

# ENGLISH COMPASS SAMPLE ITEMS



These sample items are designed to illustrate the form of the items in the COMPASS battery. They have not been pre-tested and have not been subjected to the content and fairness reviews required for all operational items.

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When I'm in New York but feeling lonely for Wyoming I look for the Western movie ads in the subway. But the men I see in those posters with their stern, humorless looks remind me of no one I know in the East. If he's "strong and silent" it's because there's probably no one to talk to. If he "rides away into the sunset" it's because he's been on horseback since four in the morning moving cattle and he's trying, fifteen hours later, to get home to his family. If he's "a rugged individualist" he's also part of a team: ranch work is teamwork and even the glorified open-range cowboys of the 1880s rode up and down the Chisholm Trail in the company of twenty or thirty other riders. It's not toughness but "toughing it out" that counts. In other words, this macho, cultural artifact the cowboy has become is simply a man who possesses resilience, patience, and an instinct for survival. "Cowboys are just like a pile of rocks—everything happens to them. They get climbed on, kicked, rained and snowed on, scuffed up by the wind. Their job is 'just to take it,'" one old-timer told me.

Adapted from Gretel Ehrlich, *The Solace of Open Spaces*. ©by Gretel Ehrlich.

#### Referring

1. According to the passage, cowboys are probably "strong and silent" because:
  - a. their work leaves them no time for conversation
  - b. they have been cautioned not to complain
  - c. they are stern and humorless
  - d. there is no one nearby to listen to them
  - e. their work makes them too tired to talk

#### Reasoning

2. For which of the following statements does the passage give apparently contradictory evidence?
  - a. The cowboy's work takes endurance.
  - b. Cowboys work alone.
  - c. Cowboys are adequately paid.
  - d. The cowboy's image has become romanticized in American culture.
  - e. Cowboys think of themselves as humorless.

#### Prior-Knowledge

3. A subway can best be described as:
  - a. a bus route through town

- b. an underground train
- c. a pedestrian right-of-way
- d. an exit ramp
- e. a bicycle path

### **Sample Passage 2—Practical Reading**

Regular tune-ups of your heating system will cut heating costs and will most likely increase the lifetime and safety of the system. When a service technician performs a tune-up, he or she should test the efficiency of your heating system.

The technician should measure the efficiency of your system both before and after servicing it and provide you with a copy of the results. Combustion efficiency is determined indirectly, based on some of the following tests: 1) temperature of the flue (or chimney); 2) percent carbon dioxide or percent oxygen in the atmosphere; 3) presence of carbon monoxide in the atmosphere; and 4) draft. Incomplete combustion of fuel is the main contributor to low efficiency. If the technician cannot raise the combustion efficiency up to at least 75% after tuning your heating system, you should consider installing a new system or at least modifying your present system to increase its efficiency.

Adapted from Alex Wilson and John Morrill, *Consumer Guide to Home Energy Savings*. ©1993 by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

### **Reasoning**

1. The passage suggests that, if carbon monoxide is present in the atmosphere, it is likely that the:
  - a. heating system is losing efficiency due to incomplete combustion
  - b. heating system only needs minor repairs and will most likely function for a number of years
  - c. temperature of the flue will be lower than expected
  - d. heating system cannot be repaired and must be replaced
  - e. costs for running the heating system will decrease

### **Referring**

2. According to the passage, when performing a tune-up of a heating system, the service technician should:
  - a. ensure that the combustion efficiency is at least 25%
  - b. modify the heating system before initially measuring efficiency
  - c. measure combustion efficiency both before and after servicing the system

- d. provide his or her supervisor with a written report of the system's efficiency
- e. ignore the age of the heating system

**Prior-Knowledge**

3. **Combustion** can best be described as a process of:
- a. fueling
  - b. charging
  - c. spinning
  - d. burning
  - e. cooling

**Vocabulary Diagnostic Test**

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**Noun: Moderate Difficulty**

1. The two old friends had not seen other for years, but a lucky \_\_\_\_ brought them together.
- a. enclosure
  - b. encounter
  - c. justification
  - d. visibility
  - e. installment

**Adjective: High Difficulty**

2. Painting the house was an \_\_\_\_ task. It was not surprising that they were exhausted when they finished the job.
- a. estranged
  - b. opportune
  - c. enviable
  - d. arduous
  - e. insensitive

**Adverb: Low Difficulty**

3. The teacher asked Todd to speak more \_\_\_\_ so that everyone in the class would be able to hear him.
- a. fondly
  - b. hurriedly
  - c. enthusiastically
  - d. conveniently
  - e. loudly

**Verb: Low Difficulty**

4. The artisan used a knife to \_\_\_\_ the piece of wood into the shape of a bird.

- a. grind
- b. twist
- c. whittle

- d. whisk
- e. issue

Scented geraniums, which provide a wide variety of enticing fragrances—strawberry, coconut, peppermint, chocolate, apple, orange, and lemon—are not really geraniums but their distant cousins the pelargoniums. The two look very much alike and belong to the same plant family.

