

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Understanding who takes the ACCUPLACER and why
- » Getting clear about the Next-Generation ACCUPLACER
- » Knowing what the ACCUPLACER tests
- » Understanding how the ACCUPLACER is scored and what this means to you

Chapter 1

Getting to Know the ACCUPLACER

If you've been told that you have to take the ACCUPLACER, you probably have a bunch of basic questions about it, such as the following:

Just what is the ACCUPLACER?

Do I *have* to take it (really)?

When, where, and how do I take it?

What kind of stuff does the ACCUPLACER test?

What happens after I take the test?

In this chapter, I give you answers to the most common questions that students tend to have about the ACCUPLACER.

Knowing What the ACCUPLACER Is and Whether You Really Need to Take It

If you're reading this book, you've probably been advised to take the ACCUPLACER. In this section, I try to anticipate and then answer some of the most basic questions that you may have about the test — including what the heck it is and whether you really need to take it.

What is the ACCUPLACER?

The ACCUPLACER is a placement test for community college (also known as junior college). It's used to assess your current skill level and readiness for the types of schoolwork you'll be required to do in community college — specifically, reading, writing, and math.

Who makes the ACCUPLACER?

The ACCUPLACER is made by the College Board. These are the same folks who created the SAT and the Advanced Placement Program (the AP Tests).

So is the ACCUPLACER like the SAT or ACT?

Yes and no.

The ACCUPLACER tests a lot of the same skills that the SAT and ACT test. However, the SAT and ACT are *entrance tests*. This means that you take these tests *before* you've been accepted to a college. Getting a low score on the SAT or ACT can cause a college to reject your application.

In contrast, the ACCUPLACER is a *placement test*. This means that you take it *after* you've been accepted to community college. A low score on one or more parts of the ACCUPLACER means, at the very worst, that you may need to take one or more non-credit remedial courses.

Do you have to take the ACCUPLACER?

The short answer is no. But if you don't take it, your community college may place you in a set of remedial courses that are too easy for you. Passing the ACCUPLACER — or any of the five sections of the ACCUPLACER — allows you to place out of these non-credit courses, so you can begin earning college credits immediately.

So, you can think of the ACCUPLACER not as a required test that you *must* pass, but rather as an *opportunity* to jump over a bunch of lower-level courses that you may not need to take.

What is the Next-Generation ACCUPLACER?

The current version of the ACCUPLACER is called the *Next-Generation ACCUPLACER*. This name distinguishes it from the older and now defunct version.



REMEMBER

The Next-Generation ACCUPLACER is the *only* version of the test being administered in 2019 and for the foreseeable future. So, heads up: If you've bought any other ACCUPLACER books along with this one, check to make sure that they're *explicitly* for the Next-Generation ACCUPLACER. If not, don't use them! (Or, perhaps, use them to prop open a door or, in a pinch, give them as birthday presents to people you plan never to see again.)

Throughout this book, whenever you read *ACCUPLACER*, you can assume that I'm talking about the *Next-Generation ACCUPLACER*.

Discovering When, Where, and How to Take the ACCUPLACER

If you've read (or even skimmed) this far, I'm going to assume that you've decided to take the ACCUPLACER. Now, you may want to know some specifics about where and how to register for and take the test. That's what this section is about.

How do you register for and take the ACCUPLACER?

The ACCUPLACER is administered by your community college. If you've recently enrolled in a community college, an administrator probably mentioned the ACCUPLACER among a short list of important things to take care of as a new student.

The ACCUPLACER is most often done either by appointment or by just walking into the right office and asking the nice person behind the desk to take it. But the procedure can vary a bit among institutions. If you have any doubts as to how to get started, call your community college to get specifics.

How long does the ACCUPLACER take?

The ACCUPLACER is an *untimed* test, which means that you can take as long as you like. This is in contrast to most other tests, including those that you're used to taking from high school. In Chapter 3, I give you some strategies to make the most of this aspect of the ACCUPLACER.

Do you need to take all sections of the ACCUPLACER on the same day?

No! You can opt to take all five sections at once, or break them up in any way you like. In Chapter 3, I discuss a few strategies to maximize your advantage when taking the ACCUPLACER.

How is the ACCUPLACER administered?

