A Description of the CUNY Proficiency Examination

Information for Students

2002-2003

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The CUNY Proficiency Examination (CPE), developed in response to a 1997 Board of Trustees' resolution, is required of students who are completing associate degree programs or beginning junior-level work. The CPE tests students' ability to understand and think critically about ideas and information and to write clearly, logically, and correctly at a level associated with success in upper-division courses. It consists of two tasks:

**Task 1: Analytical Reading and Writing (2 hours)**
You will be given two reading selections: a 6-8 page selection to be studied in advance and an additional 1 to 1 1/2 page selection at the time of testing. You are required to write a focused essay, drawing a relationship between specified elements of the two readings and extending it, as directed, to your own perspective or experience.

**Task 2: Analyzing and Integrating Material from Graphs and Text (1 hour)**
At the test you will be given a set of materials—two charts and a brief reading passage—on the same or similar topics. In a short written response, you must state the major claim(s) of the reading selection and discuss the extent to which the data support or challenge the major claim(s).

**Who is required to take the CPE?**
**First-time Freshmen.** If you entered CUNY as a first-time freshman in Fall 1999 or later, you are required to take the CPE.
- **Senior college** students must pass by the time they have completed their 60th credit.
- **Community college** students must pass the CPE, which is a requirement for the associate's degree, before they graduate.

Starting September 1, 2003, students who enrolled in CUNY before Fall 1999 will also be subject to the CPE requirement. ("Students enrolled" is defined as all students taking courses in the University before Fall 1999, full-time or part-time, matriculated or non-matriculated and whether or not their enrollment since 1999 has been continuous.)

**Transfer Students from Outside CUNY**
1. **No previous attendance at CUNY.** As of Fall 2000, new transfers must take and pass the CPE.

   Students transferring to a senior college who enter with 45 or more credits must take the CPE in their first semester at CUNY and must pass it by their 60th credit.

   Those who enter with 60 or more credits (unless exempted) must take the CPE at the first administration of the exam after they enter.

   Transfers entering with fewer than 45 credits must take the CUNY Basic Skills Tests (unless exempted) before entering and follow placement recommendations. They must pass the CPE by the time they have completed their 60th credit.

2. **Previous attendance at CUNY in Fall 1999 or later (as freshmen).** Students in this category are also required to take and pass the CPE. (Same credit conditions as above.)
3. **Previous attendance at CUNY before Fall 1999 (as freshmen).** Students in this category are not currently required to take the CPE.

4. **Previous attendance at CUNY before Fall 2000 (as transfers).** Students in this category are not currently required to take the CPE.

   *However*, as stated above, beginning September 1, 2003, all students, regardless of when they entered CUNY, will be subject to the CPE requirement.

**Students transferring within CUNY**

Students who entered CUNY as first-time freshmen in Fall 1999 or later are required to take the CPE. From Fall 2001–Summer 2003, senior colleges may provisionally admit transfers from CUNY community colleges who have completed all graduation requirements except the CPE. These students must take the CPE in their first semester at a senior college.

**Exemptions**

Students with a bachelor's degree or higher from an accredited program are exempted from CPE requirements.

**What are the rules and procedures that apply to taking the CPE?**

- You must take the CPE for the first time between the 45th and 60th credit. If you are a new transfer student with 45+ credits, you will take the CPE in your first semester at CUNY.

- You *may* take the CPE for the first time during the semester in which you register for your 45th credit.

- You must be in good academic standing—students with gpa's below 2.0 may not take the CPE.

- You may take the CPE three times.

**Can the CPE Be Substituted for CUNY-ACT Basic Skills Tests?**

- As stated above, students (new and transfer) who enrolled in CUNY before Fall 1999 (including part-time or non degree) are not currently subject to CPE requirements. However, students in this category who have been unsuccessful in passing the CUNY ACT Basic Skills Tests in Reading and Writing may elect to take the CPE instead. A pass on the CPE will satisfy their CUNY ACT reading and writing requirements.

- New transfer students who entered CUNY in Fall 2000 and thereafter must pass the CUNY ACT Basic Skills Tests in Reading and Writing (unless exempted) to qualify to take the CPE.

- New students (non-transfer) who entered CUNY in Fall 1999 and thereafter must pass the CUNY ACT Basic Skills Tests in Reading and Writing (unless exempted) to qualify to take the CPE.

**How do I register for the CPE?**

You will register for the CPE at your college Testing Office early in the semester, 2-3 weeks before the test date:

- Colleges will send letters to students who have 45+ credits reminding them to register.

- If you have 45+ credits, you *must* register for and take the CPE even if you do not receive a letter from your college. You will forfeit one of your chances to take the CPE if you skip a required administration.
How should I get ready for the CPE?

Before the semester you take the CPE

The CPE tests skills that you have developed through the course work you have already taken:

- Taking writing-intensive courses within your first 45 credits is the best preparation. The whole curriculum, not the required English Composition courses, is the field for your preparation.
- If you experience difficulty in writing, arrange to work in the writing or learning center at your college.

Test Preparation

At the time you register for the CPE, you will receive the long reading selection for Task 1 in addition to this booklet.

Review the Reading Selection. When you receive the reading selection for Task 1, you have about two weeks to study it before the test:

- Read the selection several times and underline, mark up, highlight, or outline the important points in the text as you would if you were studying for a course examination.
- Use a dictionary for vocabulary you do not know.

Learn about successful strategies. Readers who have reviewed and scored thousands of essays suggest that you:

- become familiar with the CPE format, directions, and grading criteria
- prepare thoroughly.
- take time to plan your answers.
- follow the directions carefully, answering all parts of the question for each Task.
- summarize only the parts of the readings called for, not the entire reading.
- avoid plagiarism by making a clear distinction between your own words and the language of the readings and by identifying language or ideas taken from the readings.
- explain and support your points fully.
- keep the reader in mind—focusing your essay, making logical connections between readings or between reading passage and data, and between readings and your own perspective or experiences.
- Take time to edit and correct your work.

Attend an information session or take a workshop. Every college offers support services for students preparing to take the CPE.

- Most campuses have scheduled information sessions for students.
- Writing or learning centers may have workshops to help you prepare.

What should I bring with me to the CPE session?

You must bring your copy of the reading selection, but no other papers. In addition, you must bring a pen, a #2 pencil, and picture identification. You may bring one dictionary for use during the test; however, no electronic spellers or other devices may be used.

What are the arrangements for students with disabilities?

Accommodations based on disabilities will be granted to comply with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Please contact your college Testing Office if you require such accommodations.

How is the CPE scored?
Task 1 and Task 2 are scored separately by different groups of readers, with the responses to each task being read by two trained readers. Should the two readers disagree by more than a score point, the response is read by a third reader.

**Task 1: Analytical Reading and Writing.** Four criteria are used to rate an essay on a scale of six points. These criteria are:

- You develop an essay that is a focused response to the writing assignment, making appropriate connections among all parts of the assignment;
- You demonstrate understanding of the readings through summary and explanation of relevant material;
- You incorporate, as support for your own thoughts, appropriate references to the readings, identifying the sources formally or informally;
- You communicate clearly and effectively, using appropriate conventions of language (e.g., word choice, grammar, punctuation, spelling).

**Task 2: Analyzing and Integrating Material from Graphs and Text.** Your answers will be assessed for accuracy and completeness. You must communicate the information clearly and precisely.

