

Samples
Test of Critical Skills Seminar

NOTE: We do not give specific feedback on anyone's performance in the Test of Critical Skills. In general, we find that applicants need to work on the skills of gathering and processing information, including paying attention to what the proposition asks you to do. Applicants also must have a certain level of technical proficiency with language (i.e, writing skills that communicate effectively), but we encourage you to think of the whole process, not one aspect in isolation (i.e., working only on writing skills may not help your performance on the Test of Critical Skills.)

SAMPLE 1: The Reading Task: Read the passage below critically before proceeding to the writing task. Use your thoughts about this passage to help you think critically about the writing task.

Alternative medical practices, including naturopathy, herbal medicine, and homeopathy are growing in popularity, and there is increasing pressure to allow them to be covered by public health insurance plans such as that of Saskatchewan Health. According to their adherents, these forms of treatment are more natural and more holistic approaches to health than conventional therapies using modern drugs; according to many physicians, on the other hand, they are simply scams, offering remedies which are placebos at best, potential poisons at worst. Each side accuses the other of failing to live up to the Hippocratic imperative: "Do no harm." In spite of this controversy, an estimated 20% of Canadians now make use of some form of alternative medicine.

SAMPLE 1: The Writing Task: Consider the proposition given below in italics, and write a formal, persuasive essay of 300-500 words arguing for or against it. Use your analysis of the reading to trigger and add depth to your thinking about the proposition.

Individuals have the right to decide for themselves what sort of medical treatment best suits their needs and the right to have that treatment paid for by public health insurance plans.

SAMPLE 2: The Reading Task: Read the passage below critically before proceeding to the writing task. Use your thoughts about this passage to help you think critically about the writing task.

There are those who argue that the multicultural mosaic of Canada is threatened by the continued unfair dominance of French and English as the only official languages. They assert that all the children of Canada have a right to maintain their cultural heritage and that right is best protected by providing for the teaching of other languages in Canadian school systems. In 1981, the Ontario Public School Men Teachers Association presented an article in its publication *To Herald a Child* expressing this opinion. The following is an excerpt from that article:

A child has the inalienable right to his mother tongue and to his cultural heritage, which not only determines who he is, but also who he will be. No school system, therefore, must be allowed to interfere with that right. The opposite is also true; everything must be done to encourage the child's awareness of his heritage and to develop the language skills of his mother tongue. Without these provisions we will merely be paying lip service to the multicultural reality of Canada.

Sample 2: The Writing Task: Consider the proposition given below in italics, and write a formal, persuasive essay of 300-500 words arguing for or against it. Use your analysis of the reading to trigger and add depth to your thinking about the proposition.

Because everyone has an inalienable right to maintain his/her mother tongue and cultural heritage, Canadian school systems are responsible for providing every child in Canada with an education conducted in that child's mother tongue and reflecting the values of that child's cultural heritage at the Canadian taxpayers' expense.

SAMPLE 3: The Reading Task: Read the passage below critically before proceeding to the writing task. Use your thoughts about this passage to help you think critically about the writing task.

A current issue of national concern is a perceived decline in proficiency in basic skills, such as problem solving, numeracy, and literacy. This concern is not new. In the 1940s, George Orwell, a famous English essayist, novelist and political satirist, wrote an essay on this subject entitled "Politics and the English Language". The following text is an excerpt from his essay:

Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way, but it is generally assumed that we cannot by conscious action do anything about it. Our civilization is decadent, and our language- so the argument runs- must inevitably share in the general collapse. It follows that any struggle against the abuse of language is a sentimental archaism, like preferring candles to electric light or hansom cabs to aeroplanes. Underneath this lies the half-conscious belief that language is a natural growth and not an instrument which we shape for our own purposes.

Now, it is clear that the decline of a language must ultimately have political and economic causes: it is not due simply to the bad influence of this or that individual writer. But an effect can become a cause, reinforcing the original cause and producing the same effect in an intensified form, and so on indefinitely. A man may take to drink because he feels himself to be a failure, and then fail all the more completely because he drinks. It is rather the same thing that is happening to the English language. It becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts. The point is that the process is reversible. Modern English, especially written English, is full of bad habits which spread by imitation and which can be avoided if one is willing to take the necessary trouble. If one gets rid of these habits one can think more clearly, and to think clearly is a necessary first step towards political regeneration: so that the fight against bad English is not frivolous and is not the exclusive concern of professional writers.

