

CLEP® Analyzing and Interpreting Literature: at a Glance

Description of the Examination

The Analyzing and Interpreting Literature examination covers material usually taught in a general undergraduate course in literature. Although the examination does not require familiarity with specific works, it does assume that candidates have read widely and perceptively in poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. The questions are based on passages supplied in the test. These passages are taken primarily from American and British literature.

The examination contains approximately 80 multiple-choice questions to be answered in 98 minutes. Some of these are pretest questions that will not be scored. Any time candidates spend taking tutorials and providing personal information is additional to actual testing time. An optional essay section can be taken in addition to the multiple-choice test. The essay section requires that two essays be written during a total time of 90 minutes.

Knowledge and Skills Required

Questions on the Analyzing and Interpreting Literature examination require candidates to demonstrate the following:

- Ability to read prose, poetry, and drama with understanding
- Ability to analyze the elements of a literary passage and to respond to nuances of meaning, tone, imagery, and style
- Ability to interpret metaphors, to recognize rhetorical and stylistic devices, to perceive relationships between parts and wholes, and to grasp a speaker's or author's attitudes
- Knowledge of the means by which literary effects are achieved
- Familiarity with the basic terminology used to discuss literary texts

The examination emphasizes comprehension, interpretation, and analysis of literary works. A specific knowledge of historical context (authors and movements) is not required, but a broad knowledge of literature gained through reading widely and a familiarity with basic literary terminology is assumed.

The following outline indicates the relative emphasis given to the various types of literature and the periods from which the passages are taken. The approximate percentage of exam questions per classification is noted within each main category.

Genre

- 35–45% Poetry
- 35–45% Prose (fiction and nonfiction)
- 15–30% Drama

National Tradition

- 50–65% British Literature
- 30–45% American Literature
- 5–15% Works in Translation

Period

- 3–7% Classical and pre-Renaissance
- 20–30% Renaissance and 17th Century
- 35–45% 18th and 19th Centuries
- 25–35% 20th and 21st Centuries

Study Resources

The most relevant preparation for the Analyzing and Interpreting Literature exam is attentive and reflective reading of the various literary genres of poetry, drama, and prose. You can prepare for the test by:

- Reading a variety of poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction
- Reading critical analyses of various literary works
- Writing analyses and interpretations of the works you read
- Discussing with others the meaning of the literature you read

Textbooks and anthologies used for college courses in the analysis and interpretation of literature contain a sampling of literary works in a variety of genres. They also contain material that can help you comprehend the meanings of literary works and recognize the devices writers use to convey their sense and intent. To prepare for the exam, you should study the contents of at least one textbook or anthology, which you can find in most college bookstores. You would do well to consult two or three texts because they do vary somewhat in content, approach, and emphasis.

A recent survey conducted by CLEP® found that the following textbooks are among those used by college faculty who teach the equivalent course. You might find one or

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more of these online or at your local college bookstore. HINT: Look at the table of contents first to make sure it matches the knowledge and skills required for this exam.

Abcarian, <i>Literature: The Human Experience</i> (Bedford/St. Martin's)
Arp and Johnson, <i>Perrine's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense</i> (W. W. Norton)
Booth, <i>Norton Introduction to Literature</i> (W. W. Norton)
Damrosch, <i>Longman Anthology of World Literature</i> (Longman)
DiYanni, <i>Literature: Approaches to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama</i> (McGraw-Hill)
Gardner, <i>Literature: A Portable Anthology</i> (Bedford)
Gwynn, <i>Literature: A Pocket Anthology</i> (Penguin Academics)
Kennedy and Gioia, <i>Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama and Writing</i> (Pearson/Longman)
Kirszner and Mandell, <i>Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing</i> (Wadsworth)
Lawall, <i>Norton Anthology of World Literature</i> (W. W. Norton)
Meyer, <i>The Bedford Introduction to Literature</i> (Bedford/St. Martin's)

The literature resources below, compiled by the CLEP test development committee and staff members, may help you study for your exam. However, none of these sources are designed specifically to provide preparation for a CLEP exam. The College Board has no control over their content and cannot vouch for accuracy.

Literature Resources:

Virtual Public Library:
www.virtualology.com/virtualpubliclibrary/halloffamousauthors/

Luminarium Anthology of English Literature:
www.luminarium.org/lumina.htm

Bartleby.com Great Books Online:
<http://bartleby.com/>

Voice of the Shuttle Literature (in English):
<http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=3>

Visit clep.collegeboard.org/test-preparation for additional literature resources.

You can also find suggestions for exam preparation in Chapter IV of the *CLEP Official Study Guide*. In addition,

many college faculty post their course materials on their schools' websites.

Sample Test Questions

The following sample questions do not appear on an actual CLEP examination. They are intended to give potential test-takers an indication of the format and difficulty level of the examination and to provide content for practice and review. For more sample questions and info about the test, see the *CLEP Official Study Guide*.

Questions 1–3 refer to the passage below.

