science	3 lower-level credits
Spanish Language	6 lower-level credits
Statistics	3 lower-level credits