Most often, the ACCUPLACER is administered via the Internet, at a computer located in the administrative office or testing center of a community college. Some schools, however, administer the ACCUPLACER on paper, in its COMPANION format. If you're not sure which format your school uses, the office that administers the test can tell you.

In Chapter 3, I discuss how the online form of the ACCUPLACER is a *computer adaptive test* (CAT), and what this means to you as a test-taker.

What do you need to bring to the ACCUPLACER?

When taking the ACCUPLACER, be sure to bring your student ID. If your school administers the ACCUPLACER using its computer format (this is most common), scrap paper will be provided. You won't need or be allowed to use a calculator for the math portions of the test — though for some questions, a calculator will appear on your computer screen.

If your school offers the ACCUPLACER on paper, in its COMPANION format, then you'll be allowed to use a simple four-function calculator on some portions of the test, which they should provide for you. (Your fancier scientific or graphing calculator, however, is out.)

What accommodations does the ACCUPLACER make for disabled students?

If you have a documented disability that requires special accommodations for taking the ACCUPLACER, contact your community college to let them know, and they'll get you set up.



TIP

If you have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a medical condition that allows you to receive extra time on other standardized tests, no worries: The ACCUPLACER is an untimed test, so you (and everybody else!) can take all the time you need to answer the questions. However, just to be practical, I recommend that you arrive early enough in the day that everybody in the administrative office isn't about to leave for the day! (See Chapter 3 for more on this topic.)

Understanding What Happens After You Take the ACCUPLACER

If you've read through the earlier sections of this chapter, you may be wondering what happens after you take the ACCUPLACER. In this section, I discuss the ins and outs and ups and downs of what life after your ACCUPLACER may look like.

How is the ACCUPLACER scored?

Each of the five sections of the ACCUPLACER is scored separately on a scale from 200 to 300. Generally speaking, any score of 280 or above is passing. You don't get a letter grade such as an A or a B, but what you *do* get is a free pass out of taking the no-credit college course associated with that test. Yay!

However, different community colleges draw the pass-fail line in different places. So a score of 278 on one section may be a passing score at your school. Or, a 278 may be a passing score on the Arithmetic Test but not on the Writing Test.

Additionally, some schools allow students who are only a few points below the passing score to take more accelerated no-credit courses or even partial-credit courses. (Who says "close" only counts in horseshoes?)

The person who administers your test is probably the best person to ask for information about what the passing ACCUPLACER scores are at your community college.

If you do well on the ACCUPLACER, what happens?

Every section of the ACCUPLACER that you do well on enables you to skip the no-credit remedial course work in that subject. This means that you *don't* have to spend a semester (or more!) taking

a course that adds no credit toward your college degree. Even better, because passing the ACCUPLACER demonstrates your competence in a subject area, you can move on to upper-level courses with the confidence that you're ready to do the work!

If you DON'T do well on the ACCUPLACER, what happens?



REMEMBER

This is key: If you don't do well on the ACCUPLACER, you still won't be kicked out of community college. It's just not that kind of test.

This feature makes the ACCUPLACER different from college entrance tests like the SAT and ACT. Most colleges and universities set a minimum SAT and ACT score. And while there may be some wiggle room in special cases, scoring on the low side definitely lowers your chances of being accepted. And, naturally, more competitive schools tend to require higher scores.

But, as I mention earlier in this chapter, the ACCUPLACER isn't an entrance test. In fact, if you're scheduled to take the ACCUPLACER, this means that you've already been accepted into community college (congratulations!).

Failure to pass any portion of the ACCUPLACER simply means that your community college is going to require you to take at least one remedial no-credit course before they allow you to enroll in a credit course in that subject area. Essentially, they want to set you up for success, to make sure that you have the skills necessary to pass your courses when the time comes.

What if you pass some sections of the ACCUPLACER but not others?

When you pass any section of the ACCUPLACER, you're done with that section forever! You never have to take it again, and you're exempted from taking remedial courses in that area of study.

How many times can you take the ACCUPLACER?

Usually, your community college will give you two chances to pass each section of the ACCUPLACER. In some cases — especially for a good student with good grades — they may stretch this to three times.

The good news is that when you pass any section of the ACCUPLACER, you're officially done with that section, and you don't have to take it again.

