

ARE YOU READY FOR COLLEGE-LEVEL WRITING?

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE CUNY ASSESSMENT TEST IN WRITING (CATW)

What is the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) and Why Do You Need to Pass It?

The CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) is a standardized writing test that measures your ability to do college-level writing in English. Entering first-year students take the test to determine their placement into English composition, ESL, or developmental courses.

If you PASS the test, you can go straight to college level, credit-bearing classes. If you DO NOT PASS the test, you will be required to take remedial writing courses and to take the test again. Therefore, you should take the test seriously and give it your full effort. Otherwise, you could end up spending valuable time and tuition in remedial, non-credit courses than you might not really need.

The term “standardized test” means that the test is given to all test takers in the same manner and under the same conditions; it is scored by trained readers using “standard” rules or criteria. The CATW asks you to write an essay in response to a reading passage you are given and to show competency in five categories (you receive a score 1-6 in each). The five categories are explained in detail on page 2-3.

In the test, you need to:

- identify key ideas within the reading passage
- write a brief summary of the key ideas in the reading
- demonstrate basic critical thinking in response to these key ideas
- identify a key idea in the reading passage and present a clearly written response to that idea
- write an essay that is well organized and shows connections between ideas
- support ideas with relevant personal experience, readings, schoolwork, and/or other sources of information
- demonstrate competence in sentence construction, sentence variety, and word choice
- demonstrate correct usage, grammar, and mechanics

Advice from Students Who Have Taken the Test:

v Read *The New York Times* as many of the CATW articles are from there
v PROOFREAD v Believe that you can do it!! v When things seem tough, try not to give up v Make sure you don't repeat yourself on the exam
v Take your time to read through the article and make sure you understand it v Know the formula of each part of the essay: intro, body paragraphs, and conclusion v Build up your vocabulary v Bring a dictionary with you (at all times) v Get sleep the night before the exam!

UNDERSTANDING THE CATW

The writing directions for all CATW exams are the same:

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.

THE FIVE SCORING CATEGORIES

The CATW graders score your exam in five different categories: Critical Response, Structure, Development, Sentence Structure/Word Choice, and Grammar. Each category is scored 1-6, with 6 as the highest possible score. *The scores from the first three categories (Critical Response, Structure, and Development) are then doubled.* Below is a guide to what each category entails.

	Category	What Does This Mean?
1	<i>Critical Response</i>	The grader assesses how well you understand this passage. Also, the grader evaluates whether you completed the required tasks: summarizing, discussing, responding to significant ideas, and providing examples to support your response. Your argument is crucial in this category. <u>Express your own ideas about the subject matter, rather than simply repeating the author's opinions.</u>
2	<i>Development</i>	Here, the grader wants to see you fully explain your ideas. Do not assume that your position is an obvious one. Your task is to convince the reader through 2-3 body paragraphs with detailed examples! Do this in dialogue with the text. This means that you are constantly integrating ideas from the passage with examples and ideas of your own.

3	<i>Structure</i>	It's very important that you are clear and organized in presenting your ideas. Your grader will be looking for a central focus (or "thesis") and logical explanation of this main idea through an essay with a clear introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion. Later in this handbook, we will practice using transition words, which will help you make connections between ideas.
4	<i>Language Use: Sentences and Word Choice</i>	Mix it up! Variety in your sentence structure and word choices will help your score in this category.
5	<i>Language Use: Grammar, Usage, Mechanics</i>	Your sentences must be as clear as you can make them. For example, subjects and verbs should agree; verb tense should be consistent; correct punctuation is necessary. The stronger your grammar skills, the higher your score will be in this category.

To repeat, the scores for categories 1, 2, and 3 above are each doubled. The scores for categories 4 and 5 are each counted once. This means that if you want to maximize your score, you should put extra effort into "critical response," "development," and "structure."

