

HUNTER COLLEGE READING/WRITING CENTER

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The CUNY Proficiency Examination: Preparing for Task 1

You will have two hours to read, think, and write your essay during the CPE Task 1 exam.

Task 1 involves both extemporaneous and premeditated critical thinking, reading, and writing. During this two hour section of the CPE, you will be reading a prompt, reading and assessing a short text, reviewing and re-assessing the long text, and of course planning and writing your essay. However, Task 1 also includes the time and effort you are willing to invest prior to the exam when you are studying, annotating, and summarizing the long reading. These are all academic skills you have used to prepare for class discussions, writing assignments, and exams.

In Task 1, you will be asked to write an essay in response to a prompt, which will be presented to you on the day of the exam. The prompt will ask you to write about and draw upon two readings: the long one, which you have had in your hands and mind in advance of the exam, and the short one, which you will receive and read at the exam site. Therefore, the essay you write for Task 1 calls for a comparison, but do not fix in your mind—before you read the Task 1 exam prompt and the short essay on the day of the exam—that there will be a pointed similarity or dissimilarity in the two authors' handling of subject matter.

Task 1 requires **critical, comparative thinking**; it is an academic endeavor and you need to adhere to the standard conventions of language, but this doesn't mean that you don't have the freedom to explore your subject matter and discover your own voice within it (you do!). It is important to review prior Task 1 prompts and essays to become familiar with the general format. To do this, go to the Reading/Writing Center website: rwc.hunter.cuny.edu (**click on CPE**); also, review the Testing CPE Information Booklet.

How can you prepare for Task 1 before you enter the exam site?

You can prepare by reading, re-reading the long essay, annotating it, looking up difficult words, outlining it, writing summaries for it, and discussing it with students (faculty is not permitted to discuss it with you). Make contact with students in the workshops, so you can share your ideas and questions, and go to the Reading/Writing Center Study Group sessions, during which time you can work on the long reading with other students.

What basic skills do you need to put into action to work with the long reading selection?

Answer: critical reading; annotating; outlining; summary writing

When you read a text for academic purposes, your natural inclination is to identify the author's **subject matter, the thesis statement/main idea, and her/his line of reasoning**. This common sense approach is exactly what you need to do with the advance copy of the Task 1 reading. Since you will be working with this text during different stages of comprehension, it is a strategic move to make at least 2 copies of it. This way you can work uninhibitedly with the extra copies—making mistakes and even being messy—and then apply your more deliberated thinking to annotate the exam copy of the reading, which you will take with you into the exam room.

A map of active reading processes with the long reading

- 1. First, read through the entire selection to get the gist** of its meaning. Don't worry if you are a bit confused during this stage; bypass the anxiety. Remember you will have time to figure it out, which takes us to the next stage.
- 2. When you read the selection for the second or third time, begin annotating: underline key words, sentences, and passages, and make notes in the margins, signaling the author's thesis, asking questions, and so on.** Circle unfamiliar words; look them up in a dictionary and then apply them to the context of the passage in which they appear. This way you'll understand how they are being used.
- 3. Next identify the central aspects of the text's arguments (the thesis and the author's line of reasoning).**
- 4. Then, write an informal outline, which maps the author's rhetorical strategy and identifies each central point of development within that strategy.**
- 5. After this activity, you will be ready to write a summary of the entire reading.** Doing this will reinforce your understanding of the text and additionally give you practice in writing summaries, a skill you will need during the exam.
- 6. Now, go back to your outline, in which you identified the key points of development and pieces of evidence, and write a summary for each key point of the author's argument, paying attention to how each point elaborates upon the author's thesis.** This will give you a solid understanding of the author's line of reasoning and how each segment of that reasoning is linked to the argument as a whole. **It will also prepare you to work with different sections of the text on the day of the exam.**
- 7. Don't expect to use your practice summaries on the day of the exam. The prompt may direct you to focus on a particular section of the long reading, and presenting a pre-written or pre-planned summary for the entire reading, or for a different section or purpose, would not fulfill the requirements of the assignment.**

The Short Reading Selection

Apply the skills you have used for the long reading to the short reading. However, you will not have an extended period of time to work with this selection. Read the selection in its entirety (after you read the prompt so that you know what you are looking for!), and then re-read it, and this time begin **annotating: underline the thesis and the key points of the argument in relation to what the prompt asks you to do.** Please see the Reading/Writing Center CPE handout on reading and working with the short essay.

