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Next-Generation ACCUPLACER® For Dummies® with Online Practice Tests

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Introduction

The American system of community colleges — also called junior colleges — is one of the greatest achievements in American education.

Now, if you’ve grown up watching *The Big Bang Theory*, you may well side with Sheldon, who never lets up on Penny for being a “community college dropout.” (Just remember, he’s pretty hard on MIT, Princeton, and Harvard, too!)

But I stand by what I said: Community college is a great achievement for our nation, and an amazing opportunity for you personally.

As the price of education continues to rise, and shows no sign of dropping anytime soon, community college is still the best deal since the nickel hotdog. The average price tag on a semester of community college is something like \$1,500, but many students pay far less or even nothing at all due to government assistance through the FAFSA program. And some even *receive* money to help them buy books, a computer, and other important college-related stuff.

You can graduate from community college with an associate’s degree (A.A. or A.S.). And virtually every community college can help you accumulate 60 credits toward your 120-credit bachelor’s degree. Even better, if you maintain a B average at most community colleges, you may find that the doors of your state university just about swing open for you when you graduate.

So, assuming you’re with me (and against Sheldon!) that community college is awesome, let’s get down to business and talk about the ACCUPLACER.

The ACCUPLACER is more of a speed bump than a detour on your road to a college degree. Here are the most important things to know about the ACCUPLACER:

- » **The ACCUPLACER is *NOT* an *entrance* exam.** Your performance on the ACCUPLACER won’t keep you out of community college.
- » **The ACCUPLACER *IS* a *placement* exam.** It’s an opportunity to jump over non-credit reading, writing, and math courses by showing your community college that you already know this stuff.

In fact, technically speaking, you don’t have to take the ACCUPLACER at all. But if you don’t, then you’ll be giving up an *opportunity* to bypass a bunch of classes you might not have to take. You don’t really want to miss out on an opportunity, do you?

About This Book

I wrote this book to help you to do your absolute best on the ACCUPLACER.

If you survived (some prefer the term “graduated”) high school, there’s probably not much in this book that you don’t already know — or at least you *did* know it at one time or another. This

book offers a quick way to remember what you knew “back then” and to fill in the stuff that you never quite understood or don’t remember now.

I’ve done my best to keep this book limited to the absolute essentials for the ACCUPLACER. If you see it in the book, it’ll probably show up on the test. So, the more time and effort you spend working through the information you find here, the better you will do when you take your ACCUPLACER.

Think of it this way: Each section of the ACCUPLACER that you pass allows you to jump over at least one semester (and possibly two or three) of a no-credit community college course. And a college course has about 45 hours of class time, plus whatever time you spend out of class reading, studying, doing homework, and preparing for tests. However you slice it, that looks to me like 75 to 100 hours, or maybe even more, taking a course that doesn’t even earn you any credits toward graduation.

And that’s just one course.

Or, with the help of this book, you could spend maybe 10 or 20 hours studying on your own, get your skills up to speed, and then pass a section of the ACCUPLACER. (That’s right — you don’t have to take the entire ACCUPLACER all at once. At most community colleges, you can take one section at a time if that suits you.)

For many of the students I’ve helped to pass the ACCUPLACER, that seemed like a pretty good deal. So I invite you to come along!

The ACCUPLACER includes five different sections:

- » Reading Test
- » Writing Test
- » Three Math Tests:
 - Arithmetic
 - Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, and Statistics (QAS)
 - Advanced Algebra and Functions (AAF)

Because the last two math tests have long and confusing names, at times throughout this book I refer to them using the abbreviations “Math QAS” and “Math AAF.” Make sense?

Foolish Assumptions

If you’ve bought this book — or even if you’re looking through it while sitting at the café of your favorite bookstore — I’m going to jump to one of three conclusions about you:

- » You need to take the ACCUPLACER to move forward in community college, and want to improve your score.
- » Someone you care about needs to take the ACCUPLACER, and you’d like to help them.
- » You LOVE standardized tests and can’t wait to try this one!

That’s who I wrote the book for, but if none of this applies to you, you’re still more than welcome to buy it!

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout the book, I use a handful of icons to point out various types of information. Here's what they are and what they mean:



The Remember icon is like a little Post-it note, labeling everything in the book that's key to remember. After reading a chapter, I recommend that you go through it again and test yourself to see how well you remember this information.



The Example icon marks where I present an example, followed by a step-by-step solution. Throughout the book, you'll often find an Example icon paired with a Remember icon, indicating that the example goes with the important idea being introduced.



The Tip icon indicates a quick way to remember important material or perform a task. Use these tips to help you save time and frustration.



