The CUNY Assessment Testing Program  
Policies and Procedures

Overview

All students applying for an associate or bachelor’s degree program at CUNY must demonstrate a level of proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics that enables them to engage in college-level study. Students may document their proficiency in a variety of ways, including through their performance on the SAT, ACT or the New York State Regents examinations, and through CUNY’s skills assessment tests. Acceptance to a bachelor’s program is contingent on demonstrating proficiency in reading, writing and math, and, with some exceptions, skill proficiency in the appropriate area(s) is a pre-requisite for enrolling in freshman composition and in credit-bearing math courses. Students who have not achieved the requisite proficiency in any or all of the skill areas must first enroll in a developmental course of instruction. Before they can exit the developmental sequence they must demonstrate proficiency.

The following sections describe the policies and procedures that govern the administration and use of these tests.

Testing Policies

Standards of Basic Proficiency in Reading, Writing and Mathematics

Multiple indicators are used to assess minimum proficiency at CUNY, as specified below.

• Reading and Writing. Individuals are deemed proficient in reading and writing if they meet any of the following criteria:
  
  o Score 480 or higher on the SAT critical reading
  o Score 20 or higher on the ACT verbal
  o Score 75 or higher on the New York State Regents examination in English.
Earn a grade of C or higher (C- is not acceptable) in a three-credit freshman composition course (or a higher-level English course for which freshman composition is a pre-requisite) at an accredited college.\(^1\)

Individuals who do not show proficiency on the basis of any of the above must sit for the CUNY Assessment Tests in Writing and Reading. Minimum passing scores on these exams are currently 56 or higher and 70 or higher, respectively.

- **Mathematics.** All current and returning CUNY students, as well as new applicants for admission (including transfer students), may meet the standard in any one of the following ways:
  - Score at or above 500 on the SAT math.
  - Score at or above 21 on the ACT math.
  - Score at least 70 on the common-core-oriented New York State Regents exam in Algebra I (or an 80 on any other current Regents examination in mathematics) and successfully complete high school Algebra 2/Trigonometry or a higher-level course.
  - For internal CUNY transfers, document successful completion of an elementary algebra course.
  - Document successful completion of a credit-bearing math course at a CUNY college or other regionally or New York State-accredited institution (if the learning outcomes are deemed appropriate). Successful completion is a passing grade within CUNY and a C or better for non-CUNY courses.
  - Present a Compass score of 40 or higher on the elementary algebra module.

Students who meet this standard qualify to take at least one credit-bearing course in mathematics at any undergraduate college in the University to which they are admitted.

The following students will also be deemed proficient in all three skill areas:

- CUNY associate degree holders;

---

\(^1\) Accredited colleges are institutions of higher education that have been approved by the NYS Board of Regents and colleges and universities outside the United States in which the primary language of instruction is English.
Students who were proficient based on the standard in place at the time of their original admission to CUNY. The New York State Regents course sequences and examinations in mathematics have changed several times in recent years. Students may qualify as proficient based on a score of 75 or better on the exams for Math A or B as well as Sequential II or III.

**Admission to the University and Placement**

The policies governing admission to baccalaureate and placement in associate programs are as follows:

**Baccalaureate Programs**

- Applicants for freshman and transfer admission must demonstrate minimum proficiency in reading, writing, and math in order to be admitted (some groups of students are exceptions to this policy. See the section labeled “Exceptions” below).
- Proficiency may be established as described above (See “Standards of Basic Proficiency in Reading, Writing and Mathematics”).
- Applicants who do not demonstrate minimum proficiency in all areas may opt to matriculate in an associate program and take the necessary developmental instruction there. These students have a number of options for developmental instruction in addition to conventional developmental courses, including the University Skills Immersion Program (USIP) and the Summer Start Program. They may also opt to defer matriculation and enroll in the CUNY Start program or, for ESL instruction, the CLIP program.
- CUNY colleges administer Compass math to all matriculating freshmen in order to place them in the appropriate credit-bearing math course.
- Some colleges offer students who are not proficient an opportunity to demonstrate proficiency based on the CUNY Assessment Tests.