Originally grown in South Africa, scented geraniums were brought to Europe in 1634 by seamen who had stopped to trade while sailing around the Cape of Good Hope. Grown as popular herbs in specialty gardens and as houseplants, scented geraniums were used for spicy teas and potpourris, in bathwater, as cosmetics, and even as insect repellents. When they were brought to America in early Colonial days, their usefulness in medicines, foods, beverages, and crafts made them quite popular.

Today you can find a selection of scented geraniums for sale at most garden centers or nurseries. In South Africa, they are grown outside many people’s doors and in herb gardens. The rose, nutmeg, and apricot geraniums, for example, are most popular as insect repellents and food flavorings.

Scented geranium blossoms come in a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes. Rubbing or gently stroking the leaves releases their fragrant oils.

Adapted from E. Barrie Kavasch, “Fragrant Gifts.” ©1991 by Cobblestone Publishing, Inc.

### Main Idea

1. This passage is mainly about:
  - a. the difference between geraniums and pelargoniums.
  - b. how Colonial America used plants.
  - c. herb gardens around the world.
  - d. trade between South Africa and Europe in 1634.
  - e. the various uses of scented geraniums.

### Explicit Detail

2. Highlight the name of the place where, according to the passage, scented geraniums were first grown.

### Implicit Information

3. According to the information in the passage, which of the following statements is true?
  - a. All geraniums are pelargoniums.
  - b. Some pelargoniums are really geraniums.
  - c. Geraniums and pelargoniums are identical plants.
  - d. Pelargoniums are often referred to as scented geraniums.
  - e. Most scented geraniums are not pelargoniums.

1. Do you enjoy reading?
  - a. always
  - b. sometimes
  - c. never
  
2. What is your most common purpose for reading?
  - a. pleasure
  - b. work
  - c. school
  
3. About how many hours per week do you spend reading for all purposes?
  - a. 0-2
  - b. 3-5
  - c. 6-10
  - d. 11 or more
  
4. Do you read newspapers?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
5. How many hours per week do you spend reading newspapers?
  - a. 0-2
  - b. 3-5
  - c. 6-10
  - d. 11 or more
  
6. If you had more free time, would you choose to spend more time reading?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  
7. How would you rate your ability as a reader?
  - a. excellent
  - b. good
  - c. average
  - d. poor

**Sample Writing Skills Placement Test Essay**

Examinees are presented with an essay similar to the one below and are asked to look for errors in grammar, punctuation, usage, and style. When examinees find what they believe to be errors, they move the cursor to the appropriate part of the text and hit the enter key. An item window appears offering five options for revising that area of text. Note that the first option is always identical to the original wording in the text, and thus represents a NO CHANGE option. Examinees can choose to revise any section of the essay. After revising the essay, examinees are routed to two items focusing on rhetorical strategies.

The essay below contains the same number and types of errors that an operational unit would contain; however, for demonstration purposes, only a handful of these segments have been selected for revision. These segments are indicated by bold lettering, and the items associated with them are shown on the next page.

-----Start Essay-----		
<p><b>An increasing number of lakes and rivers</b> in the northern United States invaded are being by a mussel no larger than a fingernail.</p> <p>The zebra mussel probably steamed aboard a transatlantic ship sometime in the mid-1980s from the Caspian Sea into U.S. waters. Despite its growth was explosive, partly because the species <b>was preyed upon by very few native predators in its new environment</b>. As a consequence, the zebra mussels did find a plentiful food supply. They eat huge amounts of phytoplankton, which tiny free-floating sea organisms that dwell in water. <b>Scientists are concerned when the mussels</b> may compete aggressively with other species that depend on the same food supply.</p> <p>Others concerned by the invading species are industry, public utilities, and boat owners. Zebra mussels cluster in huge colonies, being anchored themselves to any hard surface. These colonies can clog your water intake pipes of electric and water treatment plants. Fishery specialists are currently casting about and baiting their hooks to gun down control methods that will cause the lowest amount of damage to water supplies and other aquatic species. Two of the alternatives exploring are interrupting the species reproductive cycle and finding a bacterium harmful only to zebra mussels.</p>		
-----End of Essay-----		
Press 'F' when Finished	Use the arrow keys (←, →, ↑, ↓) to move the pointer to the part of the essay you want to change. Then press <Enter>.	Press 'H' for Help

## Basic Grammar and Usage: Ensuring Grammatical Agreement

### Segment 1

- A. An increasing number of lakes and rivers
- B. An increasingly number of lakes and rivers
- C. A number of increasing of lakes and rivers
- D. A number of increasingly of lakes and rivers
- E. An increasing of lakes and rivers

