

Preparing for the English Competency Exam (ECE)

Preparing for the exam

We recommend that you attend a free, one-hour workshop on ECE preparation. Stop in our office or visit our website for an ECE workshop schedule. Once you have attended a workshop, we invite you to make an appointment and come in for tutoring.

Signing up for the exam

When you are ready to take the exam, you can visit the Assessment and Testing website at <http://www.neiu.edu/~assess/> to find the current semester's ECE test dates and registration procedure. Then you can register in person in D-130 or over the phone by calling 773-442-5293.

Interpreting the results of the exam

To interpret the ECE Writing Results, visit <http://www.neiu.edu/~assess/aboutece3.htm>

If you did not pass the written part of the ECE, you should contact the Writing Lab and make an appointment to review your essay. A tutor will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your essay with you and will interpret the results that you received. He or she will let you know how to begin if you have been advised to come for tutoring (T) or to take a class (C).

Preparing to retake the exam

A tutor will develop a plan with you based on your individual needs. Plans vary, but they may include coming for weekly tutoring, taking a class, or preparing a portfolio.

Taking a class

Language Competence Skills (ELP DEV 090) is a class designed to improve writing skills in preparation for the ECE. This class is especially for students who have failed the written portion of the ECE. The class reviews topics such as planning, outlining, developing paragraphs, writing introductions and conclusions, and proofreading. It provides intensive, individualized instruction in the skills associated with college level competency in writing. Visit or call the lab to be authorized for this class. Note: Even after taking and passing this course, you will still need to take and pass the ECE in order to graduate.

The English Competency Exam (ECE) requirement

The ECE is one of 10 Bachelor's Degree requirements of Northeastern Illinois University. For more information on these requirements, see the Northeastern Illinois University Academic Catalog.

The purpose

The ECE is designed to ensure that every NEIU student can demonstrate college-level competency in reading and writing. It is a requirement for graduation, to be taken after a student has passed English 101. Students are recommended to take it upon completing 60 credit hours and should pass the ECE by the time they have

completed 90 credit hours. Some majors require that students pass the exam before they can declare. We highly recommend taking the exam as early as possible!

The writing task

The ECE presents students with a choice of essay topics, all of which require you to take a position on a social, educational, or business issue. You must argue only one side of the issue, and you must focus your answer on the stated topic.

Format

The ECE requires that students use proper essay format: introductory paragraph, 2 – 4 body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. Each paragraph must be well-developed, using illustrative examples and topic sentences that support the thesis. You should utilize transitions between paragraphs.

Length

The essay will be handwritten, single-spaced in a test booklet. It must be 500—700 words in length, approximately 2½ to 3 handwritten pages. The length requirement is designed to demonstrate your ability to develop a detailed argument using support and illustration.

Time

This is a timed essay of 2½ hours. You will be given a blank piece of paper on which to organize your ideas. Give yourself plenty of time to plan your approach: write an outline, diagram your points, or use whatever method works best for you to plan a coherent and well-developed argument. We recommend spending 30 minutes on planning, 90 minutes on writing, and 30 minutes on proofreading.

The Three Best Ways to Prepare for the Exam

- 1. Attend a preparation workshop offered by the Writing Lab.** The Lab offers preparatory workshops each semester to help students prepare to take the written portion of the exam. The workshop provides an overview, including sample topics, planning strategies, and organizational rules. Space is limited, so you must register in advance by stopping by the lab or calling.
- 2. Practice writing.** Using the sample topics in this handout, write a practice essay. Before you write, review what you know about persuasive writing, dig up notes from writing classes, and review basic rules in your handbook. Then, recreate the circumstances of the exam as much as possible: set aside 2½ hours, read and choose from the sample topics, plan your essay, and write! Be sure to save time at the end to proofread.
- 3. Make an appointment with a tutor.** Once you have reviewed the basic information about the ECE, written a practice essay, and attended a workshop, you may make an appointment to meet with a tutor. During your

50-minute session, you and the tutor will review your practice essay, identify strengths and weaknesses, and develop strategies to help you take the exam.

Sample Essay

This section includes the instructions you will receive for your ECE, as well as sample topics, a sample outline, and a sample essay. Following the sample essay is a brief discussion of its strengths.

Instructions: This is the exact wording you will find on an ECE booklet.

Choose one of the following statements, circle the number of the statement that you have chosen, and write a well-organized essay of 500—700 words supporting that statement. Be sure to develop your essay by giving logical arguments and specific details, and *to address the topic fully*. Also, remember to proofread your work for grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

You may use the attached color sheet to write notes, ideas, or an outline. You will be graded only on what you write in the lined essay booklet.