SAMPLE 3: The Writing Task: Consider the proposition given below in italics, and write a formal, persuasive essay of 300-500 words arguing for or against it. Use your analysis of the reading to trigger and add depth to your thinking about the proposition.

The decline of the English language, noted by Orwell, can be directly attributed to the advance in communication technologies, such as radio and television.

Questions to Ask about Your Writing

1. Do you have a precise understanding of the task that you have been assigned or are you responding to an impression of it?
Remember: Careful critical reading of the task is absolutely necessary. Time spent analyzing the task is crucial to success.
2. Have you selected exactly the appropriate content to use in the response to the task?
Remember: Information that you do not relate clearly and precisely to the task weakens your efforts.
3. Is your approach to the task sufficiently focused, or is it too broad?
4. What strategies have you used to achieve clarity, depth and complexity of thought about the task and the content that related to it?
5. What organizational strategy have you used to develop your position or argument, and is it the most appropriate one?
6. Is all of your evidence relevant?
7. Are your positions and /or arguments fully developed?
8. Do you need more or better examples to prove or support your points?
9. Are you depending on your reader to integrate and interpret your position(s) or argument(s), or have you clearly stated and supported all of your thinking about the task.
Remember: It is your job to make your thinking clear to the reader. It is not the reader's job to "just know what you mean" and supply missing information or thinking for you.
10. Are your sentence structures correct, varied, and interesting to your reader?
11. Are your sentences succinct or do they contain unnecessary words that tend to obscure your meaning?
Remember: Effective communication occurs when your meaning is conveyed directly through clear, concise sentences. Imprecise, wordy, thesaurus-dependent sentences usually try the reader's patience.
12. Have you carefully proofread your essay?

**Global Assessment Scale
Test of Critical Skills**

Student PIN _____

Evaluator _____

Precision of the response to the task This essay:

- responds precisely and perceptively to the task, indicating excellent analysis, synthesis and evaluation of the reading and the proposition;
- responds comprehensively and competently to the task, indicating clear and accurate understanding of the reading and the proposition
- responds generally to the task, indicating a grasp of the major issues in the reading and the proposition;
- responds incompletely and/or distorts the task, indicating an impressionistic, surface or superficial understanding of the reading or the proposition
- responds inappropriately or tangentially to the task, perhaps indicating a lack of understanding of the reading or the proposition.

Focus, organization, and development of the argument This essay:

- exhibits precise focus, coherent organization and interesting development, with an excellent thesis strongly stating the student's position, thoroughly detailed exposition and fully developed argumentation supporting that position (with carefully chosen and insightful details, examples, reasons, etc.), and a satisfying conclusion;
- exhibits control of focus, competent organization, and development, with a good thesis, well-managed supporting exposition and argumentation (all of the subject matter is relevant to the task, but is not as insightfully selected or interestingly developed as a response at level A), and an effective conclusion;
- exhibits sufficient control of focus, organization and development to include the major issues required of the task; an adequate thesis and some effort to organize effective supporting exposition and argumentation, but may be formulaic or wandering, or contain some poorly chosen or poorly developed material; major ideas are adequately supported;
- exhibits insufficient control of focus (e.g., thesis may be unclear), organization (e.g., may ramble, be repetitious, or adhere to a simplistic formula) and development (e.g., may be mostly descriptive, or lack adequate support)
- exhibits a basic sense of organization, but contains little of real substance (e.g., no discernable thesis, ideas are undeveloped, irrelevant, illogical, inconsistent, or based on inaccurate understanding of the subject matter)

Technical proficiency with language (i.e., the communication of the information gathered, selected, interpreted and managed)
This essay:

- exhibits excellent control of expression (diction, tone, sentence structure, sentence variety, and sentence sense), grammar, punctuation, and mechanics;
- exhibits control of expression, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics (sentences consistently convey the intent of the writer, but without the precision, finesse, and variety of level A);
- exhibits sufficient control of expression, grammar, punctuation, and mechanics; may contain a number of errors, but they do not interfere with understanding the text;
- exhibits a lack of control of expression, grammar, punctuation, or mechanics to a degree that interferes with understanding;
- exhibits serious and recurring errors in expression, grammar, punctuation, and/or mechanics that prevent understanding.

Essay is over/under the word limit _____ Number of words _____

Essay is illegible _____

Other _____