The Warning icon helps you steer around mistakes that students commonly make. Don't let this happen to you!



The Technical Stuff icon gives information that is often peripheral to the task at hand. Strictly speaking, you don't need this stuff, but in some cases you may find it interesting or useful. Read or skip over as you like.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this book comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet that includes tips to help you prepare for the ACCUPLACER. To get this Cheat Sheet, simply go to www.dummies.com and type **ACCUPLACER For Dummies Cheat Sheet** in the Search box.

You also get access to a 3 full-length online practice tests. To gain access to the online practice, all you have to do is register. Just follow these simple steps:

1. **Register your book or ebook at Dummies.com to get your PIN. Go to www.dummies.com/go/getaccess.**
2. **Select your product from the dropdown list on that page.**
3. **Follow the prompts to validate your product, and then check your email for a confirmation message that includes your PIN and instructions for logging in.**

If you do not receive this email within two hours, please check your spam folder before contacting us through our Technical Support website at <http://support.wiley.com> or by phone at 877-762-2974.

Now you're ready to go! You can come back to the practice material as often as you want — simply log on with the username and password you created during your initial login. No need to enter the access code a second time.

Your registration is good for one year from the day you activate your PIN.

Where to Go from Here

You can start anywhere in this book and find something that can help you to do better on the ACCUPLACER.

If you're not quite sure what the ACCUPLACER contains and why you've been asked to take it, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 give you a complete overview of the entire test, and then a look at all five sections.

On the other hand, if you feel like you know all that stuff already and want to get a sense of how well you're likely to do on the test, go to the end of the book, where you'll find two practice tests. If you like, use the first practice as a pre-test, and save the second practice test for after you've worked through the material in the rest of the book.

On the third hand (you've got three hands, right?), if you want to get started improving your score right now, flip to any chapter in Parts 2 through 6. Each of these parts covers one of the five ACCUPLACER sections: reading, writing, and three levels of math. And the last chapter of each part includes practice problems based on the information in that part. Lots o' options!

This last piece of advice should be easy to follow: Don't read what you don't need.

For example, if you're pretty confident you'll pass the ACCUPLACER Writing Test (in my opinion, the easiest of the five sections), then don't bother reading the chapters that cover this section. Additionally, some schools don't require you to take the most difficult of the three math sections, the Advanced Algebra and Functions (AAF) Test. So, if you don't have to take this test, you can skip over Part 6 of this book.

1

Getting Started with the ACCUPLACER

IN THIS PART . . .

Understand the purpose of the ACCUPLACER test and why it's important.

Look at what the ACCUPLACER covers and know how the test is set up.

Prepare for the test and get the best score possible.

- » Understanding who takes the ACCUPLACER and why
- » Getting clear about the Next-Generation ACCUPLACER
- » Knowing what the ACCUPLACER tests
- » Understanding how the ACCUPLACER is scored and what this means to you

Chapter 1

Getting to Know the ACCUPLACER

If you've been told that you have to take the ACCUPLACER, you probably have a bunch of basic questions about it, such as the following:

Just what is the ACCUPLACER?

Do I *have* to take it (really)?

When, where, and how do I take it?

What kind of stuff does the ACCUPLACER test?

What happens after I take the test?

In this chapter, I give you answers to the most common questions that students tend to have about the ACCUPLACER.

Knowing What the ACCUPLACER Is and Whether You Really Need to Take It

If you're reading this book, you've probably been advised to take the ACCUPLACER. In this section, I try to anticipate and then answer some of the most basic questions that you may have about the test — including what the heck it is and whether you really need to take it.

What is the ACCUPLACER?

The ACCUPLACER is a placement test for community college (also known as junior college). It's used to assess your current skill level and readiness for the types of schoolwork you'll be required to do in community college — specifically, reading, writing, and math.

Who makes the ACCUPLACER?

The ACCUPLACER is made by the College Board. These are the same folks who created the SAT and the Advanced Placement Program (the AP Tests).

So is the ACCUPLACER like the SAT or ACT?

Yes and no.

The ACCUPLACER tests a lot of the same skills that the SAT and ACT test. However, the SAT and ACT are *entrance tests*. This means that you take these tests *before* you've been accepted to a college. Getting a low score on the SAT or ACT can cause a college to reject your application.

In contrast, the ACCUPLACER is a *placement test*. This means that you take it *after* you've been accepted to community college. A low score on one or more parts of the ACCUPLACER means, at the very worst, that you may need to take one or more non-credit remedial courses.

Do you have to take the ACCUPLACER?