- (SIR PETER:) When an old bachelor marries a young wife, what is he to expect? 'Tis now six months since Lady Teazle made me the happiest of men—and I have been the most miserable dog ever since! We tift a little going to church and fairly quarrelled before the bells had done ringing. I was more than once nearly choked with gall during the honeymoon, and had lost all comfort in life before my friends had done wishing me joy. Yet I chose with caution—a girl bred wholly in the country, who never knew luxury beyond one silk gown, nor dissipation above the annual gala of a race ball. Yet she now plays her part in all the extravagant fopperies of fashion and the town, with as ready a grace as if she never had seen a bush or a grassplot out of Grosvenor Square!*- I am sneered at by all my acquaintance and paragraphed in the newspapers. She dissipates my fortune, and contradicts all my humors; yet the worst of it is, I doubt I love her, or I should never bear all this. However, I'll never be weak enough to own it. (1777)

*a fashionable section of London

- In lines 3–4, the phrases “the happiest of men” and “the most miserable dog” are best described as
 - metaphors characterizing Sir Peter's conflicted state of mind
 - allusions to literary characters famed for their good and bad marriages
 - clichés illustrating the contrast between Sir Peter's previous hopes and present reality
 - stock attitudes about marriage based upon popular myth
 - euphemisms describing Sir Peter's transition from a devoted bridegroom to an adulterous husband

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2. According to lines 8–11 (“Yet I chose . . . race ball”), Sir Peter chose a bride that he hoped would be
 - A. different from the rural women of her time
 - B. ignorant of his wish for a lavish lifestyle
 - C. innocent and guileless in morals and habits
 - D. fond of the duties that accompany life on a farm
 - E. graceful, accomplished, and socially sophisticated
3. In context, the word “grace” (line 13) most nearly means
 - A. skill
 - B. privilege
 - C. virtue
 - D. prayer
 - E. demand
4. Which of the following best reflects the ideas in the first sentence?
 - A. People do not sufficiently recognize the power of vanity in action.
 - B. Only discerning people recognize vanity when they come upon it.
 - C. Vain actions are usually forceful and can therefore be recognized.
 - D. Vanity often causes people to use force against others.
 - E. The operations of vanity are difficult to detect because they are not usually forceful.
5. In line 21, “thou” refers to which of the following?
 - A. The reader
 - B. Money
 - C. The hero
 - D. Vanity
 - E. The author’s patron

Questions 4–6 refer to the passage below.

O Vanity! how little is thy force acknowledged, or thy operations discerned! How wantonly dost thou deceive mankind under different disguises! Sometimes thou dost wear the face of pity, sometimes of generosity: nay, thou hast the assurance even to put on those glorious ornaments which belong only to heroic virtue. Thou odious, deformed monster! whom priests have railed at, philosophers despised, and poets ridiculed: is there a wretch so abandoned as to own thee for an acquaintance in public? yet, how few will refuse to enjoy thee in private? nay, thou art the pursuit of most men through their lives. The greatest villainies are daily practised to please thee; nor is the meanest thief below, or the greatest hero above, thy notice. Thy embraces are often the sole aim and sole reward of the private robbery and the plundered province. It is to pamper up thee, thou harlot, that we attempt to withdraw from others what we do not want, or to withhold from them what they do. All our passions are thy slaves. Avarice itself is often no more than thy handmaid, and even Lust thy pimp. The bully Fear, like a coward, flies before thee, and Joy and Grief hide their heads in thy presence.

I know thou wilt think that, whilst I abuse thee, I court thee, and that thy love hath inspired me to write this sarcastical panegyric on thee; but thou art deceived: I value thee not of a farthing; nor will it give me any pain if thou shouldst prevail on the reader to censure this digression as arrant nonsense; for know, to thy confusion, that I have introduced thee for no other purpose than to lengthen out a short chapter; and so I return to my history.

(1742)

6. The tone to which the passage shifts in lines 26–28 can best be described as
 - A. playful and humorous
 - B. formal and scholarly
 - C. simple and colloquial
 - D. ironic but somber
 - E. reticent but obsequious

Questions 7–10 refer to the excerpt from a poem below.

It lies not in our power to love, or hate,
 For will in us is over-rul'd by fate.
 When two are stript long ere the course begin,
 We wish that one should loose, the other win;
 Line (5) And one especiallie doe we affect
 Of two gold Ingots like in each respect.
 The reason no man knowes, let it suffice,
 What we behold is censur'd by our eies.
 Where both deliberat, the love is slight,
 Who ever lov'd, that lov'd not at first sight?
 (1593)

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7. Which of the following is the best paraphrase of lines 1 and 2 ?
 - A. We cannot know the truth about love and hate.
 - B. We cannot control our impulse to love or hate.
 - C. Most people are incapable of real love or hate.
 - D. With effort, we can learn to control our passions.
 - E. We often hate what we really should love.
8. The speaker in the excerpt is most concerned with
 - A. asking a question
 - B. making a denial
 - C. making a comparison
 - D. creating a myth
 - E. asserting an idea
9. The literary device employed in the last line is best described as
 - A. a rhetorical question
 - B. a conceit
 - C. a syllogism
 - D. an epic simile
 - E. a euphemism
10. The theme of the excerpt is best described as the
 - A. indecisiveness of human beings
 - B. joys of passionate love
 - C. need to be judicious in making choices
 - D. nonrational quality of preference
 - E. reasonable nature of love

Credit Recommendations

The American Council on Education has recommended that colleges grant three credits for a score of 50, which is equivalent to a course grade of C, on the CLEP Analyzing and Interpreting Literature exam. Each college, however, is responsible for setting its own policy. For candidates with satisfactory scores on the Analyzing and Interpreting Literature examination, colleges may grant credit toward fulfillment of a distribution requirement, or for a particular course that matches the exam in content. Check with your school to find out the score it requires for granting credit, the number of credit hours granted, and the course that can be bypassed with a passing score.

Answers to Sample Questions: 1-C; 2-C; 3-A; 4-A; 5-D; 6-A; 7-B; 8-E; 9-A; 10-D