**How will I find out the results of the CPE?**

You will receive a letter informing you of your results at the end of the semester in which you take the test.

**What happens if I don’t pass the CPE the first time I take it?**

You may take the CPE 3 times:

- If you fail the CPE, you must retest during the semester after you register for your 60th credit.
- If you need a third try, you must retest no later than the semester in which you register for your 75th credit.
- If you enter with 60 or more credits, unless exempted, you must take the CPE at the first administration of the exam after you enter; if you need retesting, it must be at the next successive administration of the test
- For all students, failure to take the CPE when required means forfeiting one chance to take the test.

Students who fail the CPE once should see an adviser to plan a program that includes one or more of the following activities:

- Tutoring.
- Workshops for students repeating the CPE.
- Writing course or writing-intensive course in a specific discipline.

Each college has appointed a CPE Liaison. Contact your testing office for the name of that person. For students who fail the CPE twice, **consultation with an advisor and registration for a required appropriate writing or writing-intensive course is mandatory.**

**How will student appeals be handled?**

All appeals must be made in writing to the committee at the college designated for that purpose. Reasons for appeals may include early testing, academic standing, postponements, forfeits, or test results. For specific information on appeals procedures, please contact the CPE Liaison at your college.
SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Task 1: Analytical Reading and Writing

Sample Writing Assignment and Student Essays

This examination is based on Reading Selection A, "The Central Puzzles of Learning" and "The Difficulties Posed by School" by Howard Gardner, which you were given to read and study in advance and on Reading Selection B, "To Err Is Human" by Lewis Thomas. The readings are printed below. Read "To Err Is Human" and review the Gardner readings in light of the writing assignment, which is printed following Reading Selection B below.

Reading Selection A

In these two excerpts from his book, The Unschooled Mind, Howard Gardner first introduces an important question that he will explore and then begins to find an answer to it.

The Central Puzzles of Learning

Many a person who has tried to master a foreign language in school has thought back wistfully to his (or her) own learning of his native tongue. Without the help of a grammar book or a trained language instructor, without the sanctions of a course grade, all normal children readily acquire the language spoken in their vicinity. More remarkably, children who are too young to sit at a school desk but who happen to grow up in a polyglot environment can master a number of languages; they even know under which circumstances to invoke each tongue. It is humbling to realize that language learning in early life has operated exquisitely over the millennia, yet linguists are still unable to describe the grammar of any naturally occurring language in a completely satisfactory way.

One can, of course, attempt to dismiss language as a special case. After all, we are linguistic creatures, and perhaps we have special dispensation to speak, just as warblers and chaffinches sing as part of their avian birthright. Or one can stress the immense importance of language in all human intercourse; perhaps therein lies the solution to the question of why all children successfully master language within a few years of their birth.

Upon examination, however, language turns out to be unexceptional among human capacities. It is simply the most dramatic instance of one puzzle in human learning—the facility with which young humans learn to carry out certain performances that scholars themselves have not yet come to understand. During the first years of life, youngsters all over the world master a breathtaking array of competences with little formal tutelage. They become proficient at singing songs, riding bikes, executing dances, keeping scrupulous track of dozens of objects in their home, on the road, or along the countryside. In addition, though less visibly, they develop powerful theories of how the world works and how their own minds work. They are able to anticipate which manipulations will keep a machine from functioning properly; they can propel and catch balls hurled under various conditions; they are able to deceive someone else in a game even as they can recognize when someone is trying to play a trick on them. They evolve clear senses of truth and falsity, good and evil, beautiful and ugly—senses that may not always be consistent with communal standards but that prove remarkably serviceable and robust.

Intuitive Learning and Scholastic Learning

We are faced with another puzzle. The very young children who so readily master symbol systems like language and art forms like music, the same children who develop complex theories of the universe or intricate theories of the mind, often experience the greatest difficulties upon their entry in school. Speaking and understanding language have proved unproblematic, but reading and writing may pose severe challenges; counting and numerical games are fun, but learning mathematical operations can prove vexing, and the higher reaches of mathematics may remain forbidding. Somehow the natural, universal, or intuitive learning that takes place in one's home or immediate surroundings during the first years of life seems of an entirely different order from the school learning that is now required throughout the literate world.

So far, this puzzle is not unfamiliar and has been commented upon often. Indeed, one might go so far as to claim that schools were instituted precisely to inculcate those skills and conceptions that, while desirable, are not so readily and naturally learned as the intuitive capacities cited above. Accordingly, most of the recent raft of books and reports about the "educational crisis" persevere on the difficulties students have in mastering the overt agenda of school.

*For expository ease, I vary the gender forms from now on.
Such a description of the failings of school may be accurate as far as it goes, but in my view it does not go nearly far enough. In this book I contend that even when school appears to be successful, even when it elicits the performances for which it has apparently been designed, it typically fails to achieve its most important missions.

Evidence for this startling claim comes from a by now overwhelming body of educational research that has been assembled over the last decades. These investigations document that even students who have been well trained and who exhibit all the overt signs of success—faithful attendance at good schools, high grades and high test scores, accolades from their teachers—typically do not display an adequate understanding of the materials and concepts with which they have been working.

Perhaps most stunning is the case of physics. Researchers at Johns Hopkins, M.I.T., and other well-regarded universities have documented that students who receive honor grades in college-level physics courses are frequently unable to solve basic problems and questions encountered in a form slightly different from that on which they have been formally instructed and tested. In a typical example, college students were asked to indicate the forces acting on a coin that has been tossed straight up in the air and has reached the midway point of its upward trajectory. The correct answer is that once the coin is airborne, only gravitational pull toward the earth is present. Yet 70 percent of college students who had completed a course in mechanics gave the same naive answer as untrained students: they cited two forces, a downward one representing gravity and an upward one from "the original upward force of the hand." This response reflects the intuitive or common-sense but erroneous view that an object cannot move unless an active force has somehow been transmitted to it from an original impelling source (in this instance, the hand or arm of the coin tosser) and that such a force must gradually be spent.

Students with science training do not display a blind spot for coin tossing alone. When questioned about the phases of the moon, the reasons for the seasons, the trajectories of objects hurtling through space, or the motions of their own bodies, students fail to evince the understandings that science teaching is supposed to produce. Indeed, in dozens of studies of this sort, young adults trained in science continue to exhibit the very same misconceptions and misunderstandings that one encounters in primary school children—the same children whose intuitive facility in language or music or navigating a bicycle produces such awe.

The evidence in the venerable subject of physics is perhaps the "smoking gun" but, as I document in later chapters, essentially the same situation has been encountered in every scholastic domain in which inquiries have been conducted. In mathematics, college students fail even simple algebra problems when these are expressed in wording that differs slightly from the expected form. In biology, the most basic assumptions of evolutionary theory elude otherwise able students who insist that the process of evolution is guided by a striving toward perfection. College students who have studied economics offer explanations of market forces that are essentially identical to those preferred by college students who have never taken an economics course.

Equally severe biases and stereotypes pervade the humanistic segment of the curriculum, from history to art. Students who can discuss in detail the complex causes of the First World War turn right around and explain equally complex current events in terms of the simplest "good guy-bad guy" scenario. (This habit of mind is not absent from political leaders, who are fond of portraying the most complicated international situations along the lines of a Hollywood script.) Those who have studied the intricacies of modern poetry, learning to esteem T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, show little capacity to distinguish masterworks from amateurish drivel once the identity of the author has been hidden from view.

