

CLEP® English Literature: at a Glance

Description of the Examination

The English Literature examination covers material usually taught in a course at the college level. The test is primarily concerned with major authors and literary works, but it also includes questions on some minor writers. Candidates are expected to be acquainted with common literary terms, such as metaphor and personification, and basic literary forms, such as the sonnet and the ballad.

In both coverage and approach, the examination resembles the historically organized survey of English literature offered by many colleges. It assumes that candidates have read widely and developed an appreciation of English literature, know the basic literary periods, and have a sense of the historical development of English literature.

The examination contains approximately 95 questions to be answered in 90 minutes. Any time candidates spend on tutorials and providing personal information is in addition to the actual testing time.

An optional essay section can be taken in addition to the multiple-choice test. Candidates respond to two of three essay topics. An essay on the first topic, a persuasive analysis of a poem, is required, and candidates are advised to spend 35 to 40 minutes on it. For the second essay, candidates are asked to choose one of two topics that present a specific observation, position, or theme. Depending on the topic chosen, candidates choose any work by a particular author to appropriately support the claim or select works from a designated list provided. Candidates should plan to spend 50 to 55 minutes on the essay.

Candidates are expected to write well-organized essays in clear and precise prose. The essay section is scored by faculty at the institution that requests it and is still administered in paper-and-pencil format. There is an additional fee for taking this section, payable to the institution that administers the exam.

Knowledge and Skills Required

The English Literature examination measures both knowledge and ability. The percentages below show the relative emphasis given to each; however, most questions draw on both.

35–40% Knowledge of:

- Literary background
- Identification of authors
- Metrical patterns
- Literary references
- Literary terms

60–65% Ability to:

- Analyze the elements of form in a literary passage
- Perceive meanings
- Identify tone and mood
- Follow patterns of imagery
- Identify characteristics of style
- Comprehend the reasoning in an excerpt of literary criticism

The examination deals with literature from *Beowulf* to the present. Familiarity with and understanding of major writers is expected, as is knowledge of literary periods and common literary terms, themes, and forms. Some of the questions on the examination ask candidates to identify the author of a representative quotation or to recognize the period in which an excerpt was written.

Study Resources

Most textbooks and anthologies used in college-level English literature courses cover the periods and topics in the outline given earlier, but the approaches to certain topics and the emphases given to them may differ. To prepare for the English Literature exam, it is advisable to study one or more college textbooks, which can be found in most college bookstores. When selecting a textbook, check the table of contents against the knowledge and skills required for this test. You should also read critically the contents of at least one literary anthology, many of which are used as textbooks in English or British literature courses at the college level. You can probably obtain an extensive English or British literature reading list from a college English department, library, or bookstore.

Most textbook anthologies contain a representative sample of readings as well as discussions of historical background, literary styles and devices characteristic of various authors and periods, and other material relevant to the test. The anthologies do vary somewhat in content, approach, and emphasis, and you are therefore advised to consult more

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than one anthology as well as some specialized books on major authors, periods, and literary forms and terminology. You should also read some of the major novels that are mentioned or excerpted in the anthologies.

A recent survey conducted by CLEP® found that the following anthologies are among those used by college faculty who teach the equivalent course. You might find one or more of these online or at your local college bookstore. HINT: Look at the table of contents first to make sure it covers the time periods required for this exam.

Damrosch et al., <i>Longman Anthology of British Literature</i> (Longman)
Greenblatt, <i>Norton Anthology of English Literature</i> (W. W. Norton)
Black, <i>Broadview Anthology of British Literature</i> (Broadview)
Various eds., <i>Oxford Anthology of English Literature</i> (Oxford U. Press)

These resources, 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.

www.lib.jmu.edu/resources/subject.aspx?s=12

(James Madison University: English and American Literature — Online Books for Educators)

<http://literature.org/>

(The Online Literature Library)

<http://webcast.berkeley.edu/>

(University of California, Berkeley: Webcast Lectures)

www.luminarium.org/

(Anthology of English Literature online)

Visit clep.collegeboard.org/test-preparation for additional English 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 following passage.

"Is he a ghoul or a vampire?" I mused. I had read of such hideous incarnate demons. And then I set myself to reflect how I had tended him in infancy, and watched him grow to youth, and followed him almost through his whole course; and what absurd nonsense it was to yield to that sense of horror. "But where did he come from, the little dark thing, harbored by a good man to his bane?" muttered Superstition, as I dozed into unconsciousness. And I began, half dreaming, to weary myself with imagining some fit parentage for him; and, repeating my waking meditations, I tracked his existence over again, with grim variations; at last picturing his death and funeral: of which all I can remember is, being exceedingly vexed at having the task of dictating an inscription for his monument, and consulting the sexton about it; and, as he had no surname, and we could not tell his age, we were obliged to content ourselves with the single word "Heathcliff."

- The passage above appears in which of the following novels?
 - Tess of the D'Urbervilles*
 - Villette*
 - The Woman in White*
 - The Way of All Flesh*
 - Wuthering Heights*
- The narrator is describing a mental conflict between
 - the supernatural and the worldly
 - the demonic and the angelic
 - science and art
 - urban and rural
 - laborers and the gentry

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3. This passage's concern with dreams, death, horror, and monsters links it closely to which of the following kinds of fiction?
 - A. the epistolary novel
 - B. the stream of consciousness novel
 - C. the picaresque novel
 - D. the Gothic novel
 - E. the regional novel

4. Which of the following is an English allegorical epic that features the Red Cross Knight and Gloriana?
 - A. *The Pilgrim's Progress*
 - B. *Orlando Furioso*
 - C. *The Faerie Queene*
 - D. *Romance of the Rose*
 - E. *Paradise Lost*

5. All of the following were written in the 20th century EXCEPT:
 - A. *The Heart of Darkness*
 - B. *Middlemarch*
 - C. *Finnegan's Wake*
 - D. *Juno and the Paycock*
 - E. *The Man of Property*

6. What is the order, from earliest to latest, in which the following works about King Arthur were written?
 - I. *Le Morte d'Arthur*
 - II. *Idylls of the King*
 - III. *The Once and Future King*
 - A. I, II, III
 - B. I, III, II
 - C. III, I, II
 - D. II, III, I
 - E. III, II, I

7. Leigh Hunt, Thomas de Quincey, and Walter Savage Landor are essayists associated with what literary period?
 - A. the Restoration
 - B. the Romantic period
 - C. the Victorian period
 - D. the Age of Reason
 - E. the Renaissance

8. Which of the following poets is best known for an unusual system of prosody called "sprung rhythm"?
 - A. A. E. Housman
 - B. Christina Rossetti
 - C. Gerard Manley Hopkins
 - D. Algernon Charles Swinburne
 - E. Elizabeth Barrett Browning

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 English Literature exam. Each college, however, is responsible for setting its own policy. For candidates with satisfactory scores on the English 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-E; 2-A; 3-D; 4-C; 5-B; 6-A; 7-B; 8-C