

UMass Lowell Writing Placement Exam, Summer 2010: RE-TEST

Because we are asking you to make a fresh approach on your re-test, we will do things slightly differently than we did during orientation. Please put the essay you wrote during orientation out of your mind. Today's prompt is completely different; we want you to focus only on writing the best possible response so that we can place you accurately into the correct writing course.

You will have 10 minutes to plan and 50 minutes to write your essay. I will time the first 10 minutes. Use that time to think about your thesis and the structure of your essay as a whole. Make a quick outline, diagram, or list of the points you want to make in developing your essay. After I tell you to begin writing, you will have 50 minutes to draft and to look over your essay. Be sure to leave a few minutes at the end to proofread and edit your essay. If you wish, you may skip lines as you write in order to make it easier to edit your sentences. You do not need to copy over your essay; you may cross out errors and write in corrections. Please use both sides of the pages of your blue book. Please use ink, and **make your writing legible**. Illegible essays will not be scored.

Here are the criteria we will use to evaluate your writing. These are the same criteria we mentioned on the original test, but we've added some explanation and reminders:

Thoughtful and detailed content responsive to the prompt

Make sure you stay focused on the prompt. Some failed to address the central point of the prompt. Some writers failed to be sufficiently specific and to develop the essay in detail, as the prompt specified; instead, they wrote in vague terms and generalizations. Remember that, along with the fundamentals and mechanics of your writing, we are making placements based on the sophistication clarity, and development of your thoughts. We require a minimum of five paragraphs.

Strong focus, essay structure and organization

Be careful not to let the brainstorming questions take the place of good essay structure. Make sure your thesis (the central idea of your essay) is clearly stated and is developed enough to provide your essay with unity. Make sure each of your paragraphs has a topic sentence, and that topic sentence supports and develops your thesis. A developed paragraph, even under time constraints, should contain at least six or seven sentences. Each paragraph should also demonstrate cohesion – it should focus on only one point. When you transition from one paragraph to the next, make sure the readers will be able to follow your logic without difficulty. Your essay must not have fewer than five developed paragraphs, and if you can sustain your argument for six or seven paragraphs, please do.

Proper grammar and use of Standard English

Plan on leaving time to proofread. Check that you've written in complete sentences. Be sure that your grammar is not making your meaning difficult to understand. Check for the habitual errors you are most likely to make, such as confusing plurals and possessives (s'/s/s'), disagreement in pronouns (a person has to do *their*—instead of *his* or *her*—best), or errors with homonyms like there, their and they're, etc. Think about the things that your teachers have corrected in the past.

Appropriate college-level vocabulary and usage

We want to see a good command of vocabulary—we don't need to see your SAT practice words, but we don't want you to use slang or conversational language, either. Try to use well-chosen, accurate, and specific words to express your meaning.

Please see the prompt on the reverse.

Kindly do not write on this sheet.

On the front of your blue book, please print:

Your name

Your UML ID#

Today's date

The e-mail address to which you would like your results sent. Please be sure to distinguish between the number 0 and the letter O, between the number 1 and the letter L, etc.

PLEASE ADDRESS THIS PROMPT.

You have probably heard many times this quote from the U.S. Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." At the time of their writing--and today--these powerful, abstract words require definition and interpretation. In 1822, Thomas Jefferson offered a concrete connection between the notion of happiness and the value of public education. He wrote, "I look to [...] education as the resource to be relied on for ameliorating the condition, promoting the virtue, and advancing the happiness of man."

Obviously, you are operating in a vastly different context from Jefferson. Consider how his philosophy for the nation as a whole might apply to you as an individual. **Write an essay in which you explain how your investment in your education might be a key to your future happiness. In your thesis, establish the connection you see between these ideas, and your working definition of "happiness." In the body of your essay, develop and refine your definition and its potential origin in your education, using clear and specific examples to show how these two ideas are linked.**

Here are some questions to help you get started. Remember that your essay needs to have **its own thesis and organization**; it shouldn't be merely a series of answers to these questions!

What are some of the different ways in which you're investing in your education? (e.g. time, energy, attention, money, etc.)

How do you define or measure happiness? More specifically, what particular kinds of gratification might your education bring? (e.g., having an engaging career, financial security, self-knowledge, friendships, etc.)

What do you think Jefferson meant by the "condition" of man that required amelioration, or betterment?

What conditions of your own life would you like to ameliorate (i.e. improve)?

How is your education going to help you or prepare you to make that change for the better?

What particular virtues do you think Jefferson had in mind when he suggested that education promotes the virtue of man? What vices do you think he might have contrasted with that virtue?

What virtues do you hope that your education will promote (or what vices will it abolish) within you?

Please use the full allotment of time to develop your essay as clearly and as completely as possible. Please take time at the end of the 50 minutes to proofread and edit your essay carefully.

If you finish early, you may leave, but please gather your things quietly so as not to disrupt other writers.