

Guidelines for students taking the Departmental Test Out For English 110-First-Year Composition

In the typical composition course at Augustana College, 80% of the final grade is based on good expository writing. The review of good usage and improvement of writing style constitutes the remaining 20% of the grade. Thus the first part of the departmental test out, the objective section corresponds to the grammar and style review, an important but less significant aspect of the test out. The second part, the writing sample, is the true test for a student's possible exemption from a first-year composition class. It is only the sample that the Department of English will see of the student's writing and will determine if the student will be exempt from First-Year Composition. The reading (articles or short stories) that the writing sample will be based on is available to you to read in advance of the test out date. The Student Academic Support Services will supply the writing sample for you and administer the English 110 test out exam. Contact Susan Bies for more information.

*Because the writing is timed and is based on the reading selection, the student should remember that this writing sample must convince its reviewers that it shows skill which would have been acquired from a college writing course. **Even if the student passes the first part, the writing sample must also be passed in order to pass the test.** The student will be unable to defend or to redeem an inadequate writing sample by citing past successes during high school or other accomplishments.*

In order to pass, the departmental test out and to receive four semester hours of credit for First-Year Composition, the student writer must demonstrate writing proficiency equivalent to that found in a sound and effective final essay written at the conclusion of a composition course. The evaluators of the student's sample will consider the following elements of good writing:

1. Knowledge of expository writing at the college level in an essay that shows a strong relationship between what is read and what is written.
2. Organization around a thesis statement with each paragraph of the essay's body expanding and explaining part of that thesis in a coherent order. Paragraphs in college writing are well developed and have topic sentences which guide the reader in the direction the argument or explanation takes.
3. Development of individual paragraphs (including introduction and conclusion) by clearly detailed examples and evidence, illustrative of the student's ability to think critically and to support major points with pertinent details. Neither hasty generalizations strung together nor skimpy paragraphs show mastery of the college composition process.
4. Writing that is free of major grammatical errors and exhibits a mature writing style necessary for college. Any essay with misspellings, agreement problems, and other errors indicate that its writer could use the thorough review offered in a college composition course.

The departmental test out is not designed to pass along a student who shows minimal writing skills, and the idea that a student must merely meet some lowest common denominator or average proficiency in composition is erroneous. A good writing sample will demonstrate to the English faculty that the student has a strong grasp of the essentials of good writing necessary for other college classes. If a student asks for full credit, the one-time writing sample done as part of the departmental test out must clearly indicate that the student is proficient enough to move beyond the required English 110-First-Year Composition.