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English Literature: At a Glance

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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 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.

- ▶ Damrosch et al., *Longman Anthology of British Literature* (Longman)
- ▶ Greenblatt, *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (W. W. Norton)
- ▶ Black, *Broadview Anthology of British Literature* (Broadview)
- ▶ Various eds., *Oxford Anthology of English Literature* (Oxford U. Press)

The online 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.

James Madison University: English and American Literature — Online Books for Educators:
lib.jmu.edu/resources/subject.aspx?s=12

The Online Literature Library:
literature.org/

University of California, Berkeley: Webcast Lectures:
webcast.berkeley.edu/

Anthology of English Literature online:
luminarium.org/

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*.

1. An anonymous narrative poem focusing on the climax of a particularly dramatic event and employing frequent repetition, conventional figures of speech, and sometimes a refrain — altered and transmitted orally in a musical setting — is called a
 - A. popular ballad
 - B. pastoral elegy
 - C. courtly lyric
 - D. villanelle
 - E. chivalric romance

2. Which of the following is the first line of a poem by John Keats?
 - A. “What dire offence from amorous causes springs”
 - B. “They flee from me that sometime did me seek”
 - C. “Thou still unravished bride of quietness”
 - D. “I weep for Adonais — he is dead!”
 - E. “Not, I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee”
3. Which of the following was written earliest?
 - A. *The Waste Land*
 - B. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
 - C. *Songs of Innocence*
 - D. *The Faerie Queene*
 - E. *The Rape of the Lock*
4. “Lycidas” is a poem that
 - A. adapts a heroic legend from classical mythology to the society that the writer knew best.
 - B. manages in a short space to record much of English history.
 - C. mourns the death of the writer’s friend but also reveals personal concerns of the writer.
 - D. uses an important historical event of its day to air the political views of the writer.
 - E. captures the magic of the Italian Renaissance and puts it into a realistic London setting.

Questions 5–6 are based on the following poem.

My friend, the things that do attain
 The happy life be these, I find:
 The riches left, not got with pain;
 The fruitful ground; the quiet mind;

Line

- (5) The equal friend; no grudge, no strife;
 No charge of rule, nor governance;
 Without disease, the healthy life;
 The household of continuance;

The mean diet, no dainty fare;

- (10) Wisdom joined with simpleness;
 The night discharged of all care,
 Where wine the wit may not oppress;

The faithful wife, without debate;
 Such sleeps as may beguile the night;

- (15) Content thyself with thine estate,
 Neither wish death, nor fear his might.

5. In line 9, the word “mean” signifies
- dull
 - troublesome
 - cruel
 - basic
 - contemptible
6. Which of the following best summarizes the poem’s theme?
- Happiness is best realized through simple living.
 - Life is short, so savor each experience.
 - Our passions help keep us young.
 - Preventive care ensures longevity.
 - Hard work is its own reward.
7. Match each of the following authors to the work that he or she wrote.
- Aphra Behn
 - Oliver Goldsmith
 - Samuel Johnson
 - Richard Brinsley Sheridan
- _____ *The Vicar of Wakefield*
 _____ *Oroonoko*
 _____ *The School for Scandal*
 _____ *A Dictionary of the English Language*
8. Identify the writers from the list below who were associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement.
- George Gordon, Lord Byron
 - William Morris
 - John Ruskin
 - Dante Gabriel Rossetti
 - Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- _____

set ever thought of her, except Henry Lennox. He too, she knew, would strive to forget her, because of the pain she had caused him. She had heard him often boast of his power of putting any disagreeable thought far away from him. Then she penetrated farther into what might have been. If she had cared for him as a lover, and had accepted him, and this change in her father’s opinions and consequent station had taken place, she could not doubt but that it would have been impatiently received by Mr. Lennox. It was a bitter mortification to her in one sense; but she could bear it patiently, because she knew her father’s purity of purpose, and that strengthened her to endure his errors, grave and serious though in her estimation they were. But the fact of the world esteeming her father degraded, in its rough wholesale judgment, would have oppressed and irritated Mr. Lennox. As she realized what might have been, she grew to be thankful for what was. They were at the lowest now; they could not be worse.

9. The sentence “The smooth sea of that old life closed up, without a mark to tell where they had all been” emphasizes which of the following about Margaret?
- The sense that she is drowning in her new life
 - The fact that her memories of the past are fading rapidly
 - Her strong disapproval of her father’s actions
 - Her sense of how significantly her life has changed
 - How much she misses Edith and Aunt Shaw
10. The inspiration for W. B. Yeats’s “Easter 1916” was
- the struggle for Irish independence
 - life in the trenches during the First World War
 - the death of Yeats’s young bride
 - the increase in religious doubt in the twentieth century
 - dissatisfaction with working conditions for the Irish

Question 9 is based on the following passage.

Yes! Margaret remembered it well. Edith and Mrs. Shaw had gone to dinner. Margaret had joined the party in the evening. The recollection of the plentiful luxury of all the arrangements, the stately handsomeness of the furniture, the size of the house, the peaceful, untroubled ease of the visitors — all came vividly before her, in strange contrast to the present time. The smooth sea of that old life closed up, without a mark left to tell where they had all been. The habitual dinners, the calls, the shopping, the dancing evenings, were all going on, going on for ever, though her Aunt Shaw and Edith were no longer there; and she, of course, was even less missed. She doubted if any one of that old

Credit Recommendations

The American Council on Education has recommended that colleges grant 3 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-A; 2-C; 3-D; 4-C; 5-D; 6-A; 7-2, 1, 4, 3; 8-2, 3, 4 (any combination); 9-D; 10-A.