**Associate Programs**

- To enroll in an associate program as a freshman or transfer, students must demonstrate their level of basic skills proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics. Students who are not skill proficient will be required to take developmental instruction and to demonstrate proficiency. Students are strongly
encouraged to take the skills tests as soon as possible after they have been admitted and to prepare carefully for the tests.

- On an experimental basis, colleges may place associate students who do not plan to major in a program for which college algebra or a higher-level math course is a prerequisite directly into a credit-bearing statistics or quantitative reasoning course with extra support.

- Students who are administered Compass will be administered the elementary algebra module first. Only those test takers who do not meet the University’s cut point on this module will be routed to the pre-algebra module (a Compass score of 45 or higher deems the student proficient in pre-algebra).

- Freshmen who have demonstrated minimum proficiency in mathematics will be required by their college to take the placement portion of the CUNY Assessment Test in Math (Math 3) to be placed properly in credit-bearing math courses. Colleges may also opt to administer Math 3 to incoming transfer students. Qualifying cut scores for credit-bearing courses that are pre-requisites for math-intensive majors are set at the discretion of each college, and the college may require students who do not meet these cut scores to participate in an intervention. Exempt students taking Compass for placement who nevertheless score below the developmental threshold should not be placed into developmental instruction if they do not intend to major in a field requiring college algebra or more advanced mathematics. Rather, they should be placed at a minimum into a credit-bearing math course for which their exemption qualifies them.

- Students who place into developmental education are required to commence it immediately, either in summer or winter immersion, in conventional developmental course work in their first semester, or by deferring matriculation and registering in CUNY Start or Summer Start. Colleges are expected to facilitate continuous enrollment in development instruction so that the student can complete it without interruption.

Readmission

- Students applying for readmission who have not yet demonstrated proficiency in a basic skill area must take the CUNY assessment test in that skill area, and are subject to the standards in place at the time they re-apply.
Non-degree students

- Non-degree students who wish to register for courses that require skills proficiency are subject to the same prerequisites as degree students. Examples of such courses are freshman composition and credit-bearing math courses. A college may waive this requirement for visiting non-degree students who are matriculated at a college outside the CUNY system. All non-degree students who wish to apply for admission to a CUNY degree program are subject to the same skills requirements as transfer students.

Exceptions for Baccalaureate Program Applicants

SEEK Students

- Students who are eligible for the SEEK program may be admitted to a baccalaureate program without first demonstrating basic skills proficiency. However, SEEK students so admitted, must demonstrate the requisite level of proficiency in reading and writing within one year of enrollment, and in mathematics within two years of initial enrollment. The one-year time limit for reading and writing consists of a required pre-freshman summer immersion, two regular semesters, a winter immersion, and a post-freshman immersion. The two-year time limit in mathematics consists of the required pre-freshman immersion, four regular semesters, two winter immersion, and a summer immersion at the end of the second academic year. Students are required to participate in basic skills initiatives continuously until they demonstrate basic skills proficiency. SEEK students may document math proficiency by taking Compass or by registering and passing a compensatory course in mathematics with a grade of C or higher. SEEK students who are also ESL are subject to the policy for ESL students, below. These students have two years to achieve proficiency in reading and writing.

ESL Students

- Under Board policy, students who received a secondary education abroad and who otherwise are not in need of developmental instruction may be admitted to a baccalaureate program without first reaching proficiency in reading and writing in English. The University currently implements the policy as follows: ESL students are those who have received a term or more of instruction in a foreign high school (language of instruction was not English) and can demonstrate minimum proficiency in mathematics, on the basis of the SAT,
Regents, or the CUNY Assessment Test in Math. Additionally, the University has established a second procedure for identifying ESL students. CATW essays that have received an ESL designation during the scoring process and other essays that have received a score of 32 or above may be reviewed by college ESL program chairs or directors to determine whether these students should be classified as 'ESL'. These ESL designations must be relayed by the college to the University Application Processing Center to be incorporated into the student’s application. Note that ESL students identified in this way must be basic skills proficient in mathematics to be admitted to a baccalaureate program.

- ESL students pursuing a bachelor’s degree must pass the reading and writing assessment tests by the end of their fourth full semester of attendance. They may not repeat an ESL course after receiving either no credit or a failing grade twice previously in that course. These limitations on time and attempts do not apply to ESL students pursuing an associate degree.