Perhaps, one might respond, these distressing results are simply a further indictment of the American educational system, which has certainly experienced (and perhaps merited) its share of drubbing in recent years. And in fact the majority of the research studies have been carried out with the proverbial American college sophomore. Yet the same kinds of misconceptualizations and lack of understanding that emerge in an American setting appear to recur in scholastic settings all over the world.

What is going on here? Why are students not mastering what they ought to be learning? It is my belief that, until recently, those of us involved in education have not appreciated the strength of the initial conceptions, stereotypes, and "scripts" that students bring to their school learning nor the difficulty of refashioning or eradicating them. We have failed to appreciate that in nearly every student there is a five-year-old "unschooled" mind struggling to get out and express itself. Nor have we realized how challenging it is to convey novel materials so that their implications will be appreciated by children who have long conceptualized materials of this sort in a fundamentally different and deeply entrenched way. Early in the century, the work of Freud and other psychoanalysts documented that the emotional life of the young child strongly affects the feeling and behavior of most adults. Now the research of cognitive scientists demonstrates the surprising power and persistence of the young child's conceptions of the world.

Consider examples from two quite different domains. The changing seasons of the year come about as a function of the angle of the earth on its axis in relation to the plane of its orbit around the sun. But such an explanation makes little sense to someone who cannot shake the deeply entrenched belief that temperature is strictly a function of distance from a heating source. In the domain of literature, the appeal of modern poetry resides in its
powerful images, its often unsettling themes, and the way in which the poet plays with traditional formal features. Yet this appeal will remain obscure to someone who continues to feel, deep down, that all poetry worthy of the name must rhyme, have a regular meter, and portray lovely scenes and exemplary characters. We are dealing here not with deliberate failures of education rather but with unwitting ones.

Unwitting, perhaps, but not necessarily unnoticed. That some of us may be at least dimly aware of the fragility of our knowledge was brought home to me powerfully in a conversation with my daughter, then a sophomore in college. One day Kerith phoned me, quite distressed. She voiced her concern: "Dad, I don't understand my physics course." Ever eager to assume the role of the patient and sympathetic father, I replied in my most progressive tone, "Honey, I really respect you for studying physics in college. I would never have had the nerve to do that. I don't care what grade you get—it is not important. What's important is that you understand the material. So why don't you go to see your teacher and see if he can help?" "You don't get it, Dad," responded Kerith decisively. "I've never understood it."

Without wishing to burden these words with cosmic importance, I have come to feel that Kerith's comment crystallizes the phenomenon I seek to elucidate in these pages. In schools—including "good" schools—all over the world, we have come to accept certain performances as signals of knowledge or understanding. If you answer questions on a multiple-choice test in a certain way, or carry out a problem set in a specified manner, you will be credited with understanding. No one ever asks the further question "But do you really understand?" because that would violate an unwritten agreement: A certain kind of performance shall be accepted as adequate for this particular instructional context. The gap between what passes for understanding and genuine understanding remains great; it is noticed only sometimes (as in Kerith's case), and even then, what to do about it remains far from clear.

In speaking of "genuine understanding" here, I intend no metaphysical point. What Kerith was saying, and what an extensive research literature now documents, is that even an ordinary degree of understanding is routinely missing in many, perhaps most students. It is reasonable to expect a college student to be able to apply in a new context a law of physics, or a proof in geometry, or the concept in history of which she has just exhibited "acceptable mastery" in her class. If, when the circumstances of testing are slightly altered, the sought-after competence can no longer be documented, then understanding—in any reasonable sense of the term— has simply not been achieved. This state of affairs has seldom been acknowledged publicly, but even successful students sense that their apparent knowledge is fragile at best. Perhaps this uneasiness contributes to the feeling that they—or even the entire educational system—are in some sense fraudulent.

The Difficulties Posed by School

Going beyond simple literacy, a further mission of the schools is to transmit concepts, networks of concepts, conceptual frameworks, and disciplinary forms of reasoning to their students. These topics generally bear some relation to the areas in which students are ordinarily interested and about which they have already developed intuitive theories, schemes, and kindred explanatory constructs; after all, science treats the natural world, even as history relates the story of one's group and of other relevant friendly or hostile groups.

To the extent that these materials are presented simply as lists or definitions to be memorized, they can usually be mastered by students who apply themselves to the task at hand. The curriculum of school ought to go beyond a rehearsal of facts, however, and introduce students to the ways of thinking used in different disciplines. Such an introduction would involve exposing students to new ways of conceptualizing familiar or unfamiliar entities, be they the laws that govern objects in the physical world or the ways in which events are conceptualized by historians.

The content of the various disciplines is typically encountered in forms quite remote from the conceptions the student brings to the class. The student learns about the laws of physics or the causes of war by reading a textbook or by hearing the teacher lecture. Hence the challenge for the educator is threefold: (1) to introduce these often difficult or counterintuitive notions to the students; (2) to make sure that this new knowledge is ultimately synthesized with earlier ideas, if they are congruent with one another; (3) to ensure that the new disciplinary content supplants previously held conceptions or stereotypes that would in some way collide with or undermine the new forms of knowledge.

At last we can confront directly the primary reasons why school is difficult. It is difficult, first, because much of the material presented in school strikes many students as alien, if not pointless, and the kinds of supporting context provided for pupils in earlier generations has become weakened. It is difficult, second, because some of these notational systems, concepts, frameworks, and epistemic forms are not readily mastered, particularly by students whose intellectual strengths may lie in other areas or approaches. Thus, for example, students with strengths in the spatial, musical, or personal spheres may find school far more demanding than students who happen to possess the "text-friendly" blend of linguistic and logical intelligences. And it is difficult, in a more profound sense, because these scholastic forms of knowing may actually collide with the earlier, extremely robust forms of sensorimotor and symbolic knowing, which have already evolved to a high degree even before a child enters school.
Education for understanding can come about only if students some how become able to integrate the prescholastic with the scholastic and disciplinary ways of knowing and, when such integration does not prove possible, to suspend or replace the prescholastic ways of knowing in favor of the scholastic forms of knowing. Finally, students need to be able to appreciate when a prescholastic form of knowing may harbor a different or even a deeper form of understanding than the discipline-related form of knowing learned in school.

Up to this point I have spoken of the difficulties of school primarily in terms of the problems experienced by students as they are asked to think in new kinds of ways about new kinds of concepts and forms. Even in the happiest scholastic environment, such a regimen may pose problems. Yet, human constraints on learning are magnified by the equally burdensome constraints under which schools themselves must operate. Although it would be desirable for teachers to work directly with small and well-motivated groups of students, most schools are burdened with large classes, onerous rules and regulations, disruptive demands for accountability, and students who have many personal problems. It is not surprising that an education geared toward understanding is a low priority in such schools; by their nature, bureaucratized institutions have difficulty in dealing with ends that cannot be readily quantified.

In fact, what seems to have evolved in most parts of the scholastic world is an uneasy kind of detente. Teachers require students to answer preset kinds of problems, to master lists of terms, and to memorize and then feed back definitions upon request. They do not ask students to try to reconcile their earlier, partial forms of understanding with the notations and concepts of school; instead they deal only with the latter forms of knowing, hoping that students can later develop the reconciliations on their own. Nor do teachers pose challenging problems that will force their students to stretch in new ways and that will risk failures that might make both students and teacher look bad.

