



# Fact Sheet

## *TECHNICAL WRITING*

### TEST INFORMATION

This test was developed to enable schools to award credit to students for knowledge equivalent to that, which is learned, by students taking the course. The school may choose to award college credit to the student based on the achievement of a passing score. The passing score for each examination is determined by the school based on recommendations from the American Council on Education (ACE). This minimum credit-awarding score is equal to the mean score of students in the norming sample who received a grade of C in the course. Some schools set their own standards for awarding credit and may require a higher score than the ACE recommendation. Students should obtain this information from the institution where they expect to receive credit.

This test consists of an optional essay portion. Thomson Prometric will not score the essay section. It will be forwarded to colleges and universities for their use in determining the award of credit. Check with your college or university to distinguish if this is required.

### CONTENT

The following topics, which are commonly taught in courses on this subject, are covered by this examination.

- |  | <b>Approximate<br/>Percent</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| I. Theory and practice of Technical Writing  | <b>10%</b>                     |
| A. Establishing goals                        |                                |
| B. Analyzing the audience                    |                                |
| C. Ensuring the validity of data and sources |                                |

- |  | <b>Approximate<br/>Percent</b> |
|--|--------------------------------|
| II. Purpose, content, and organizational patterns of common types of technical documents | <b>31%</b>                     |
| A. Reports   |                                |
| 1. Progress/inspection reports   |                                |
| 2. Feasibility reports   |                                |
| 3. Research/laboratory reports   |                                |
| B. Correspondence  |                                |
| 1. Memos   |                                |
| 2. Letters   |                                |
| 3. Resumes   |                                |
| C. Manuals   |                                |
| 1. Instructions  |                                |
| 2. Procedures  |                                |
| 3. Process descriptions  |                                |
| D. Proposals   |                                |
| III. Elements of various technical reports   | <b>31%</b>                     |
| A. Titles  |                                |
| B. Summaries/Abstracts   |                                |
| C. Headings  |                                |
| D. Definitions   |                                |
| E. Conclusions   |                                |
| F. Recommendations   |                                |
| G. Graphics  |                                |
| H. Report supplements (glossary, footnotes, appendices, indices)                         |                                |
| I. Page design   |                                |



**Approximate  
Percent  
28%**

- IV. Technical editing
- A. Clarity
  - B. Completeness
  - C. Accessibility
  - D. Conciseness
  - E. Correctness
  - F. Sequence
  - G. Unity
  - H. Tone

Questions on the test require candidates to demonstrate the following abilities. Some questions may require more than one of these abilities.

- Knowledge of basic facts and terms  
(about 35-45 percent of the examination)
- Understanding of concepts and principles  
(about 30-40 percent of the examination)
- Ability to apply knowledge to specific problems and situations  
(about 25-35 percent of the examination)

### **SAMPLE QUESTIONS**

1. It is customary to place definitions of terms in all of the following parts of a technical document EXCEPT the
- (A) abstract
  - (B) introduction
  - (C) footnotes
  - (D) glossary
2. Which of the following organizational patterns would be appropriate to use when describing a mechanism?
- I. Order of assembly
  - II. Spatial order
  - III. Operating order
- (A) II only
  - (B) III only
  - (C) I and III only
  - (D) I, II, and III

3. Which of the following graphics is best for displaying continuous change over time?
- (A) Bar chart
  - (B) Line graph
  - (C) Schematic diagram
  - (D) Table
4. The major difference between proposals and many other technical documents is that proposals are
- (A) long and formal
  - (B) written by committees
  - (C) overtly persuasive
  - (D) presented orally as well as in writing
5. Laboratory reports customarily contain all of the following sections EXCEPT
- (A) materials and methods
  - (B) results
  - (C) discussions
  - (D) recommendations

*Questions 6-7 refer to the following group of numbered sentences:*

1. The rabbits did not build up as much fat in the walls of their arteries as expected.
2. One group was left unattended except at feeding time, while the other received some old-fashioned tender loving care (TLC) every day for at least one hour.
3. Researchers at Ohio State University made an unexpected finding while feeding a group of rabbits high-cholesterol diets in preparation for an experiment.
4. The TLC rabbits developed only one-third as many fatty deposits as the others.
5. Investigating further, the team fed high doses of cholesterol to two new groups of rabbits.
6. One researcher mentioned that she had given these rabbits special treatment, greeting and cuddling each four to five times a day.