A Note on Reading the CATW Passage

This test is in large part a test of your reading comprehension, so it always starts with a short reading that you'll be given at the start of the exam period. Know what to expect: a roughly 300word passage that often has a clearly stated thesis at the beginning, with examples, facts, and research to support this main idea. It is smart to spend 15 minutes reading and taking notes before you start to write. Look for examples, but more importantly, figure out what those examples illustrate. Always ask yourself: "Why does the author offer a particular story, quote, or statistic? What bigger point is s/he trying to prove?"

Recommended CATW Essay structure:

The Introduction

Your introduction will mainly consist of your **summary**. However, a strong introduction will attract the reader's attention (**hook**), summarize the piece, and end with your own thesis.

Introduction = **HAT**

Hook + **Author summary** + (your) **Thesis**

The hook The first sentence of your introduction should grab (or "hook") your reader's attention. You want something short and simple that will make your essay stand out. Share a brief anecdote

or react in some way to what you have just read. (If you can't think of anything catchy on the spot, just skip this and go straight to the summary.)

The summary

Present the title of the passage, the author's name, the author's thesis, and three or four main points the author uses to explain his or her thesis. Do not include your personal examples in a summary; save these for the body paragraphs.

The thesis

In the summary, you should already have written down the author's thesis and supporting points. What follows next is your own thesis, which you can present at the very end of the introductory paragraph. Example: *I believe that...*

Body paragraphs

Body paragraphs are each composed of a topic sentence, supporting details, and a concluding sentence. For your CATW essay you need 2 or 3 body paragraphs. The main idea of the paragraph will be determined by your response to the author's ideas. (For instance, do you agree or disagree with the author's point? Why or why not?). Your supporting details will include your own examples and explanations, as well as how your ideas relate to the passage. In addition, provide a concluding sentence that gives your reader a sense that the paragraph is over. Weak, unfocused, or "thin" body paragraphs can hurt your score. Aim to write at least 6-8 sentences for each body paragraph.

There are 2 very important things to remember!

1. You are asked to **DIRECTLY ADDRESS** ideas from the passage, which in fact means that you need to **QUOTE** and/or **PARAPHRASE** from the reading in every body paragraph.
2. You should use **TRANSITIONAL** words and phrases inside and between the paragraphs. Transitions show the relationships between ideas. They are like road signs in that they tell the reader in advance what direction you're heading, before you're suddenly or abruptly on a new road. (For instance: although, since, while, because, for, and, nor, but, yet, so, or, additionally, consequently, moreover, in addition, therefore, first of all, lastly, in conclusion, finally)

Conclusion

You can soon breathe a sigh of relief, as you are nearing the finish line. Instead of simply reiterating the author's thesis and three main points, your conclusion can explain what you learned from the passage, how this information might influence you, potential solutions to the concerns brought up in the article, and the long-term effects of what the author discusses. A trick to remembering this:

Conclusion: **HAM** (**H**ow (article) **A**ffected **M**e)

NOW PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING CATW ESSAY EXAMPLES CAREFULLY...

SAMPLE READING:

Assignment

Begin by reading the passage below.

Hype

Advertisements are the most prevalent and toxic of the mental pollutants. From the moment your alarm sounds in the morning to the wee hours of late-night TV, commercial pollution floods your brain at the rate of about three thousand marketing messages per day. Every day an estimated 12 billion display ads, 3 million radio commercials, and more than 200,000 TV commercials are dumped into North America's collective unconscious. The increase in commercial advertising has happened so steadily and relentlessly that we haven't quite woken up to the absurdity of it all. No longer are ads confined to the usual places: buses, billboards, stadiums. Anywhere your eyes can possibly come to rest is now a place that, in corporate America's view, can and ought to be filled with a logo or product message.

