

# THE ENGLISH ELIGIBILITY EXAM: AN OVERVIEW

**WHAT IS IT? WHO CAN TAKE IT?** The English Eligibility Exam is for students who want to demonstrate reading and writing competency, so they can skip a class or classes in the English sequence. Some students also use this exam for initial placement. Any student may take this exam, but students need to earn a grade of C or higher in their current English class to use this exam to advance.

**WHAT TO BRING:** Bring your student ID and a picture ID, a dictionary, and a pen.

**THE WRITING TASK:** You will be given a reading passage or short essay. You will be asked to write first a summary of the reading and then, in response to a particular question or prompt, an argumentative essay in which you take a position on the topic presented.

**FORMAT:** Your essay should be written in pen. Skipping lines as you write will make it easier to revise or adjust sentence structure if necessary. You will not be penalized for crossing out neatly as long as your writing is legible and your reader can follow your argument.

**TEST SCORERS ARE LOOKING FOR:**

- a clear thesis statement that addresses the question or topic
- a thoughtful essay that is long enough to fully develop a line of reasoning to support your argument
- evidence from the essay and other evidence that supports the thesis statement
- focused paragraphs developed around main ideas
- coherent structure, an order that is apparent
- effective sentence structure, including variety and complexity
- correct grammar and idiomatic use of language

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Sample exams from previous semesters are available in the Writing Lab in the LAC (R207); please ask for assistance. The eligibility coordinator, Paolo Sapienza, can be contacted in Batmale 514 (239.3574 or [jsapienz@ccsf.edu](mailto:jsapienz@ccsf.edu)).

# ENGLISH ELIGIBILITY EXAM: TIMED TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES

**Be aware of time.** You will have 1 hour and 30 minutes to complete your essay. It is better to take some time to plan than launch into a false start and have to start over again. You will not have time to revise your entire essay. Being clear, direct, and to the point is better than rambling and being repetitive. Try to reserve the last 10-15 minutes to check your grammar.

It is important to **read the passage or essay carefully** and to understand the question you have been asked. Previewing the question before you read the essay will help you look for the information you need to write your essay.

**Read the essay thoroughly** and mark any unfamiliar vocabulary. If you are not sure about the author's positions or how he/she supports his/her arguments after your first reading, look up any words you don't know. Read the essay a second time, perhaps highlighting or underlining the main ideas.

In addition to your essay, **you will be asked to write a brief summary** of the reading or essay. A summary, written in your own words, should state the title and author of the reading, the author's thesis (overall main point), and key supporting points. The summary may be separate from the essay, or you may use it as the introduction to the essay.

Before you write your essay, **sketch a brief outline** or cluster. Your ideas are the center of your essay. Think carefully about your thesis statement: does it answer the question? Have you taken a clear position? Have you determined key points you want to discuss in your essay? Set up a clear line of logic in your argument.

**Use paragraphs with main points to develop your thesis.** Use evidence from the reading and background knowledge to support your ideas fully.

**If you want to revise**, you may add asterisks (\*) or write in the margins as you think of additional details that support your argument, but consider whether these ideas will require you to revise your thesis statement or alter your introduction and conclusion.

In the 5-10 minutes you've saved, **proofread for sentence-structure, grammar, and word choice/idiom.** Make your corrections and additions neatly. (White-out is not necessary.)

sentence structure: correct fragments, run-ons, and comma splices; combine sentences to relate ideas and improve parallelism.

grammar: proofread for the grammar errors you know you make (subject-verb agreement? verb tense and form? word forms? vague pronouns and pronoun agreement?)

word choice and idiomatic expression: read your essay one last time to improve wording as time allows.

You must stop writing when time is called, even if you have not finished your essay. **If you are running out of time and will not be able to complete your essay**, in your last 3–5 minutes you may want to: 1) write a sentence that provides an overall conclusion, even if you know it's not integrated well into your last paragraph, or 2) write a sentence that explains what you had intended to say or would say if you had more time.