Sample topics: These are not real ECE questions; they are examples of what you can expect to receive.

1. TV has a positive impact on children’s development.
2. TV has a negative impact on children’s development.

Sample outline: The following is a sample outline for essay topic #2:

- I. Introduction
- II. T.V. interferes with progress in school
 - A. discourages doing homework
 - B. discourages outside reading
- III. T.V. interferes with social development
 - A. discourages interactive communication skills
 - B. discourages use of social skills
- IV. T.V. interferes with physical fitness
 - A. discourages physical activity
 - B. encourages poor eating habits
- V. Conclusion

Sample essay: The following is a sample essay for topic #2

Watching too much television can cause children to not have enough time for development of other skills and activities which are important for any child’s growth, as well as important for creating successful and healthy adults. These negative effects on a child’s growth include reasons such as the fact that TV could interfere with a child’s progress in school, with a child’s social development, and could also interfere with a child’s level of physical fitness and eating habits.

First, TV interferes with progress in school. My kids, for example, would rather watch TV than do homework anytime, and from what they tell me, so would their classmates and friends. However, without the reinforcement that homework provides, it takes children longer to grasp important concepts which they are learning in school. Doing their homework thoughtfully and carefully helps a child do better on exams in class, and to be a better student not only in early grades, but also in high school and college. In addition, kids can do much better in school if they read in addition to the material in their textbooks. Not only does additional reading foster better reading and comprehension skills, but reading offers more knowledge to the child than what is offered only in class. For example, I learned a great deal of history and geography through reading historical novels, some basic logic through reading mystery novels, and anthropology and philosophy through science fiction. Unfortunately, TV lures children away from homework and from outside reading, and their performance in school suffers. It is important for parents, therefore, to encourage their children to watch less TV and to spend more time on activities such as homework and reading so that they can develop intellectually.

Second, TV can interfere with children's social development. When kids watch TV, they are being passive recipients of what they see, instead of talking to each other, responding to questions and thinking about ideas and new ways of looking at things. Sometimes, I have to yell or step in front of the television to even get my children's attention, and to try to get them to talk with me. It is important for children to learn how to interact with others and to express their ideas, and it is important for them to learn to use their imagination and to share their thoughts with others. Many television programs offer nothing but the same old plots, the same characterizations and story lines, and do not encourage the imagination or questions about our world or human behavior. In addition, children do not sit together after a TV show and discuss what happened in the program, come up with their own ideas of what they just saw, or take time to agree or disagree with the outcome of the plot or the "moral of the story." Instead, they just continue to watch another television program, accepting what they see as reality. Not only do their intellectual and imaginative skills suffer, but also their basic social skills. Instead of sitting passively in front of the television, children should be playing together, and learning basic social skills such as waiting for a turn, sharing, or asking for things politely.

Finally, TV negatively affects children's development physically as well as intellectually. With TV's dominance of our lives we have come up with the phrase, "couch potato," to describe people who spend much of their time sitting in front of the TV instead of exercising. Children need to engage in physical activities such as playing games, running, and walking in order to develop fitness habits which will last a lifetime. In addition, while they are sitting for hours watching television, television commercials encourage a desire for snacks such as candy, sweetened cereal, soda pop, chips, and other high calorie junk food. The combination of no exercise and lots of junk food eaten during TV viewing results in children who are unfit, overweight, and sluggish. If a child does not learn the necessity of physical

fitness and a balanced diet when they are young, they will most likely be unfit and overweight adults.

In order to create adults who are intellectually, socially, and physically fit and developed, it is important to encourage all the necessary habits and skills early in life. TV, because it encourages little attention for school work and intellectual growth, almost no social interaction, and no physical activity and healthful dietary habits, has a negative effect on a child's possibility of becoming an accomplished and healthy adult.

Basic strengths of this essay:

- The introduction has a strong organizing thesis, as well as a brief description of the reasons that will be used in the body paragraphs.
- Each body paragraph has a topic sentence.
- The writer uses examples and illustrations for each point.
- The writer also uses good techniques of persuasive and argumentative writing.
- There is frequent use of transition and connecting phrases (for example: first, second, finally).
- The conclusion restates the main idea of the essay, but does not simply repeat the introductory paragraph.
- There are very few grammar, punctuation or sentence structure errors.
- The essay meets the length requirement of 500-700 words.