

WritePlacer Essay Guide

The ACCUPLACER includes the WritePlacer exam, which is the ACCUPLACER essay test. On this portion of the test you are evaluated on organization, focus, development and support, sentence structure, and mechanical conventions. The good news is that your essay is only required to be approximately 300-600 words in length. A simple 5 paragraph essay will be more than sufficient. Scores on WritePlacer range from 0 to 8.

You will have **90 minutes** to plan, write, and proofread this essay.

An essay that is too short to be evaluated, written on a topic other than the one presented, or written in a language other than English will be given a score of zero. Notice that the biggest differences between the low-scoring and high-scoring essays is LENGTH and CLARITY. Aim to achieve multiple paragraphs with good organization, and this essay should be fairly easy!

WritePlacer Tips and Strategies

- **Understand that the WritePlacer exam will NOT require any outside knowledge.** You are not expected to have any specific technical know-how or understanding of specific books or authors. The essay will be based off a provided prompt meant to spark your creativity. Everything you need to answer the question will be part of the prompt!
- **Select one side only.** Unlike real life where most of our opinions are a mix of gray, the ACCUPLACER essay requires you to take a strong stand on one side and one side ONLY of the issue. You won't be able to adequately argue a middle-of-the-road approach, and you risk appearing indecisive and muddling your essay.
- **Remember that you will not be scored on your opinion.** Don't worry if you feel you are choosing a less commonly held position on the topic. The reader will NOT give you a lower score based on personal bias.
- **Don't change your position mid-essay.** Even if you feel you're running out of steam and you're regretting your position on the topic, stay strong and finish the essay anyway. Don't waffle, and don't try to take a "middle of the road" approach. You don't have time to go back and re-write the whole thing.
- **No example is "too" specific.** As long as you can argue logically that it supports your thesis, no example is "too" specific. Most essays are way too general. Aim to make the reader think, "wow, what extreme detail!" as they read. If you are using an example from personal experience, using some names, dates, places, and other concrete details can go a long way. Replace abstracts with absolutes.
- **Incorporate the opposing side.** A great way to strengthen your own argument is to acknowledge that there *is* in fact complexity to the issue. However, if you bring up and describe the opposing side, make sure to criticize it effectively and reiterate that *your*

side is the only one that is valid. This is a great tool to use in your conclusion, although many students include it in an additional body paragraph.

- **Keep the introduction and conclusion brief.** Don't take forever to get to the topic. The function of an introductory paragraph is to introduce the reader to the topic in the prompt, and then to clearly and forcefully state your position on it. More than 3-4 sentences is too long. In the conclusion, 1-2 sentences is great to reiterate your position and leave the essay with a closing idea. Save your writing-time for your body paragraphs!
- **Use Transition Words.** Scroll down to the bottom of this article to see a good list of common transition words. Be sure to use them as you move between paragraphs! Always make sure the reader will understand why you are moving from one paragraph to the next paragraph!

WritePlacer Template

This is a sample outline for the ACCUPLACER Essay. Notice we are aiming for 5 paragraphs total. You may opt for a shorter 4 paragraph version if 5 paragraphs are too many for you to write, but aim for 5 paragraphs if you can. If you have trouble completing 5 paragraphs, see if you can streamline your body paragraphs. They can often be bloated with unnecessary wordiness. Keep the introduction and the conclusion short and sweet.

Paragraph 1 – Introduction (3-4 sentences)

You will want to begin your essay with one of the following: a generalization about the topic, a quotation, a short anecdote to set-up the correctness of your position, a historical framework, or a piece of news illustrating the contemporariness of the issue. **Admit the complexity of the issue.**

You have two goals in the beginning part of the essay: to introduce the topic, and to express your opinion on it. Be sure to place your thesis as the final sentence in your introduction.

Paragraph 2 – First Example (4-6 sentences)

Start with your most-powerful or relevant example. Be specific. Your example can be from history, science, politics, business, entertainment, pop culture, current events, personal experience, etc. Anything can be an example, but choose ONE only for each paragraph. It needs to be something you are knowledgeable about and also something that you believe strongly supports your thesis. You have three tasks in your body paragraphs:

- Introduce your example.
- Describe it.
- Explain how it fully supports your thesis.

You should spend the majority of your body paragraph accomplishing the the third step: **explaining how it fully supports your thesis.** Aim to convince the reader through very concrete details how your position on the issue is correct.

Paragraph 3 – Second Example (4-6 sentences)

Use a transition phrase to introduce the second example. Describe it, and explain again how it fully supports your thesis. You may refer to your first example if you need to, but prioritize a focus on your new example. Don't mention your third example until you get to the third paragraph.

Paragraph 4 – Third Example (4-6 sentences)

Use a transition phrase again in the first topic sentence. Describe the example. Explain how it supports. Make sure you are elucidating for the reader how each example relates to the topic.

Paragraph 5 – Conclusion (2-4 sentences)

In your conclusion, introduce the opposing side. Explain their position in general terms. Refute their position. Then reinforce the correctness of your own thesis. This takes care of having to come up with a conclusion- you'll already know what to do! Here's how it might look:

Although _____ is demonstrably correct, some have argued that _____, believing that _____. However, this viewpoint on the present issue is negated by _____. Rather, _____. Therefore, in the long run,

ACCUPLACER Essay Practice

Be sure to write at least 2-3 sample essays before your exam so you are comfortable with the format. Have a teacher, friend, or trusted relative read through your exam and give you feedback. Below you'll find a list of three sample ACCUPLACER essay prompts. Choose at least TWO of these ACCUPLACER essay topics and write a practice essay, attempting to follow the above template to the best of your ability.

ACCUPLACER Essay Topics

- 1) Do works of art have the power to change people's lives? Some people say a book or a movie has the power to do just that. Are they exaggerating, or can art have such a large impact of individuals?
- 2) Is an education a requirement for a successful career? Explain the topic and either agree or disagree with the statement, offering support for your position.
- 3) Scientists and politicians argue over whether global warming and climate control present a real threat to human welfare. Take a position on this issue and explain whether or not you believe this to be a serious problem for humanity.

Transition Words List

Agreement Words

- in the first place
- not only ... but also
- as a matter of fact
- in like manner
- in addition
- coupled with
- in the same fashion / way
- first, second, third
- in the light of

Opposition Words

- in contrast
- different from
- of course ..., but
- on the other hand
- on the contrary
- at the same time
- in spite of
- but
- (and) still

Causation Words

- in the event that
- for the purpose of
- with this intention
- with this in mind
- in the hope that
- in order to
- If
- ... then
- in case

Example Words

- in other words
- to put it differently
- for one thing
- as an illustration
- in this case
- for this reason
- to put it another way
- that is to say
- with attention to