Prior Baccalaureate

- Students who previously have earned a bachelor’s degree or a higher degree from an accredited program verified by CUNY are deemed skills proficient. Only students who document the degree at the time of application for admission to the college are entitled to this exemption.

- Colleges may test ESL students who have completed a baccalaureate abroad to assess their proficiency in English. In this context, ESL students are those who have:

  1. spent one or more semesters of their secondary education in a non-English-speaking environment and
  2. accumulated fewer than 30 credits (earned and in progress) in an English-speaking post-secondary environment.

If the assessments indicate a need for ESL instruction, the college may require the student to take it and set proficiency standards for proceeding with his or her academic program.

Adult Students

- Adult students can be admitted to bachelor’s programs via worker education programs if they meet the current standards for reading and writing and meet any of the following standards for mathematics:
  - 480 or higher in SAT math
  - 75 or higher on any New York State mathematics Regents exam
30 or higher on the Compass pre-algebra module and 30 or higher on the Compass elementary algebra exam.

- These students must meet the regular proficiency requirements of the University by the time they have completed the 24th credit. They may show proficiency on the basis of the Compass exam (45-40 standard) or by taking and passing a compensatory math course if offered.

- Students matriculating in the following programs qualify for this exemption: The City College Center for Worker Education, the Joseph S. Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, the Adult Education Program at Lehman College, and the Adult College Education Program at Queens College.

**Exit From Developmental Instruction and ESL**

**Writing, reading and ESL**

- In order to enroll in a college-level English composition course students must have achieved minimum proficiency in both reading and writing. Students enrolled in the top-level developmental course in writing must pass the CATW in order to exit, while students in the top-level reading course must pass the Compass reading test. ESL students must pass both the reading and the writing tests.

**Mathematics**

- Students who place into arithmetic may qualify to register for elementary algebra either at their home college or at any other CUNY college, should they transfer, by successfully completing the top-level arithmetic course or other equivalent intervention.

- To enroll in a credit-bearing mathematics course, students must have demonstrated minimum proficiency in mathematics by successfully completing elementary algebra with a passing grade and passing the CUNY Elementary Algebra Final Exam (CEAFE) with a score of 60 or higher. All students who have not withdrawn from the course must be allowed to sit for the CEAFE. This standard applies to elementary courses as well as to non-course-based interventions (NCBIs) such as CUNY Start and USIP. NCBIs designed primarily for individuals, including high school students, who have not yet taken Compass for placement must use Compass as the exit criterion.

- In order to facilitate development of developmental pathways that prepare students for credit math courses such as quantitative reasoning and statistics, all
colleges are granted a temporary exemption from the elementary algebra requirement for students who do not plan to major in a program requiring college algebra or a more advanced math course. For these students, successful completion of the alternative to elementary algebra is the pre-requisite.

- Each college will set its own criteria for entry to math workshops (minimum of 20 hours) based on the student’s performance on the CEAPE and for taking the CEAPE a second time without having to repeat elementary algebra. Every college should offer such a workshop.
- Every college must offer at least one credit-bearing math course for which exempt and elementary-algebra-proficient students can qualify, including at least one course that meets the quantitative reasoning requirement of the common core.
- Students who need college algebra or pre-calculus for their programs may be required to take an intervening non-credit intermediate algebra course or other instruction.

**Testing Procedures**

In order to protect the security of testing materials and to insure fairness, all CUNY basic skills tests and ACT diagnostic assessments must be administered under the direct supervision of the college testing office. The results of testing conducted under any other circumstances cannot become part of the student’s official record.

**Placement Testing**

All admitted students who are not otherwise exempted or excepted as described above in the ‘Exceptions’ section, must take the CUNY Assessment Tests to determine if they are ready to enroll in college-level courses, and if not, to determine where they should be placed in the developmental/ESL sequence of courses.