You fill your car with gas, and there's an ad on the nozzle. You wait for your bank machine to spit out money and an ad scrolls by in the little window. You drive through the countryside and the view of the wheat fields is broken at intervals by enormous billboards. Your kids watch Pepsi and Snickers ads in the classroom. A company called VideoCarte installs interactive screens on supermarket carts so that you can see ads while you shop. (A company executive calls the little monitors "the most powerful micromarketing medium available today.") There is nowhere to run. No one is exempt and no one will be spared. In the silent moments of my life, I often used to hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony play in my head. Now I hear that kid singing the Oscar Meyer wiener song.

Excerpted from Kalle Lasn. "Hype," in *Signs of Life in the USA: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers*, 4th ed. Sonia Maasik & Jack Solomon, Eds. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 217 - 220.

Writing Directions

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.

Next, you will read two sample student essays on "Hype." One is a passing essay the other one is not. Let's see if you can guess which is passing and which one is not...

Paper #1

In “Hype,” Kalle Lasn speaks of the significant number of advertisements that people are exposed to today. He refers to them as “mental pollutants,” implying that these ads are taking over our minds and playing a significant role in the way we think. Although I agree that I see hundreds of ads everyday, I feel that they are, in some ways, necessary to our functioning in society.

When I sit down and turn on the television, there’s a good chance many of the channels I flip through are showing a commercial for a new product, or a new movie, or a new T.V. series. Every ten minutes, the showing I’m watching goes into commercials for five minutes, in which time I may see five to ten different commercials. I don’t always realize it when I’m watching T.V., but I receive information about a lot of new things. I may learn about what hot new gadgets are available or about what kind of movies are showing in theatres. When I’m in the train or on the bus, there are ads within the cars, and also many can be seen outside through the window. Even when I’m on the internet, almost every website has ads by Google. I don’t always immediately take note of the ad I see, but I remember seeing a video once that explained how an ad may just be looked upon and the image of which remains in our brains, affecting us psychologically. Thus ads are a significant in our lives.

Although it may be irritating to see an ad come on in the middle of your favorite show, the information supplied by that ad may not be available to you anywhere else. Corporations create ads to keep us updated on what is new. In a world where everyone is so busy working and studying, many people won’t take the time to research and investigate what’s new in the world. Ads keep us informed while we’re busy doing more important things. Even if somebody’s not looking for a specific item, they may see something in an ad that interests them, and may otherwise not know about it. Ads are they only ways for hundreds of millions of people to find out about something.

Kalle Lasn is right that ads are everywhere and play a significant role in our lives. Probably most of the ads we see won’t be beneficial to us, but the concept of advertising is essential in our world for keeping people informed and for helping the economy.

PASSING?

YES

NO

Paper #2

I have read Kalle Lasn's opinions about how are advertisements forming part of human life. I think that his point of view is reflecting Advertisements like the most horrible thing that the company executive can do. However, I do not agree with him because from one way or another it helps companies to make more successful their duties and a busy society to be informed about what are companies offering?

First, all companies have something to offer specially if people are needing this. For instance, In the last month I knew two companies which had to close their services because they were lack of knowledge about Advertisements.

They had many things that people need, but nobody could buy anything because those people did not know about what they were offering. For this reason I believe that advertisements are very need in our everyday.

Secondly, I know that if someone wants information about something he or she has to be look for, but US is a country which has everyone too busy for that noone has time to be looking for. Now, everyone has the time to see those advertisements in usual places: buses, billboards and stadiums because people are interacting with those places everyday in their lives. For instance, people who use the bus to go to their jobs and come back home can see Advertisements on the Bus. Before I was coming to register at Hostos Community College I saw an advertisement on the bus which took all my attention. It said that Hostos has the Best programs for Nursing since I saw that information I came to Hostos and registered for the next semester. For this reason I consider advertisements like something necessary for companies and our society.

Finally, I hope that you understand my opinions and ideas about why advertisements are very important for me and How this can help our society. It was a pleasure to share my opinions with you.

PASSING?

YES

NO

Find out the correct answer on the next page!

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO PRACTICE!! TAKING THIS PRACTICE TEST MAY IMPROVE YOUR CHANCES OF PASSING THE CATW.

