Langara English Test
Information Sheet

The two-hour Langara English Test (LET) consists of two parts: reading and summarizing a short prose passage, and writing an essay on one of the three essay topics provided.

The Summary

Students need to read the prose passage carefully, and then summarize in their own words the basic ideas—that is, the key points—of the passage. The summary should be approximately 100 words long. Markers look for clarity, accuracy, and effective paraphrasing.

A summary is a condensed version of the original prose passage. In a clear, precise style, a summary presents, in shortened form, the main ideas and key points in the original piece.

Some Guidelines on Writing the Summary

- Begin by reading the passage two to three times in order to familiarize yourself with the material and identify the major points of the writer.
- Use your own words to convey the author's meaning. If you're unable to come up with your own wording for a phrase used in the original, then quote the author's phrasing (be sure to use quotation marks in such cases). Generally, though, you should avoid quoting the original.
- Do not add new information of your own. Focus on what the author writes, and concentrate on the best way to communicate the author's main points in your own words.
- Do not editorialize. That is, do not give your opinion on the content or style of the passage; do not judge the material or argue for or against it. Remember that your goal in summarizing is not to judge the passage, but, rather, to condense as accurately as possible the key information in it.
- In general, you should avoid including statistics and examples; your emphasis should be on the major points, not secondary material. Occasionally, though, you may have to include some examples if they are of central importance.
- The summary should read smoothly. Avoid writing down a series of disjointed, choppy-sounding statements. Use transition or joining words—as needed—to bridge different parts of the summary so that it reads in a smooth, logical, and easy-to-follow manner. Some examples of transition words are and, but, however, although, even though, in addition, most importantly, secondly, finally, overall, in conclusion, in contrast, similarly, etc.
Example 1: MacMillan begins by reminding us of what we don't like about advertising (its mindless repetition, its distortions) before drawing our attention to the fact that many commercials are better than the programmes they interrupt.

Example 2: Michael Stevens points out that we live in a society where, although social morality seems to be increasing, personal integrity and self-respect—once referred to as "honour"—are in decline.

(Note: both summaries refer to the author by name)

The Essay

Students need to choose one of the three topics provided, and then write an essay of about 400 words. The essay must NOT include ideas, material, or phrases from the passage in Part I.

The essay will be assessed on the following: content, organization, logical development, vocabulary (word choice and usage), sentence structure, and mechanics (punctuation and grammar). Markers are looking for an accurate, clear, unified, and logically developed piece of writing that directly addresses the chosen topic.

You should plan your time so that you have about one hour and fifteen minutes for work on this section. Reviewing and revising the essay is more useful than writing out a neat copy.

Some Guidelines on Writing the Essay

- Read over the topics and choose the one that you can write about in a clear, effective, and persuasive manner.

- Start writing as soon as you can; that's the best way to overcome writer's block.

- You will have to narrow the topic that you choose to write on, but you should not change the topic. For example, if the topic is about heroes, you can narrow it down to athletes as heroes, but cannot write about the importance of sports in Canada. Exams with an off-topic essay are given a zero and the student has to write the LET again in order to get an usable score.

- Whatever the topic, the essay must develop a central claim about the topic (a thesis) and support that claim with relevant examples and/or good reasons. Often, students don't really know their argument until the end of the essay. Just be sure to match the thesis in the introduction with the one at the end.

- Once you've chosen your topic, take some time to think about the different approaches you can use, the different ways that you can discuss the subject. What major topic areas will you discuss and what evidence will you use to clarify and support your thesis (your central claim)? What reasons and examples will you use to back up your views and develop your discussion?
After deciding on your approach and giving thought to the kinds of questions and issues noted above, you should have a basic plan to guide your writing.

- You may use the first person "I" if you wish. In fact, some topics will require this point of view. On the other hand, you should avoid writing a narrative (story) or simple description. This part of the exam requires that you present a clear position/viewpoint and try to explain that position/viewpoint with clear thinking, credible examples, and precise expression.

- Use language which is neither too formal or informal; you will achieve the best results if you use words about which you are confident. Avoid using words that you are unfamiliar with, because such words may cloud your meaning.

**Introduction** should provide a clearly stated thesis that conveys the essay's main argument. The thesis often also includes the direction the discussion will take.

*Example: below is a good introduction to an essay on the topic "heroes"*

Swords, daggers, guns and bombs are the weapons which usually come to mind when the average person thinks of a hero. We are conditioned to think of heroes as people who wage wars, who directly risk their lives by dodging bullets and missiles and who save lives in a similar fashion, pulling an injured person out of the line of fire. However, there are many, more indirect ways to be heroic. For example, when I think of heroes, I think of writers, musicians and artists—people whose "weapons" are pens, brushes and instruments, people who feed the mind and the soul, and who try to bring a different kind of peacefulness to the world.

**Body of essay** should present three or more organized and unified paragraphs, each of which develops a single idea indicated by a topic sentence.

*Example: below is the beginning of the second paragraph from an essay on heroes (the body paragraph that follows the sample introduction given above)*

Writers, artists and musicians can indirectly save lives by provoking thought and debate about important world issues. Examples are many: journalists have recently exposed the thousands of deaths in third world nations resulting from the promotion of baby formula in areas where there is no clean water with which to mix the powder.....[etc.]

**Conclusion** should return the reader to the essay's thesis and close the essay on a strong note.

*Example: below is the closing statement from an essay on heroes taken from the same essay as the two above samples*

So, while many people think of heroes as soldiers, charging into battle with guns aimed to fire, I think of writers, artists and musicians in their studios, fighting to stay creative.
NOTES:

- Students may not use these pages during the exam. They will be given a different instruction sheet.
- Students must use a pen for the exam.
- Students may take only pens and their wallets to their desk.
- Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off and put either at the side on the room or left with the supervisor at the back of the room.
- All materials given out at the exam (the booklet, information sheet, and exam sheet) must be handed in to the supervisors at the front of the room before students may leave the exam room.