The Essay:

Skills to incorporate for writing the Task 1 essay

I. Structure & Coherency

An essay has a beginning, middle, and end. Within this larger organizing pattern, there are specific paragraphs that perform functions, such as the introduction and the conclusion. Each paragraph has its own organizing pattern, presenting a topic sentence (the leading idea of the paragraph) and developing that idea through explanation, use of sources, analysis, etc. Moreover, all paragraphs cohere to develop and argue for the thesis/main idea.

In order to show relationships of meaning between parts of a paragraph or between entire paragraphs, use transitional words and phrases, such as: **however, therefore, conversely, along these same lines, in addition to, on the other hand, furthermore, and moreover.**

II. Using Direct Quotations & Paraphrases and Incorporating sources:

A) Directly quoting an author is an important practice, which requires strategy on your part. Decide which words and or sentences are essential for inclusion. Judiciously choose the word, sentence, or short passage, which captures the essence of the author's meaning (do not throw in entire paragraphs!) and **introduce the quotation.**

Examples of introducing an author's idea and contextualizing and bringing in a direct quotation

Introducing a direct quotation with a colon:

In Talking Back, Bell Hooks takes readers into her childhood world, a place in which a young girl's voice and ambition went, to a large extent, unrecognized: "Had I been a boy, they might have encouraged me to speak believing that I might someday be called to preach. There was no 'calling' for talking girls, no legitimized reward speech" (6).

Or

Introducing a direct quotation that is incorporated into your sentence:

When Bell Hooks comments on her family life, stressing that "Madness, not just physical abuse, was the punishment for too much talk if you were female," she draws her personal history into a collective one, in which the silencing of women has long been used toward the preservation of patriarchal control (6).

B) Paraphrasing (using your own words to express the author's words) is intrinsic to a discussion of any text. A paraphrase requires citation, like a direct quotation, but a paraphrase does not receive quotation marks. However, if, in a paraphrase, you use a few of the author's words (not including attendant words, such as conjunctions or articles), you must place quotation marks around those particular words. **You must introduce paraphrases** as you introduce quotations.

Examples of writing and introducing paraphrases

Bell Hooks emphasizes to readers that as a young girl she was disciplined for speaking her mind, a harsh consequence of being female in a family and culture that relegated women to positions of docility (6).

Or

The correct mien for girls in Bell Hooks's family was to be seen and not heard. Careers that rely upon strong verbal communication skills did not correspond to her family's ideas of what a female could aspire to (6).

C) Citation Style: These examples use MLA documentation style. Notice where the author's name appears and where periods are placed. Although you are normally required to include page numbers in your research papers and documented essays (and page numbers are included in the examples), you are not expected to do so for the Task 1 essay (although you may). Moreover, Talking Back is a book, so it is underlined, whereas in your essay you may be referring to an **article or book chapter, and so will use quotation marks around the title** (" "). Again, note that when you include the author's name in your prose, you do not need to include the name at the end of your quotation or paraphrase; however, when you do not include the author's name in your prose, you do need to place the name inside parentheses, at the end of your quotation or paraphrase.

D. Using your own understanding and knowledge

Past prompts have asked you to expand upon the authors' views with your own understanding and knowledge of the issue being argued. However, Task 1 is not a personal essay. Follow the prompt's directions. Incorporate your knowledge and opinion into the body of your essay in terms of their relationship to the two readings, thereby developing a coherent essay.

III. Editing & Proofreading

You won't have time to revise your entire essay, but you will have time to closely re-read it, looking for words that do not suit your meaning, punctuation for introduction and endings of quotations and paraphrases, punctuation in sentences, usage of transitional words, sentence structure (do you have run-ons or fragments?), verb form, subject and verb agreement, and perhaps usage of articles (the, a, and an). Your grammar and punctuation are not expected to be perfect, but these things do matter, certainly if they obscure your meaning.