(Student Essay #1 was a passing essay, Student Essay #2 was a failing essay).

CATW PRACTICE:

Please read the following passage:

Excerpted from “Let’s Celebrate the Art of Clutter” by Dominique Browning *The New York Times* 5/29/15

We are in a collective, and most unfortunate, paroxysm of guilt and anxiety about stuff. We are being barraged with orders to pare down, throw away, de-clutter. Magazine covers advertise formulas for how to get rid of things (most of which involve buying new things for this purpose). Entire books (books we will soon enough be told to toss) cover the subject. Entire companies are being built on the backs of a neurosis that makes us believe that the process of shedding is complicated to the point of paralyzing.

I would like to submit an entirely different agenda, one that is built on love, cherishing and timelessness. One that acknowledges that in living, we accumulate. We love. We collect. We display. And over the course of a lifetime, we forage, root and rummage around in our stuff, because that is part of what it means to be human. We treasure.

Why on earth would we get rid of our wonderful things? It is time to celebrate the gentle art of clutter. We live, and we pick up things along the way: the detritus of adventure; the vessels of mealtimes; the books and music of a life of the mind; the pleasures of our daily romps through the senses.

These days, having moved several times in several years, I am still mourning the loss of a few things I ought never have given away. I am still overcome by object lust, from time to time. Go ahead, call me materialistic. I’ll just wonder what you think you are made of.

There is a reason we talk about nesting. Next time you are out walking, take a close look at a nest. Nests are full of twigs, bits of fluff, string, moss and bark. Stuff birds take home, and fit to a shape that accommodates their lives. A home that is uniquely theirs, and uniquely beloved.

Writing Directions

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author’s most important ideas. Develop your essay by identifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant, and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that are needed to help your reader follow your thinking. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.

Worksheet. Answer the following questions as best as you can. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, write a coherent, full essay based on your answers (give yourself 90 minutes to complete the essay):

1. What is the main argument that the author makes about “clutter”?

2. What examples and evidence does she use to support her claim?

3. What do you think about “clutter” based on your experience and the reading combined? Do you agree or disagree with the author's' main point? Explain why.

4. Now give reasons that support your view:

Reason 1 (“I agree/disagree because”):

Evidence for Reason 1 (“for example”):

Reason 2 (“I agree/disagree because”):

Evidence for Reason 2 (“for example”):

Reason 3 (“I agree/disagree because”)

Evidence for Reason 3 (“for example”):

FINAL REVIEW

Intro: HAT

Hook+ **A**T&T +**A**uthor’s summary (thesis+ 3 main points) + your **T**hesis (optional) **H**elpful verbs: states, observes, argues, contends, writes, illustrates

Body Paragraphs: AREA

Author’s point+ my **R**esponse+ **E**xample+ **A**uthor connection (do not repeat your first sentence)

Conclusion: HAM

How article **A**ffected **M**e

You're aiming for 5 paragraphs (Intro, 3 BPs, Conclusion). But if you're tight on time, it IS okay to write an intro, 2 SOLID (at least 8 sentences) body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

Tips for Test Day

A. Arrive at the Testing Office **20** minutes early.

B. Bring with you:

1. 2 black or blue pens and 2 #2 pencils
2. photo ID
3. a paper dictionary (bilingual is fine)
4. your confidence

C. Once seated, remember:

1. Your phone **MUST** be off.
2. Do not speak with anyone during the test.
3. When the proctors say to stop writing, you **MUST** put down your pen.
4. Finally, do **NOT** leave the room during the test—this will steal important time from your essay. Take care of all personal business beforehand, including **eating** so you have energy.

D. Do NOT leave early!!! This test is far too important to rush. If you have any time left, use it to add more writing and/or to proofread your work.

E. Most importantly, TRUST YOURSELF.

Need more information? Visit: <http://laguardia.edu/Testing/Resources/> An additional source is the 'CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CATW) Student Handbook.

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