The short answer is no. But if you don't take it, your community college may place you in a set of remedial courses that are too easy for you. Passing the ACCUPLACER — or any of the five sections of the ACCUPLACER — allows you to place out of these non-credit courses, so you can begin earning college credits immediately.

So, you can think of the ACCUPLACER not as a required test that you *must* pass, but rather as an *opportunity* to jump over a bunch of lower-level courses that you may not need to take.

What is the Next-Generation ACCUPLACER?

The current version of the ACCUPLACER is called the *Next-Generation ACCUPLACER*. This name distinguishes it from the older and now defunct version.



REMEMBER

The Next-Generation ACCUPLACER is the *only* version of the test being administered in 2019 and for the foreseeable future. So, heads up: If you've bought any other ACCUPLACER books along with this one, check to make sure that they're *explicitly* for the Next-Generation ACCUPLACER. If not, don't use them! (Or, perhaps, use them to prop open a door or, in a pinch, give them as birthday presents to people you plan never to see again.)

Throughout this book, whenever you read *ACCUPLACER*, you can assume that I'm talking about the *Next-Generation ACCUPLACER*.

Discovering When, Where, and How to Take the ACCUPLACER

If you've read (or even skimmed) this far, I'm going to assume that you've decided to take the ACCUPLACER. Now, you may want to know some specifics about where and how to register for and take the test. That's what this section is about.

How do you register for and take the ACCUPLACER?

The ACCUPLACER is administered by your community college. If you've recently enrolled in a community college, an administrator probably mentioned the ACCUPLACER among a short list of important things to take care of as a new student.

The ACCUPLACER is most often done either by appointment or by just walking into the right office and asking the nice person behind the desk to take it. But the procedure can vary a bit among institutions. If you have any doubts as to how to get started, call your community college to get specifics.

How long does the ACCUPLACER take?

The ACCUPLACER is an *untimed* test, which means that you can take as long as you like. This is in contrast to most other tests, including those that you're used to taking from high school. In Chapter 3, I give you some strategies to make the most of this aspect of the ACCUPLACER.

Do you need to take all sections of the ACCUPLACER on the same day?

No! You can opt to take all five sections at once, or break them up in any way you like. In Chapter 3, I discuss a few strategies to maximize your advantage when taking the ACCUPLACER.

How is the ACCUPLACER administered?

Most often, the ACCUPLACER is administered via the Internet, at a computer located in the administrative office or testing center of a community college. Some schools, however, administer the ACCUPLACER on paper, in its COMPANION format. If you're not sure which format your school uses, the office that administers the test can tell you.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how the online form of the ACCUPLACER is a *computer adaptive test* (CAT), and what this means to you as a test-taker.

What do you need to bring to the ACCUPLACER?

When taking the ACCUPLACER, be sure to bring your student ID. If your school administers the ACCUPLACER using its computer format (this is most common), scrap paper will be provided. You won't need or be allowed to use a calculator for the math portions of the test — though for some questions, a calculator will appear on your computer screen.

If your school offers the ACCUPLACER on paper, in its COMPANION format, then you'll be allowed to use a simple four-function calculator on some portions of the test, which they should provide for you. (Your fancier scientific or graphing calculator, however, is out.)

What accommodations does the ACCUPLACER make for disabled students?

If you have a documented disability that requires special accommodations for taking the ACCUPLACER, contact your community college to let them know, and they'll get you set up.



TIP

If you have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a medical condition that allows you to receive extra time on other standardized tests, no worries: The ACCUPLACER is an untimed test, so you (and everybody else!) can take all the time you need to answer the questions. However, just to be practical, I recommend that you arrive early enough in the day that everybody in the administrative office isn't about to leave for the day! (See Chapter 3 for more on this topic.)

Understanding What Happens After You Take the ACCUPLACER

If you've read through the earlier sections of this chapter, you may be wondering what happens after you take the ACCUPLACER. In this section, I discuss the ins and outs and ups and downs of what life after your ACCUPLACER may look like.

How is the ACCUPLACER scored?

Each of the five sections of the ACCUPLACER is scored separately on a scale from 200 to 300. Generally speaking, any score of 280 or above is passing. You don't get a letter grade such as an A or a B, but what you *do* get is a free pass out of taking the no-credit college course associated with that test. Yay!

However, different community colleges draw the pass-fail line in different places. So a score of 278 on one section may be a passing score at your school. Or, a 278 may be a passing score on the Arithmetic Test but not on the Writing Test.

Additionally, some schools allow students who are only a few points below the passing score to take more accelerated no-credit courses or even partial-credit courses. (Who says "close" only counts in horseshoes?)