### Style: Avoiding Redundancy

### Segment 2

- A. was preyed upon by very few native predators in its new environment
- B. found very few predators in its new environment
- C. found very few native predators and was seldom eaten in its new environment
- D. was preyed on by very few native predator species in its new environment
- E. was seldom eaten or preyed on by native predator species in its new environment

### Sentence Structure: Relating Clauses

### Segment 3

- A. Scientists are concerned when the mussels
- B. Scientists are concerned that if the mussels
- C. Scientists are concerned wherein the mussels
- D. Scientists are concerned that the mussels
- E. Scientists are concerned as if the mussels

### Strategy: Making Decisions About Cohesive Devices

### Item 4 (end-of-passage)

The writer wishes to add a sentence at the end of Paragraph 1 that will serve as a transition between Paragraphs 1 and 2 and will establish the main focus of the essay. Which of the following sentences most effectively fulfills that purpose?

- A. The zebra mussel will provide a difficult challenge for public utility managers.
- B. The zebra mussel is only the latest in a series of newly introduced species to thrive in the U.S.
- C. No one knows how far south and west the zebra mussel is likely to spread, but scientists think they may be on the trail of important clues.
- D. Although small in size, the zebra mussel may become a huge problem for pleasure boat owners in North American waterways.
- E. Despite its size, however, the zebra mussel may have a dramatic effect on North American waterways.

### **Punctuation: Punctuating Breaks in Thought**

1. What time is it I am afraid we are going to be late.
  - a. NO CHANGE
  - b. it, I
  - c. it. I
  - d. it? I

### **Organization: Establishing Logical Order of Sentences**

2. Which of the alternatives places the following group of sentences in the most logical order?
  - (1) When I arrived, fifty customers were waiting outside. (2) I read in the newspaper that Bill's Furniture Mart was having a big sale. (3) "The store hasn't opened yet," one of them said. (4) I got in my car and drove to the store.
  - a. NO CHANGE
  - b. 1, 4, 3, 2
  - c. 2, 4, 1, 3
  - d. 4, 3, 2, 1

### **Relationships of Clauses: Avoiding Squinters**

3. In which of the following sentences is the meaning most clear?
  - a. Hiking in the mountains, thunder was heard in the distance.
  - b. While hiking in the mountains, we heard thunder in the distance.
  - c. In the mountains while hiking, thunder could be heard in the distance.
  - d. When on a hike in the mountains, in the distance sounded a clap of thunder.

### **Spelling/Capitalization: Finding Errors in Capitalization**

4. Find the capitalization error in this sentence:

For my science project last Spring, I made a scale model of the planet Saturn.

(The cursor cycles between underlined letters. When the examinee finds the error, he/she moves the cursor to the incorrect letter, hits enter, and the letter changes from lowercase to uppercase or vice versa.)

### **Verb Formation and Agreement: Forming Tenses of Regular and Irregular Verbs**

5. Three of the sentences below are grammatically correct. Which of the sentences is NOT grammatically correct?
- The curtain had just rose, and the play was supposed to begin, Danny could not remember his lines.
  - The curtain had just risen; the play was supposed to begin, but Danny could not remember his lines.
  - The play was about to begin; the curtain rose, but Danny forgot his lines.
  - As the curtain was rising and the play was about to begin, Danny panicked and forgot his lines.

### **Style: Avoiding Ambiguity, Wordiness, and Redunancy**

6. In which of the following sentences is the meaning expressed most clearly and effectively?
- Because the day seemed to be a good one for these activities, Tracy and Chris went to the park, which was a long walk from downtown, for an outdoor picnic lunch and an afternoon of going to fly kites, which Tracy liked, and which Chris liked, too.
  - An outdoor repast, or picnic, and an afternoon of recreation was experienced approving by Chris as well as her younger sibling, or brother, Tracy.
  - Chris and Tracy, who is her younger sibling, equally enjoyed the food and the fun outdoors, which was a fun and enjoyable event.
  - Both Chris and her younger brother Tracy enjoyed their walk to the park for a picnic and an afternoon of kite flying.

### **Punctuation and Usage: Forming Possessives, Using Pronouns, and Observing Usage Conventions**

7. Add apostrophes wherever you believe they are needed in the following sentence:

Theres always the possibility that Trinas sister wont want to go with us, but lets invite them anyway.

COMPASS SAMPLE ITEMS

ANSWERS TO SAMPLE ITEMS

Reading Placement Test: Sample Passage 1---Humanities

1. D    2. B    3. B

Reading Placement Test: Sample Passage 2—Practical Reading

1. A    2. C    3. D

Vocabulary Diagnostic Test

1. B    2. D    3. E.    4. C

Reading Comprehension Diagnostic Test

1. E    2. South Africa    3. D

Writing Skills Placement Test

1. A    2. B    3. D    4. E

Writing Skills Diagnostic Test

1. D    2. C    3. B    4. Spring  
5. A    6. D  
7. There's always the possibility that Trina's sisters won't want to go with us, but let's invite them anyway.