As I have come to express it, neither teachers nor students are willing to undertake "risks for understanding"; instead, they content themselves with safer "correct-answer compromises." Under such compromises, both teachers and students consider the education to be a success if students are able to provide answers that have been sanctioned as correct. Of course, in the long run, such a compromise is not a happy one, for genuine understandings cannot come about so long as one accepts ritualized, rote, or conventionalized performances.

No doubt educators have arrived at this compromise for many reasons, not least because the distance between students' intuitive understandings and the understandings exhibited by disciplinary experts is so vast. Scholastic responses—correct-answer compromises—seem a viable midpoint between these disparate forms of understanding. But just how great is the disjunction between scholastic and nonscholastic forms of understanding has become apparent only in recent years. This area has been the major concern of a number of scholars who call themselves "cognitive scientists interested in education" or "educators interested in cognitive-scientific research." The names of many of these researchers are found in the notes keyed to the relevant studies, but it is appropriate to pay special tribute to the work of Michael Cole, Jean Lave, Lauren Resnick, Sylvia Scribner, and their associates. Their work has much influenced my own thinking and informs much of the ensuing discussion.

As I have already suggested, each discipline, and perhaps each subdiscipline, poses its own peculiar forms of difficulties, its own constraints that must be tackled. The disjunctions between intuitive understandings of history and the formal versions encountered in school are not directly comparable to the disjunctions encountered in physics, mathematics, or the arts. These distinctions should not be in any way minimized but it will be useful from here on to group these disjunctions under three principal headings. In the case of science and science-related areas, I will speak of misconceptions that students bring to their studies. In the case of mathematics, I will speak of rigidly applied algorithms. Finally, in the case of nonscientific studies, particularly those in the humanities and arts, I will speak of stereotypes and simplifications.

I must underscore two points. First, I must stress that there exists no sharp line between misconceptions and stereotypes. Indeed, difficulties in mathematics and in certain of the social sciences seem to fall about midway between the prototypical misconception in physics and the prototypical stereotype in history or the arts. It is mostly for pragmatic reasons that I have divided the evidence on these difficulties into two large chunks.

I must also concede that use of the terms "misconceptions" and "stereotypes" entails a risk; these terms may imply that the views of young students are completely inadequate and that the views of older children or disciplinary experts are entirely superior. In fact, however, the situation proves far more complex. There are positive rationales underlying the views held by young children, and often these perspectives harbor important insights, which may be lost by older children and may seem obscure or remote to beginning students. By the same token, there is no smooth road from misconceptions to correct conceptions, from rigidly applied algorithms to flexible trafficking between formalisms and their referents, from stereotypes to rounded, multiply nuanced views. All understandings are partial and subject to change; far more important than arrival at a "correct view" is an understanding of the processes whereby misconceptions are reformulated or stereotypes dissolved. Because of their vividness and suggestiveness, I continue to use the terms "misconceptions" and "stereotypes" here; however, it would be more accurate to speak of "earlier understandings" and "more elaborated forms of understanding."
Reading Selection B  

To Err Is Human  
Lewis Thomas

Mistakes are at the very base of human thought, embedded there, feeding the structure like root nodules. If we were not provided with the knack of being wrong, we could never get anything useful done. We think our way along by choosing between right and wrong alternatives, and the wrong choices have to be made as frequently as the right ones. We get along in life this way. We are built to make mistakes, coded for error.

We learn, as we say, by "trial and error." Why do we always say that? Why not "trial and rightness" or "trial and triumph"? The old phrase puts it that way because that is, in real life, the way it is done.

A good laboratory, like a good bank or a corporation or government, has to run like a computer. Almost everything is done flawlessly, by the book, and all the numbers add up to the predicted sums. The days go by. And then, if it is a lucky day, and a lucky laboratory, somebody makes a mistake: the wrong buffer, something in one of the blanks, a decimal misplaced in reading counts, the warm room off by a degree and a half, a mouse out of his box, or just a misreading of the day's protocol. Whatever, when the results come in, something is obviously screwed up, and then the action can begin.

The misreading is not the important error: it opens the way. The next step is the crucial one. If the investigator can bring himself to say, "But even so, look at that!" then the new finding, whatever it is, is ready for snatching. What is needed, for progress to be made, is the move based on the error.

Whenever new kinds of thinking are about to be accomplished, or new varieties of music, there has to be an argument beforehand. With two sides debating in the same mind, haranguing, there is an amiable understanding that one is right and the other wrong. Sooner or later the thing is settled, but there can be no action at all if there are not the two sides, and the argument. The hope is in the faculty of wrongness, the tendency toward error. The capacity to leap across mountains of information to land lightly on the wrong side represents the highest of human endowments.

It may be that this is a uniquely human gift, perhaps even stipulated in our genetic instructions. Other creatures do not seem to have DNA sequences for making mistakes as a routine part of daily living, certainly not for programmed error as a guide for action.

We are at our human finest, dancing with our minds, when there are more choices than two. Sometimes there are ten, even twenty different ways to go, all but one bound to be the wrong, and the richness of selection in such situations can lift us onto totally new ground. This process is called exploration and is based on human fallibility. If we had only a single center in our brains, capable of responding only when a correct decision was to be made, instead of the jumble of different credulous, easily conned clusters of neurons that provide for being flung off into blind alleys, up trees, down dead ends, out into blue sky, along wrong turnings, around bends, we could only stay the way we are today, stuck fast.

The lower animals do not have this splendid freedom. They are limited most of them, to absolute infallibility. Cats, for all their good side, never make mistakes. I have never seen a maladroit, clumsy, or blundering cat. Dogs are sometimes fallible, occasionally able to make charming minor mistakes, but they get this way by trying to mimic their masters. Fish are flawless in everything they do. Individual cells in a tissue are mindless machines, perfect in their performance, as absolutely inhuman as bees.

We should have this in mind as we become dependent on more complex computers for the arrangement of our affairs. Give the computers their heads, I say; let them go their way. If we can learn to do this, turning our heads to one side and wincing while the work proceeds, the possibilities for the future of mankind, and computerkind, are limitless. Your average good computer can make calculations in an instant which would take a lifetime of slide rules for any of us. Think of what we could gain from the near infinity of precise, machine-made miscomputation which is now so easily within our grasp. We would begin the solving of some of our hardest problems. How, for instance, should we go about organizing ourselves for social living on a planetary scale, now that we have become, as a plain fact of life, a single community? We can assume, as a working hypothesis, that all the right ways of doing this are unworkable. What we need, then, for moving ahead, is a set of wrong alternatives much longer and more interesting than the short list of mistaken courses that any of us can think up right now. We need, in fact, an infinite list, and when it is printed out we need the computer to turn on itself and select, at random, the next way to go. If it is a big enough mistake, we could find ourselves on a new level, stunned, out in the clear, ready to move again.