Placement testing is carried out as follows:

1. Colleges receive allocations of new students from the Central Office in phases beginning about one month after admissions application deadlines. Testing generally begins in late February for fall admissions and late October for spring.
2. Students ordinarily will be scheduled to test at the college to which they have been admitted. If they have been admitted to more than one CUNY college, they will be
tested at the college for which they indicated the greatest preference on their application. CUNY maintains a centralized appointment system to insure that students are not required to test for placement more than once.

3. Tests are administered by the college’s Testing Office according to the instructions in the ACT/Compass or CATW test administration manuals.

4. The CATW writing test is the only CUNY assessment test that is not administered by computer. The CATW is scored by CUNY faculty readers at CUNY’s Borough scoring Centers under the supervision of the Borough Chief Reader and the University Chief Reader. The CATW tests are live tests, and may not leave the Testing Office premises except to be scored at a Borough Center. Testing Offices are responsible for the security of the test and must keep track of all materials. All persons with access to the tests must sign non-disclosure agreements.

a. The CUNY Central Office provides multiple forms of the writing test to the colleges and designates the forms to be administered – either for placement or exit testing – and for what period of time. Testing Offices are responsible for distributing the designated test forms to students and assuring that students are administered a test form only once.

b. Testing Offices should keep the Borough Centers informed of testing schedules and test shipments. Significant changes in test volumes or special testing needs must be reported to the Borough Center as soon as possible to assure the timely turnaround of scored tests.

c. ESL faculty appointed by the ESL Program Director may review failing CATW placement essays to determine ESL status and to place ESL students in the appropriate course. In order to insure the security of the test forms, ESL readers must conduct their review following procedures specified by the Testing Director.

d. Testing Offices inform program directors as soon as test results are available in the college’s student information system and are responsible for the generation of rosters and individual student results.

**Early-semester retesting**

- Colleges may retest students during the first 10 days of the semester to re-evaluate their course placement if there is good reason to believe the student has been misplaced.
- Retesting of this limited group of students should occur only upon faculty recommendation and approval by the program director.
• Program directors must coordinate with their testing office for the timely scheduling of a retest to allow the student to make enrollment changes if warranted.
• During the retesting process, students should continue to attend the developmental/ESL course into which they were placed. They should be counseled on their options for modifying their course schedules and maintaining their academic and financial aid standing.

Exit Testing

Students pursuing the associate degree who are not exempt and who do not pass a placement examination are required to enroll without delay in the appropriate intervention: conventional developmental courses, workshops, immersion programs, CUNY Start, or Summer Start, and are retested at the end of the highest level of the developmental/ESL sequence or other instructional format. Students must pass the assessment test in order to exit from reading, writing or ESL study. Students placed into developmental math are required to pass the elementary algebra course as well as the mandatory CUNY Elementary Algebra Final Exam (CEAFE), which counts for 35% of the final grade, as noted above (see ‘Mathematics’). Colleges are expected to provide the support necessary for students enrolled in developmental education to pursue it without interruption. (Proficiency requirements for certificate programs may be set by the college or department.)

All retests, no matter what the instructional format, must be preceded by a minimum of 20 hours of instruction. The chief academic officer of the college may set higher minimums. Students should not be retested more twice a semester.

Exit testing should be conducted as follows:

Courses
• Colleges administer the CEAFE in class during the final exam period and test students in top-level developmental English and ESL semester-length courses in the testing lab during testing windows established each semester. These windows are generally set in consultation with the CUNY Office of Assessment for the last two weeks of the semester.

---

2 For accelerated remediation programs including accelerated sections of freshman composition, colleges may test twice during the semester and, if needed, a third time during the final exam or intersession period.
• Colleges may make arrangements to test at other times students who are enrolled in other developmental instructional formats (short courses, workshops, or accelerated courses).
• The CUNY Office of Assessment is responsible for providing CATW forms to the colleges and will provide time frames for the use of each form. Testing offices must adhere to these time frames so that students are not tested more than once on the same form and so that faculty scorers are prepared to score the forms they receive each semester.
• Departments or programs may recommend a few outstanding students from intermediate-level ESL or English reading or writing courses for exit testing. Such students must be added to the roster of students deemed eligible for retesting.
• Students in developmental and ESL writing courses write their essays in rooms designated by the testing office or, with the agreement of the testing office and the appropriate department or program, they may write their essays in their regular classrooms. Class teachers may not be present during these testing sessions.