The person who administers your test is probably the best person to ask for information about what the passing ACCUPLACER scores are at your community college.

If you do well on the ACCUPLACER, what happens?

Every section of the ACCUPLACER that you do well on enables you to skip the no-credit remedial course work in that subject. This means that you *don't* have to spend a semester (or more!) taking

a course that adds no credit toward your college degree. Even better, because passing the ACCUPLACER demonstrates your competence in a subject area, you can move on to upper-level courses with the confidence that you're ready to do the work!

If you DON'T do well on the ACCUPLACER, what happens?



REMEMBER

This is key: If you don't do well on the ACCUPLACER, you still won't be kicked out of community college. It's just not that kind of test.

This feature makes the ACCUPLACER different from college entrance tests like the SAT and ACT. Most colleges and universities set a minimum SAT and ACT score. And while there may be some wiggle room in special cases, scoring on the low side definitely lowers your chances of being accepted. And, naturally, more competitive schools tend to require higher scores.

But, as I mention earlier in this chapter, the ACCUPLACER isn't an entrance test. In fact, if you're scheduled to take the ACCUPLACER, this means that you've already been accepted into community college (congratulations!).

Failure to pass any portion of the ACCUPLACER simply means that your community college is going to require you to take at least one remedial no-credit course before they allow you to enroll in a credit course in that subject area. Essentially, they want to set you up for success, to make sure that you have the skills necessary to pass your courses when the time comes.

What if you pass some sections of the ACCUPLACER but not others?

When you pass any section of the ACCUPLACER, you're done with that section forever! You never have to take it again, and you're exempted from taking remedial courses in that area of study.

How many times can you take the ACCUPLACER?

Usually, your community college will give you two chances to pass each section of the ACCUPLACER. In some cases — especially for a good student with good grades — they may stretch this to three times.

The good news is that when you pass any section of the ACCUPLACER, you're officially done with that section, and you don't have to take it again.

- » Getting acquainted with the Reading Test
- » Encountering the Writing Test
- » Checking out the three math tests

Chapter 2

Taking a Closer Look at What's on the ACCUPLACER

Every question on the ACCUPLACER is a multiple-choice question with four possible answers, A through D.

The ACCUPLACER has a total of five sections:

- » Reading Test
- » Writing Test
- » Three Math Tests:
 - Arithmetic
 - Quantitative Reasoning, Algebra, and Statistics (QAS)
 - Advanced Algebra and Functions (AAF)

In this chapter, I get into a few specifics about what you'll find on each section of the test.

Reading Test

The ACCUPLACER Reading Test is similar to many other reading tests you've probably taken throughout your life. Most of the test requires you to read a passage and then answer one or more comprehension questions. Additionally, a few questions give you a sentence with a word or short phrase missing, and you're asked to fill in the blank.

One passage is a work of fiction, and the rest are nonfiction. Each question presents you with four answers that test you on the following reading skills.

» **Information and ideas:**

- Reading closely for factual details in the passage
- Determining the central idea (or main idea) — the most important point that the writer is making
- Summarizing — restating the information in the passage in a different way that conveys its meaning effectively
- Understanding relationships among elements within the passage, and especially making inferences about what is not specifically stated but can be reasonably understood

» **Rhetoric:**

- Word choice — why the writer most likely chose to use a specific word or phrase
- Text structure — how the writer organizes the information that they are presenting
- Point of view — what the writer believes or feels about what they are writing about
- Purpose — why the writer chose to write this passage
- Arguments — how the writer frames their case to persuade the reader

» **Synthesis:** Given a pair of texts that discuss a common theme from two different perspectives, comparing and contrasting information or rhetoric in the passages

» **Vocabulary:** Demonstrating comprehension of a specific word or phrase

Writing Test

The ACCUPLACER Writing Test presents you with essays that are in need of editing. Your job is to answer questions, each of which presents you with a choice of four possible ways to express an idea. The questions test your understanding of the following information.

» **Standard English conventions:**

- Sentence structure — avoiding sentence fragments and run-on sentences, understanding coordination and subordination of clauses, making sentences readable with parallel structure, and avoiding inappropriate verb shifts
- Usage — subject-verb agreement, pronoun-antecedent agreement, clarifying frequently confused words, and following the conventions of English expression
- Punctuation — how and when to use the punctuation that students most often misuse, such as commas, semicolons, colons, and dashes

» **Expression of ideas:**

- Development — expressing an idea clearly, adding supporting information, and maintaining focus
- Organization — introducing ideas in a logical sequence, and helping the reader to understand your point through the use of introductions, conclusions, and transitions