Sample Writing Assignment
With these reading selections by Howard Gardner and Lewis Thomas in mind, write an essay in which you discuss error and learning. In your essay summarize Howard Gardner's criticism of the schools. Draw a relationship between Gardner's ideas and what you have just read about the value and utility of error. In light of the reading selections, describe your own experience or observations of learning, either in school or out. Discuss the degree to which your experience does or does not reflect the ideas of Gardner or Thomas or both. You may address these points in any order, but be careful to respond to all parts of the assignment and to connect your thoughts into a single, clearly-organized essay. Make specific references to the readings to support your ideas.

Sample Student Essays
The essays on the following pages, written by CUNY students who participated in a pilot study, are printed with permission. Their purpose is to give you a sampling of student essays that demonstrate varying levels of writing proficiency. The eight essays are printed in descending order of excellence.

Essay A
Using computers as comparisons to the human mind, Lewis Thomas' "To Err is Human" stresses the importance of mistakes as a tool for action. He states that to err is what separates the human mind and superhuman, electronic minds. While computers have the capacity to produce an infinite amount of precise calculations, glitches and errors will still be made, and the corrections made by humans. He mentions that the knack of being wrong is "a uniquely human gift" and that it should be used as "a guide for action." Thomas stresses the significance of error as a motivation to illicit the appropriate response – correction – in order to know.

Mistakes are necessary and Thomas points out that if we were completely free of making them, "we could never get anything useful done." He mentions that "wrong choices have to be made as frequently as the right ones" for the human mind thinks and makes decisions based on right and wrong alternatives.

Such is the idea that ties in with Howard Gardener's "The Difficulties Posed by Schools." Gardener makes the point that school fail to stress the importance of understanding over the ability to "memorize and feed back definitions upon request." He adds that teachers do not challenge their students by asking questions "that will force their students to stretch in new ways which will risk failures."

Gardener maintains that genuine understanding is a low priority in scholastic education, and becomes lost when teachers and students revel only in the regurgitation of memorized facts and concepts. This poses somewhat of a competition between those "text-friendly" students who have that ability, with students whose intellectual strengths lie in other areas.

In connection to Thomas' notion of "error as important," Gardener upholds the same idea by stating that students and teachers together must be willing to "undertake risks for understanding" if success is to follow. This cannot be achieved if the only response desired are "ritualized, note, or conventionalized performances."

What a coincidence to be writing about the faults of scholastic learning when, just the other day, I had discussed the same issue with my parents. I had come to the conclusion that, although blessed with high grades throughout my educational years, I did not come to an understanding of the material learned until college. Not until then, when teachers were open to opinions and challenges, did I start my in-depth cognitive learning. I definitely agree with Lewis Thomas and Howard Gardener when they stress the importance of failure. Making mistakes is what sets success. One cannot excel if one does not know where problems lie and how to correct them.

Comments on Essay A: Rating = 5/6
A good understanding of the reading selections and a unified, tightly-organized structure make this a strong essay. In addition, the student enhances the discussion by quoting appropriately. Other distinguishing features of this essay are its generally clear, fluid prose and its use of fairly sophisticated sentence structure to express complex ideas. While the concluding paragraph presents the student's own experience somewhat glibly, all in all, the essay is an effective response to a challenging exam-writing task.
Essay P

Learning is an on-going process that never ends. To acquire information is to not just by listening to lectures and answering test questions correctly. It is how one uses their tools wisely in order for successful learning to take place. Without possessing methods of effective learning, one might not be considered to actually understand something.

In "To Err is Human" by Lewis Thomas, he stresses the word "error." Why does he emphasize this word? Lewis makes a point that all living organisms including computers are bound to make errors. "We are built to make mistakes coded for error", says Lewis. Without making mistakes, new discoveries and new understandings will not occur. Mistakes cannot be avoided, we all make them and it helps us find out what is needed to rectify the problem so the mistake will not occur again. Errors also help us learn the kinds of mistakes we tend to make to pinpoint a individual's "weakness."

Therefore, errors are actually positive by helping us find solutions and advancing to a higher order of knowledge and learning. It is a tool that is subtle to people but without errors, there will be no advancements. "If it is a big enough mistake, we could find ourselves on a new level, stunned, out in the clear, ready to move again"(4).

In "The difficulties Posed By School" by Howard Gardner, Gardner points out the fallibilities of the school system. "The curriculum of school ought to go beyond a rehearsal of facts, however, and introduce students to the ways of thinking used in different disciplines"(9). Simply recalling facts via rote memorization, does little to true understanding of the material they have learn.

Another interesting fact Gardner points out is the student's lack of ability to distinguish intuitive learning and scholastic learning. Gardner admits that this hard to accomplish. Another stumbling block Gardner points out is students must be aware that they learn outside of school may not coincide with the learning in a educational institution.

So what changes can take place in the academia world of learning? One problem addressed by Gardner is the mutual agreement between the student and teacher of "correct answer compromises"(10). The problem with this tool of understanding is once the student has answered a question correctly, no further assessments are made to ensure full understanding. This is one of the problems of conventional learning in schools.

"As I have come to express it, neither teachers nor students are willing to undertake "risks for understanding."(10). This is the most important Gardner makes about the schools failure in helping students toward understanding. Teachers and students are not willing to take the initiative of true learning. Gardner criticizes the use of conventional assessment to check the student's understanding of materials. Gardner makes the point that traditional "instruments" used to check understanding will not be beneficial in the long run. "...for genuine understanding cannot come about so long as one accepts ritualized, rote, or conventionalized performances" (10).

In both readings, Gardner and Thomas attempts to address the problems of learning and acquiring information. Gardner identifies the ideal way of real understanding and how school does not fulfill that goal. Lewis points out that error is rather not a infallibility in humans but a strength that we possess to new discovery and understand our process of learning. Although both authors has a different approach in discussing the different areas of learning, they both offers solutions to help us learn more effectively and efficiently.

As I read both readings, I am able to relate the discussion of problems and solutions to my personal experience. Being a student in school and out of school, I am able to understand how I learn effectively. One major problem I had a difficulty in school was finding a consistent method of studying. I learned by as Gardner states, "trial and error." If a certain method didn't work for me, I would try a different tool or approach to learning and understanding material. My attempt was to go beyond note memorization and to actually understand. When you understand something, it is easier for you to absorb the material than painstakingly, memorize material you can't even interpret.

The way I was assessed in school was not what I called the ideal way of learning. For example, after taking a test I would forget the information because I had to worry about new information for the next test. I thought to myself, why remember old information that wasn't going to be on the next test?

Mistakes made on exams were to be accepted. The teacher just labeled the question as incorrect without offering an explanation. Without the teacher helping me understand my error, I couldn't reach the next advancement of understanding the question by understanding my error. This can contributed to the fact that each teacher is forced to follow a curriculum implemented by the school system. Teachers just didn't have the time to go over student's errors because he or she had to get everything covered on the curriculum "...bureaucratized institutions have difficulty in dealing with ends that cannot be readily quantified"(10).

More problems are faced with the task of learning. One, humans have to use our weaknesses into advantage. For example, understanding errors made by an individual. Two, the individual's success towards understanding because of the way the school adoption of an assembly line of learning. The assembly line of learning being schools spoon feeding students knowledge with minimal understanding.
We as learners must adopt effective tools towards genuine understanding. Without these tools, a person cannot claim themselves as true learners. True learning is accomplished by making that knowledge part of yourself lasting a lifetime.