6. If the sentences are arranged into a coherent paragraph, which sentence will come third in the sequence?
- (A) 1  
(B) 2  
(C) 5  
(D) 6
7. If the sentences now numbered 1 and 6 were combined into one sentence, the new sentence would begin with which of the following?
- (A) When  
(B) Although  
(C) Because  
(D) Thus
8. One significant difference between technical language and lay language is that technical language tends to be more
- (A) subjective  
(B) sophisticated  
(C) abstract  
(D) exact
9. Which of the following does NOT need revision to correct an error in parallel structure?
- (A) We found it impossible either to replicate their results or even approximate them.  
(B) The ideal environment for colonizing plants like ragweed is bare, windswept, and, of course, contains little groundwater.  
(C) The platypus is an animal with mammalian, reptilian, and avian aspects and which illustrates the difficulty of exact biological classification.  
(D) The proposed pertussis vaccine not only is as effective as the vaccine currently in use but also poses little or no health risk to children under two years of age.
10. Which of the following is a major flaw in a classification?
- (A) Overlap in the categories  
(B) Use of the same criterion throughout  
(C) Division into more than ten groups and subgroups  
(D) Categories with different numbers of subdivisions

In each of the following sentences, some part of the sentence or the entire sentence is underlined. Beneath each sentence you will find four ways of phrasing the underlined part. The first choice (A) repeats the original; the other three are different. If you think the original is better than any of the alternatives, choose answer A. Otherwise, choose one of the others. In choosing answers, pay attention to grammatical correctness, appropriate word choice, and smoothness and effectiveness of sentence construction.

11. After heating for twelve minutes, the sample was dried.
- (A) After heating for twelve minutes, the sample  
(B) After heating the sample for twelve minutes, it  
(C) After it had been heated for twelve minutes, the sample  
(D) After twelve minutes of heating the sample, it
12. Ibuprofen is a powerful pain reliever and it has only recently been made available to the public in nonprescription doses.
- (A) Ibuprofen is a powerful pain reliever and it has only recently  
(B) Ibuprofen, a powerful pain reliever, has only recently  
(C) Ibuprofen is a powerful analgesic that only has recently  
(D) Only the potent analgesic ibuprofen has recently

## STUDYING FOR THE EXAMINATION

The following is a list of reference publications that were being used as textbooks in college courses of the same or similar title at the time the test was developed. Appropriate textbooks for study are not limited to those listed below. If you wish to obtain study resources to prepare for the examination, you may reference either the current edition of the following titles **or** textbooks currently used at a local college or university for the same class title. It is recommended that you reference **more than one textbook** on the topics outlined in this fact sheet.

You should **begin by checking textbook content against the content outline** included on the front page of this Fact Sheet **before** selecting textbooks that cover the test content from which to study. Textbooks may be found at the campus bookstore of a local college or university offering a course on the subject.

Sources for study material suggested but not limited to the following:

Brusaw, C.T., Alred, G.J., and Oliu, W.E. *Handbook of Technical Writing*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, current edition.

Kennedy, George E. and Montgomery, Tracy T. *Solving Problems Through Technical and Professional Writing*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, Inc., current edition.

Lannon, John M. *Technical Writing*. New York, NY: Longman, current edition.

Markel, Michael H. *Technical Communication: Situations and Strategies*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, current edition.

Mills, Gordon H. and Walter, John A. *Technical Writing*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, current edition.

Olsen, Leslie A. and Huckin, Thomas N. *Technical Writing and Professional Communication*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, current edition

Current textbook used by a local college or university for a course on the subject.

## TECHNICAL WRITING JOURNALS

Journal of Technical Writing and Communications  
Technical Communication  
The Technical Writing Teacher

## CREDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The American Council on Education (ACE) has reviewed and evaluated the DSST examination development process. The American Council on Education has made the following recommendations:

Area or Course	
Equivalent:	Technical Writing
Level:	Lower-level baccalaureate
Amount of Credit:	Three (3) semester hours
Source:	ACE Commission on Educational Credit and Credentials

## INFORMATION

Colleges and universities that would like additional information about the national norming, or assistance in local norming or score validation studies should write to: DSST Program, Prometric, 2000 Lenox Drive, 3rd Floor, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648.

It is advisable that schools develop a consistent policy about awarding credit based on scores from this test and that the policy be reviewed periodically. Prometric will be happy to help schools in this effort.

Correct Responses: 1.A; 2.D; 3.B; 4.C; 5.D; 6.D; 7.A; 8.D; 9.D; 10.A; 11.C; 12.B

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