## **General Directions for Taking the English Eligibility Exam**

### **(A Sample Exam)**

1. This is an argument essay. Do not rely on narrative/personal experience for the basis of your argument.
2. Read the essay carefully and complete both writing tasks. You have one and a half hours to read/write. Spend at least 10 minutes writing your summary and, at least, 10 minutes organizing your essay. Arrange your ideas logically behind a central claim/thesis and support your generalizations with specific evidence, using ideas and language from the reading and following proper guidelines for quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing.
3. You may use a dictionary or thesaurus.
4. Write in ink on the lined paper given to you. Write on one side of the paper; you may single space, but it is often a good idea to write on every other line for editing purposes. Try to leave at least 10 minutes at the end to carefully re-read and make corrections.
5. Both the quality of your thinking and the correctness of your writing will be evaluated.
6. Leave all your paperwork with the proctor.

### **The Reading:**

## **Who Owns Dr. King's Words?**

|By Ellen Goodman

At first it sounds like a question for a panel of philosophers: Who owns a dream? What happens when a vision that's formed in the words of one person is released like a balloon into the air to be shared with everyone? Whose property is it then?

The dream in this case was described by Martin Luther King Jr. Standing before a crowd of 200,000 at the Lincoln Memorial on that August day in 1963, he found the language to match the moment. "I Have a Dream," he told the country in a speech that became a part of our collective eloquence, as much a part of our heritage as the Gettysburg Address.

Dr. King had a gift. Now people are wrangling over the value of that gift.

Today the question of dreamers and owners, words and property, history and money, has been set before a panel of three judges in Atlanta. The King family is asking an appeals court to rule that CBS must pay them to use the dream speech in a documentary sold on videotape. They claim that they -- not the public -- own Dr. King's words.

For years, the King family has been protective or litigious -- choose one or the other. They sued and settled with Henry Hampton, who produced the "Eyes on the Prize" documentary. They sued and settled with USA Today. They regard themselves as keepers of the legacy . . . and the accounting books.

In 1963, no one would have believed there was money to be made from civil rights history. In his lifetime, King was interested in justice, not profit. His family at times lived on the salary of a \$6,000-a-year minister. He contributed everything, even his Nobel Prize money, to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

When King was assassinated, the sum total of his estate was a \$50,000 insurance policy bought for him by singer Harry Belafonte. That, plus his words.

These words are what the family lawyers call "intellectual property." It's property that will soon be worth an estimated \$50 million from multimedia deals, licensing and real estate.

I do not mean to suggest that the family is in the protection racket solely for the money. Schools are granted the use of the "dream" speech freely. At the same time, one of the many lawsuits was against a company that wanted to use King's image on refrigerator magnets.

It is not surprising that the family would resist the trivialization of a man's magnetism into a refrigerator magnet. It's far too easy in our culture to slip from being a martyr on a pedestal to a pop icon on a T-shirt.

While we are talking about King and commercialism, it is fair to ask the difference between the family profit—much of which goes to the Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta—and CBS's profit.

But nevertheless there is still the little matter of public history and private property.

In the appeals court, the case will not be decided on the grounds of greed but of copyright law and free speech. On the one hand Dr. King gave the press advance copies of the speech; on the other hand, the most eloquent passages were extemporaneous. On the one hand he copyrighted the speech after it was given; on the other hand he characterized it as "a living petition to the public and the Congress."

Those of us who work with words for a living understand the desire to control our ephemeral "product." We are sensitive to the notion of intellectual property and do not

take kindly to bootlegged editions of CD's or books or software that show up on black markets.

But Martin Luther King Jr. was not a rock star. Or a software designer. He was a preacher, a leader, a prophet, a martyr. He was, in every sense of the word, a public figure.

One day, 36 years ago, he gave voice to our collective idealism and words to our best collective yearnings: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

This is not a private dream. It doesn't belong to his family estate. It belongs to all of us.

### **The Assignment:**

You will have 90 minutes to write your exam. Here are your directions.

**First:** Write a one paragraph summary of the main ideas in the essay. You may use this summary as the first paragraph of your essay if you wish.

**Second:** Write an argumentative essay in which you address this question:

If you were a member of the appeals court, argue how you would make your ruling. Would the speech (regarded as intellectual property and thus private property) belong to the King family, or would you allow CBS to use the speech for profit, considering its public history and belonging to all of us?