Comments on Essay P: Rating = 4
This essay shows a good understanding of the reading selections. That sense is bolstered by specific quotations and appropriate references, as well as by accurate summarizing. The writer has produced a unified and fully developed essay that permits some depth of analysis and comparison. The essay is rated 4 and not 5, however, in part because the style is loose, and there are too many lapses in use of conventions, even for exam writing. Nevertheless, the student has written an essay that fulfills the assignment adequately.

Essay M

Essay M was written in response to a variation on the writing assignment in which Reading Selection B was "The Naked Source" by Linda Simon

The definition of understanding is not knowing. Many students and educators believe if a student can recite or rememberize answers they understand the material. Howard Gardner and Linda Simon disagree with this belief.

Howard says, "If you answer questions on a multiple-choice test in a certain way, or carry out a problem set in a specified manner, you will be credited with understanding." Because you can answer a question correctly doesn't mean you understand. According to Howard, understanding is being able to apply the information received. Many students are unable to apply information they are received. They can answer a question correctly at that particular time, but if that same question was to be reworded they would not be able to do the same.

Howard believe that schools often fail to help the majority of their students to achieve understanding for various reasons. One reason is because young children master and adopt to certain ways of learning before attending school. Then when they attend school they face a whole different order of learning. Now that they are in school they have to adapt to a new way of learning and getting a understanding. Howard says, researchers at Johns Hopkins, M.I.T. have documented that students that receive high grades in college courses are many times not able to solve basic problems and questions given in a different form on which they have been recently instructed and tested.

Howard agrees with Linda on her belief that students... "need to understand the role of imagination and intuition in the telling of histories, they need to practice, themselves, confronting sources, making judgements, and defending conclusions. Howard expands on if students stray away from their "discipline-related form" of knowing then they can get a better understanding. There should not be rules and regulations on how to learn such as—You must read a host of books to begin with a text. You can read thousands of books and when you finish you don't understand a word you read. This often happens to me.

When the professor assigns a reading assignment to the class I read the assign pages. The professor then gives a test on the material read and I get a high score on it. Guess what? I still don't understand what I read. I can quote sentences and definitions from the reading material, but I do not understand it. So, I agree with Howard and Linda that knowing is not understanding.

Comments on Essay M: Rating = 3
Although Essay M could benefit from more development, especially in the use of the student's own experience, the overall structure is clear and logically sequenced. The writer makes good use of the Gardner reading, incorporating it into the essay in a way that demonstrates adequate understanding; however, the Simon reading is scarcely discussed. For the most part, the student observes conventions of written English, but the language is sometimes too informal for academic writing and, in the fourth paragraph, clarity breaks down. The writer also needs to follow conventions for identifying sources by referring to authors by their last names rather than their first names. This essay is rated 3 and not 4 largely because of its uneven treatment of the two readings, its need for more development, and the lapses in use of conventions.

Essay F

Lewis Thomas and Howard Gardner really tempt the human mind with a different viewpoint of learning on all levels.

Lewis Thomas actually "flips" our common thinking and informs us that error or being wrong is what opens the door to new finding in all aspects of life.

Furthermore, Thomas enlightens us on the fact that human DNA is indeed "coded for error". If one gives this concept good thought one can reveal that if we made no errors, there would be no need for experimenting or checking, or even further research.
In the next passage reading Howard Gardner expands on "understanding" and which the majority of students fail to achieve it.

He gives us an example on how students past test and yet still fail to truely understand concepts. For, example, if elaborate on a problem in a certain manner, or answer questions on a multiple choice test in a certain way, the instructor can easily credit you with understanding the material, meanwhile you don't.

Also major points are made on why most students don't achieve mastery or even close to mastery in schools. Long time problems of over populated classrooms, harsh rules and regulations, and students' personal problems will always be around.

However there is another problem which portrays similarity with Lewis Thomas' piece concerning the advantages of being wrong. Teacher(s) usually don't give students challenging problems that would force students to stretch their brains in new ways. Teachers would rather post simple questions to avoid the risk of failure by the student and embarrassment to both.

I believe Howard Gardner is trying to say neither students nor teachers are at all anxious to take risks for the sake of understanding, in case of error. Error which is basically what steers new evolvement and achievements in technology, and is in fact the force behind the wheel that needs to keep rolling in our everyday lives.

Personally, I agree with both authors, and can relate in my own experience to the idea that understanding is not only passing a test. For example, I took a Calculus course in senior year high school. I got to college and had to take it over because I didn't understand it even after I past the course. I believe this makes us as humans and error-makers, not to take short cuts and to fully understand everything we are involved in.

Comments on Essay F: Rating = 2/3
The writer of Essay F is able in places to paraphrase accurately and makes a plausible connection between the two readings. This essay is not a 3 because inadequate paragraphing and lack of development make the essay seem disconnected and vague ("Also major points are made on which most students don't achieve mastery of even close to mastery in schools.") The connection to the student's experience is superficial. While the essay communicates clearly at times, sections are unclear and lapses in use of conventions impede comprehension.

Essay H

Everyone has a different point of view. Every human has his/her own abilities to distinguish right from wrong. Even that some humans do not develop the skills necessary to do this task. But, as what Lewis Thomas states, "It is human to make mistakes".

Lewis concept of "error" is that it is ok to make a mistake as a human. Make mistakes is in our DNA as a function from where we can learn. As humans we make mistakes it is natural but as humans we also have learn how to make that mistake a positive error. Humans make mistakes everyday but also learn from them. Some mistakes can be helpful or harmful at the same time. A mistake that is unsuspected, can be helpful in the future for human society.

Understanding means that a student is able to confront a question in any way that question is written. Understanding means that a student has the abilities necessary to develop the skills he/she has learn this is the concept that Howard Gardner means by "understanding". The way he finds out that schools often fail to help students to achieve it are: schools show a material in the same pattern and schools don't help students to develop the skills necessary to apply what the students learn. The connections that both authors have are similarities. The two authors Lewis and Howard express that "mistakes" and understanding" are two human functions. Functions that come in our DNA and we humans develop them. As humans we find a way to handle them the best way we can.

As a student a support both authors. I support Lewis Thomas because I have experienced mistakes from which I have learn. An example is when I was trying to learn how to walk. At that moment a made different mistakes that later on help to find a way to walk. I also support Howard Gardner conclusion of understanding. I have been in schools where the teachers don't really teach a student the skills to apply what he/she has learn. Those experiences in school make me support Howard conclusion. Furthermore, I also believe that is not only ok to make mistake but that they are necessary in order to progress. Understanding is a human skill that we are born with but that we need skills in order to develop that understanding.

Comments on Essay H: Rating = 2
The writer of Essay H attempts to answer all parts of the writing assignment and to link them into an essay, but the sample shows only a partial understanding of the readings. While the sample does have a rudimentary structure, it is scored 2 and not 3 because it does not develop its ideas fully enough for clear understanding, and the paragraphs do not come together as a unified piece of writing. The writing lacks fluency, and there are many lapses in use of conventions, some of which impede comprehension.
Essay T
In today’s society students of today has different ways of dealing with learning and education. Therefore, I believe that teacher should ask the question what it is really students needs to know about themself and the ways students look at the learning process. The point to this problem, that people are trying to find out for several years, but everyone see it differently, say that the understanding of learning starts at home, school or even upon one’s own, but no knows where it really starts.

If people look at the first stage of learning they may say it begin at home. I say it is the surroundings where that person is being raise in, which is entirely different from a school surroundings.