Workshops/Immersion Programs
• Workshop or Writing/Learning Center Directors are responsible for certifying that students have completed the required instruction before the testing office may retest these students.
• Students in June workshops may be retested once, at the conclusion of the workshop, and Summer Immersion enrollees may be retested twice after satisfying the minimum number of hours of instruction.
• Matriculated students may enroll in skills workshops outside their home college only with the written permission of the home testing office (or other designated office such as that of an immersion program). On completion of the workshop, the home college is informed of the student’s eligibility for retesting. Students can only be retested at their home college. In no circumstance is a student to be tested more than once for the completion of the same workshop.

CLIP
The following guidelines govern the retesting of students participating in the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP) on the CUNY Assessment Tests:

• Retesting is done only at the end of a CLIP cycle.
• CLIP students may be retested in reading and writing as warranted if
  a. they have completed 900 hours (the maximum allowable number of hours of instruction) or
b. they are Level 3 and have completed at least 150 hours of instruction.
c. In rare cases, Level 1 and 2 students who have completed at least 150 hours of instruction may be tested, but only if they have made exceptional progress and only upon the recommendation of the program director.

Appeals
Students may appeal a score on the CATW, but not on the reading or mathematics assessments. Students who receive a CATW total weighted score of at least 48, with no total Rater1 + Rater2 dimension scores of less than 6, may appeal the essay score. All appeals must be initiated by the student at the college testing office within 6 weeks of the test date.

Appealed essays are reviewed by certified readers assigned by the Chief Reader of the college to determine if the essay should be rescored on the basis of their informal evaluation that a student could consistently attain a performance level of “4” either across the 5 scoring dimensions, or within individual scoring dimensions. Essays with five or more 4’s (out of a possible 10) are sent to the Borough Center, where the Borough Chief Reader assigns two new readers to re-score the essay. If the essay achieves a passing score, the new passing score is entered on the student’s record.

The testing office coordinates the appeals process, which includes verification of eligibility to appeal, coordination with the borough centers for the rescoring of qualified essays, updating of databases and informing students of their appeal results.

Testing of Continuing Education Students
Unless specifically authorized to do so by the University Dean for Institutional Research and Assessment, testing directors may not administer the basic skills assessment tests and ACT’s diagnostic tests to individuals who are not matriculated in an undergraduate degree program or applying for admission to such a program.

Pre-college Programs
Students participating in pre-college programs including College Now, LINCT to Success, CUNY Career Path, and developmental instruction offered by unions, may be administered the CUNY assessment tests only through a structured program model and in consultation with the University Dean for Institutional Research and Assessment. Testing for these programs generally occurs as part of the admissions process.
Accommodations and Waivers Based on Disability

Basic Skills Testing

All students, unless otherwise exempted, must take and pass basic skills tests in reading, writing, and mathematics. Reasonable accommodations based on disability will be granted in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who wish to seek such an accommodation for basic skills testing should request it from the Director of Testing at the college. The student must be registered with the college’s office of disability services. Reasonable accommodations generally include, but are not limited to, extended time, technological support, and/or services of appropriate support personnel such as readers, scribes, and sign language interpreters.

In rare instances, when no reasonable accommodation is practicable, students may request a waiver of a basic skills assessment requirement. This is only a waiver from using a CUNY assessment test to determine placement into or exit from developmental courses. Any adjustments to academic program requirements in order to comply with Section 504 are addressed separately at individual colleges through their scholastic standing procedures.

The Procedure for requesting a testing waiver is as follows:

The student submits a written request to the Director of Assessment of the central CUNY Assessment Office, which oversees the evaluation process. The request must be accompanied by:

- A letter from the director of the office of disability services at the campus of attendance, fully documenting the student’s history of disability-related difficulty with the skills being assessed, even with accommodations and support services in place.
- Documentation from a certified professional that the student has a disability that would affect his/her ability to take and pass the exam.
- A panel consisting of faculty members, in consultation with the General Counsel’s Office, reviews the request and supporting material and makes its recommendation to the University Dean of Institutional Research and Assessment.
- The University Dean will make the final decision and inform the college of the decision.