

Introduction to the THEA®

THEA® REQUIREMENT BY THE STATE OF TEXAS

THEA®, or the Texas Higher Education Assessment™, was instituted in 1989 to verify that high school graduates are adequately prepared to succeed in college. In a five-hour period, students are tested for competency in reading, mathematics, and writing. Until students have passed all these sections of the examination, Texas law decrees that they must be enrolled in some form of remediation (“constant remediation” according to the law) provided by their colleges. All students enrolled in public institutes of higher learning and all teacher education students must take the test. Exemptions apply to those who completed a college-level course prior to 1989. Students with disabilities are tested under special conditions.

THE THEA® REGISTRATION BULLETIN

The THEA® Registration Bulletin provides information on registering for the test, taking the test, and scoring. It is available on request from testing offices at Texas colleges and universities. The bulletin, written jointly by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, the Texas Education Agency, and National Evaluation Systems, Inc., follows the Code of Fair Testing Practices (Joint Committee on Testing Practices, Washington, DC, 1988), which sets standards for professionally developed tests in education. The code was written to ensure that such tests are written and scored fairly and that test takers have all the information they need.

HOW THE TESTING WORKS

The THEA® test is administered at testing centers at various colleges and universities throughout the state six times a year: twice in the spring, twice in the summer, and twice in the fall. You may obtain registration materials at a college or university testing center. You will initially take the entire three-part test, but you can repeat parts as needed until you pass all three sections. Score reports will be mailed about three weeks after the test.

SCORING THE TEST

The writing part of the THEA® test consists of an objective test and a writing sample, an essay that you must create in the time provided. The writing sample is much more important than the objective test; in fact, it is the key to passing the writing section of the THEA®. Your score on the objective test is taken into account only if you receive a total score of 5 (out of 8 possible points) on the essay. Students who receive a 6 or higher automatically pass; those who receive a 4 or lower automatically fail. As you can see from the following diagram, two scorers evaluate each essay. Their scores are totaled to arrive at a final score.

The objective test, then, is used as a tie breaker. A student receiving a score of 5 on the writing sample must answer approximately 70 percent of the objective test items correctly to pass the writing section of the THEA® test. Most often, the two readers assign the same score or a score within one point of the other. If, however, the scores differ by more than one point, your paper will be read by a third reader, and the two highest scores will be used for the final calculation.

The teachers and professors scoring your essay are chosen by National Evaluation Systems (NES®) to represent a cross section of Texas educators. All must have a bachelor's degree, but usually about half of those reading at any session hold a master's degree or doctorate. NES® also selects readers with an eye to maintaining variety in ethnicity and gender. The readers are trained to consider each paper according to the same standard. Their primary consideration is to give each writer credit for everything he or she does well rather than take off points for errors.

How the Writing Sample Is Scored

The student's writing sample is graded by two readers who score the writing sample on a scale from 0 to 4. The highest possible score from each reader is 4 and the lowest score of 0 is only given under extremely unusual circumstances. The scores from both readers are added together to determine a final pass/fail score for the THEA®:

Score from first reader		Score from second reader		Total score	Does the student pass or fail the objective test? (Blank = the objective test score doesn't matter)	THEA® results
4	+	4	=	8		PASS
4	+	3	=	7		PASS
3	+	3	=	6		PASS
3	+	2	=	5*	+ student PASSES the objective test	PASS
3	+	2	=	5*	+ student FAILS the objective test	FAIL
2	+	2	=	4		FAIL
2	+	1	=	3		FAIL
1	+	1	=	2		FAIL

*A total readers' score of 5 is the only situation when the score on the objective test is used to help determine whether a student passes or fails the THEA®.

TAKING THE TEST

In the test booklet, reading comes first, followed by mathematics and writing, but you shouldn't let that order dictate the way you take the test. You have the freedom to move back and forth among the parts of the test as you wish, so you should plan your strategy before the morning of the test.

You might begin with the writing test, even though it is placed last in the booklet. Complete your prewriting and drafting of the writing sample and then go to the other portions of the test. Later, you can return to your essay to revise and edit. Following this order can give you some distance from your writing, allowing for more effective revision. A detailed explanation of this plan follows in "Strategies That Work" in Part 1 of this booklet.

GETTING FURTHER HELP

Many colleges and universities provide classes and labs where you can work with writing instructors or tutors to prepare for the THEA® test. Some schools also offer preparation for the THEA® test through continuing education programs. Contact your writing program office or English Department to see what kinds of help your school offers.