Another, aspect of learning has to do with one’s own common-sense. Students can not think without that active force which is common-sense, without this force their will be no need for life. More so, the whole point to learning is that it represent by an extension to the brain.

As I look at the difficulties of learning the are not many. It has to do with ones own self, because neither teachers or students have been able to over take the understanding of learning except to come up with a right or wrong answer to their problem, because it was to be true in society. If people look into some of the things are being asked by teachers, the would see that their learning process is being taken away from them. While teachers are hoping that later the can develop sense of learning.

I really could not think.

Comments on Essay T: Rating = 1
Essay T attempts a discussion of learning. It is rated 1 because the readings are never mentioned, nor is the writing assignment addressed. It is difficult to understand what the student is trying to say because the writing is not clear, and there are many serious lapses in the use of the conventions of written English.

Essay E
Essay E was written in response to a variation on the writing assignment in which Reading Selection B was "The Naked Source" by Linda Simon.

"The Central Puzzles of Learning" by Howard Gardner. Linguists are the world with many languages. Every person has a dispensation to speak. When a person tries to master his own language in school, he should learn a grammar book to help him to understand the language. Young children master the language and art form like music. They also develop their complex theories of the mind.

To speak and to understand the language proved for the students unproblematic, but reading and writing posed many questions. For example, students who trained well, got high grades, test scores and accolades.

For example, in physics, those students who got high grades are unable to solve basic problems in physics courses.

In Mathematics, students fail in simple algebra problems. In biology and science, young adults misunderstand and fail in it.

On the other hand, with "Lind Simon", what is the history? Students need to understand the history, practice and then to make judgments. They need to read books and study the map.

Also with Gardner, teachers required students to answer kinds of problems, mastered the terms, and to memorized the request. If the the students were able to provide answers genuine, they would success.

In conclusion, Both of these authors stress how the students understand the language or the material by reading books or studying good. It is the only thing to success.

Comments on Essay E: Rating = 1
Most of Essay E consists of an attempt to summarize one of the readings, which seems only partially understood. The second reading is scarcely mentioned and appears not to have been understood. References to the selections are general rather than specific. There is no connection made between the readings and the student's experience. This sample is rated 1 and not 2 because it does not respond to all or most parts of the writing assignment, and the essay demonstrates numerous serious lapses in use of the conventions of written English. Often it is difficult or impossible to follow what is being said.
Task 2
Analyzing and Integrating Information from Graphs and Text (1 Hour)
Sample Assignment and Student Responses

The responses on the following pages, printed with permission, were written by CUNY students who participated in a pilot study. The examination question they responded to is reprinted here:

Directions
On the following pages, you will see a brief reading selection and two figures (graphs, tables, charts, maps, or other figures), all on the same or a related topic. Assume that all three came from different sources. Read carefully the reading selection and examine the data presented in the two graphs. Then, in a well-organized response, state the major claims made in the reading selection and explain how data in the two graphs support and/or challenge those claims. Be specific. Your response will be evaluated for accuracy, completeness, and clarity. As an aid to preparing for your response, you might find it helpful to take notes on the reading passage or list the information presented in the figures. Your notes will not be evaluated.

Reading Selection
The widespread assumption that one needs a college education to succeed in the modern world is wrong—or at least seriously misguided. Our own city of Croftsburg remains a thriving center of building and manufacturing with thousands of high-paying jobs for skilled workers such as carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. These are good jobs, with generous benefits, for which a college education is not a prerequisite. Yet many of these jobs go unfilled because there are simply not enough qualified applicants in the area.

Why? The answer is clear. Over the last few decades, the board of education has systematically eliminated vocational study from its standard public high school curriculum. Our school officials feel that students must have a college education to succeed in today's marketplace, assuming that a high school diploma in and of itself is insufficient for students to earn a livable wage that will support a family. Thus, in the late 1970's the board imposed a college-prep academic track on all students, regardless of their aptitude for or interest in higher education. As a result of this decision, industrial courses like woodworking were eliminated from the curriculum.

This was a terrible mistake. If anything, Croftsburg needs more and better vocational training schools where interested students can learn a trade. While there may be some overall correlation between salary and college education, once you get to specific individuals in specific trades, you can rapidly deviate from these average trends.
Figures 1 and 2
Task 2 Sample Student Responses

Example of a Strong Response

Essay A

The article in the “Croftburg Beacon” says that the school boards decision to impose a college prep academic track or all students in the late ’70’s was a mistake and that vocational training should be available and is in many cases preferable. It contends that there is a lack of skilled labor in such fields as electricity, plumbing, and carpentry because of this change and that despite a general relationship between a college education and salary, there are often exceptions when you take individual examples.

The data in the graphs provided does not make apparent these specific individuals the article mentions. Although there is certainly a decrease in unemployment for non college graduates indicated in Figure 1, implying that the work force is decreasing slowly as alluded to in the article, the fact of the consistency of unemployment rates for college graduates shows the market has not been flooded and the decision of the board was not necessarily a bad one. One would expect from this information alone that wages for non college graduates would have increased dramatically as demand for this type of worker increased. This in fact is what the article states as the case when it mentions specific individuals in specific trades.

Figure 2 however shows the contrary. All of the fields shown, with half from the college graduate pool and half from the non-college graduate pool, exhibit a similar percentage of wage increase of approximately 50%-60%. There are exceptions such as the carpenters increase 78% but this is matched by a similar increase among attorneys. The most tale-tell sign in this second graph is the fact that none of the vacations mentioned have reached a wage equal to that of a computer analyst in 1970. When one considers the effect of inflation on the dollar in that 30-year span, it is difficult to argue with the board’s decision.

Comments on Essay A: Score = 5

This writer provides a full, analytical response to the task. In the first paragraph, the major claims are summarized clearly and accurately in the writer’s own words. In the following paragraphs, the writer demonstrates the ability to integrate information from the text and the graphs (“Although there is certainly a decrease in unemployment for non college graduates indicated in Figure 1 implying that the work force is decreasing slowly as indicated in the article . . .”). The writer also links the two graphs (“one would expect from this information alone . . . This is in fact what the article states . . . Figure 2 however shows the contrary”).

The concluding sentences bring an insightful analysis of the information in the graph back to bear on the original claim (“The most tale-tell sign in this second graph is the fact that some of the vocations mentioned have reached a wage equal to that of a computer analyst in 1970. When one considers the effect of inflation on the dollar in that 30 year span, it is difficult to argue with the board’s conclusion”). Use of transitions and references, as well as clear language, facilitate communication of the writer’s ideas.

Example of a Successful Response

Essay B

According to the above reading, there is problem of not enough skill workers in the domestic trade business, for example, carpenters, plumber, electrician. This problem is evident in the town of Croftsburg which is “thriving town” with thousands of “high paying jobs for skilled workers”. However, the town has mixed reactions over whether children should be directly educated with ‘college-prep’ course so that students will make a decision to go to college to better their chances of a well paying future career; or whether the schools should employ “better vocational training”, so that students who don’t intend on going to college could gain expertise and skill in a trade, which in this town has a competitive wage to support a family and “generous benefits” without having to go to college.

Thus, according to figure 1, which shows the unemployment rates for college graduated and non-college graduates in Croftsberg, in 1990-1999, it seems that the claim that one doesn’t needs a college education is succeed, is supported. As, the rate of unemployment decreases over the years for 10% in 1990 to 4% in 1999. Thus suggesting that even those who didn’t go to college still managed to find a job, regardless of education.

Furthermore, for the data represented in Figure 2, which demonstrates the average annual wages for selected occupations in Croftsberg in 1970 and 1999; it can be said that over the years wages for both domestic labor jobs and skilled occupations, such as attorneys, computer analyzing, increased. Therefore, get a good higher paying job or not go to college and people would still receive a decent wage that would support a family. It just means that if you
are willing to put more time into learning a profession and go to school you are more likely to get a higher paying job.

Netheless, it is clear that in Croftsberg that one could choice to go to college or not because there is high employment rates and impressive wages in whatever career path an individual choises. Especially demonstrating that over the years, the effect of changing the curriculums to more vocational studies in schools did not cause or “terrible mistake.”

Comments on Essay B: Score = 4
This response represents an adequate performance of the task. The first paragraph summarizes the major claims accurately, occasionally using aptly chosen and clearly identified quotations from the passage. The writer accurately points out a link between each of the figures and the reading selection (“Thus, according to Figure 1 . . . the claim that one doesn’t need a college education . . . is supported”) and explains the implication of the links (“Therefore, suggesting that whether you go to college and get a good higher paying job or not go to college people would still receive a decent wage that would support a family.”) However, the analysis does not go beyond the obvious interpretation. Although the writer’s language contains errors and some sentences are not well-formed, the writer’s meaning is almost always clear. The flow of the response and the connections between ideas are helped by effective use of transitional words (“Furthermore . . . Therefore . . . Nevertheless . . . Especially . . .”).

Example of an Unsuccessful Response

Essay E
Croftsburg schools are at vicissitude levels in terms of college education being a more concerned option, or having it be for an unnecessary purpose. To prepare some students for college, they have put out some college-prep academic courses in replace of vocational courses that deals with woodworking. These vocational programs are put to good use since most of the standardize jobs, like plumbing, engineer, to name a few. Unfortunately, because of the elimination of vocational studies, the qualifications to get the job puts the person at a risk to go through four or more years of college work that they may not need.

Some people are saying this is a wrong move to make. They are saying this would isolate the individuals who actually want to get vocational knowledge so they can have the best of both worlds. Even though similarities are evident, there is still a distinction that neither can't overcome the other.

Which begs the question: Is bigger better? According to figure 1, the difference in unemployment for a college graduate, and a non-college graduate are staggering. Close to four percent in 1999, who were non-college graduate, were unemployed, compared to ten percent in 1990. While college graduate stayed between the five-and-six percent line. This shows the significant effect that the vocational programs may have had. Figure 2, on the other hand, shows those same vocational careers (like plumber, electrician) mentioned are below average, in terms of annual wages, with those college-educated careers. (like lawyer, computer analyst, and even teacher).

What is the bottom line here? It is that there is no easy solution to whichever sort of career you would like to partake it. Thinking in terms of family, longevity in that career, skills, and whether it is financially stable for you. Taking out the vocational programs though won't help this decision, it, would be foreshadowed by the college education. It's the pupil, or individuals choice on what fits him best.

Comments on Essay E: Score = 1
This response demonstrates some understanding of the major claims but is unsuccessful because of a superficial and at times inaccurate interpretation of the data and because the language at many points is unclear. Although attempting to compare the data to the information in the reading selection, the writer misreads Figure 1, claiming “According to Figure 1, the difference in unemployment for a college graduate, and a non-college graduate are staggering.” In fact, the difference is very small. Similarly, in discussing Figure 2, the writer claims that the salaries of non-college graduate are “below average” with no information about what “average” is and describes “even teachers” as having higher salaries than skilled trade workers when the difference shown in the graph is actually marginal.

The writer’s language is often unclear, obscuring rather than conveying meaning (“Croftsburg schools are at vicissitude levels in terms of college education being a more concerned option, or having it be for an unnecessary purpose.”). The concluding paragraph seems to take the response in the direction of the writer’s own opinion, something not called for in the directions.
CUNY Proficiency Examination Task 2 Generic Scoring Guide

Score

6  Meets requirements for a 5
    AND offers more insightful relevant support/discussion/analysis
    OR makes one additional relevant observation about the relationship of
    the Figure(s) to one of the Claims

5  Meets the requirements for a 4
    AND makes one additional relevant observation about the relationship of
    the Figure(s) to one of the Claims

4  Accurately states the Major Claims of the reading selection
    Explains the relationship of Figure 1 and Figure 2 to the Major Claims
    Uses language generally clearly

3  Does not meet the requirements for a 4 BECAUSE
    It ignores one source
    OR misinterprets some elements of the data
    OR treats all sources superficially
    OR may be somewhat disorganized so that connections among data
    are not consistently clear
    BUT uses language generally clearly

2  Is weaker than a 3 BECAUSE
    It ignores or misinterprets much of the data
    OR does not explain relationships among the data (treats elements discretely)

1  Is weaker than a 2 BECAUSE
    It presents virtually no accurate interpretation of data

0  Blank, completely off topic, illegible, or written in a language other than English
**Campus Resources**

**Baruch College**

**Testing**
Skills Assessment Office
1 Bernard Baruch Way (25th St.)
Room 5-224
646-312-4305

**Test Preparation Information**
SACC (Student Academic Consulting Center)
1 Bernard Baruch Way, Room 2-118
646-312-4830

English Department Writing Center
1 Bernard Baruch Way
6th Floor

**Borough of Manhattan Community College**

**Testing**
Testing Office – N700
212-346-8385

**Test Preparation Information**
Developmental Skills – N428
Prof. Sharona A. Levy, CPE Liaison
212-346-8337

**Bronx Community College**

**Testing**
Colston Hall, Rm 711
718-289-5760

**Test Preparation Information**
Writing Laboratory
Philosophy Hall Basement

PASS Center
Sage Hall, Rm.210
718-789-5359

**Brooklyn College**

**Testing**
Testing Office – 0203 James Hall
718-951-5916

**Test Preparation Information**
Learning Center – 1300 Boylan Hall
718-951-5821

**City College**

**Testing**
212-650-6488

**Test Preparation Information**
Writing Center – Harris 015
212-650-8104

**College of Staten Island**

**Testing**
College Testing Office – 1A—104
718/982-2382

**Test Preparation Information**
Instructional Support Services, Bldg. IL, Rm 117
Contact: Richard Vento
718/982-3962

**Hostos Community College**

**Testing**
Assessment Center – A127
718/518-4346

**Test Preparation Information**
English Department
Prof. Diana Diaz, CPE Liaison
718-518-6600

**Hunter College**

**Testing**
Testing Office,
Room 150 Hunter North
212-772-4898 / 4868 / 4920

**Test Preparation Information**
The Writing Center
416 Thomas Hunter
212-772-4212

**John Jay College**

**Testing**
Testing Office – 3258 North Hall
212-237-8108

**Test Preparation Information**
Writing Center – 2450 North Hall
212-237-8567
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**Medgar Evers College**
CPE Liaison

Lorraine Kuziw  
Language, Literature and Philosophy  
Phone – 718-270-4951

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CPE Liaison

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CPE Liaison

Cynthia Haller  
English Department  
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