TECHNICAL WRITING

EXAM INFORMATION

This exam was designed to evaluate whether candidates possess the knowledge and understanding that would be gained by taking a lower-level college course in technical writing which includes the following content: theory and practice of technical writing; purpose, content, and organizational patterns of common types of technical documents; information design; and technical editing.

The exam contains 100 questions to be answered in 2 hours.

Form Codes: SU820, SV820, SY820, SZ820

CREDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

The American Council on Education's College Credit Recommendation Service (ACE CREDIT) has evaluated the DSST test development process and content of this exam. It has made the following recommendations:

Area or Course Equivalent: Technical Writing
Level: Lower-level baccalaureate
Amount of Credit: 3 Semester Hours
Minimum Score: 400
Source: www.acenet.edu

EXAM CONTENT OUTLINE

The following is an outline of the content areas covered in the examination. The approximate percentage of the examination devoted to each content area is also noted.

I. Theory and Practice of Technical Writing – 13%

a. Understanding contexts, purpose(s), and importance
b. Audience analysis
c. Ensuring the validity and reliability of data and sources
d. Establishing the appropriate style

II. Purpose of Technical Documents – 34%

a. Informing
    i. Progress/inspection reports
    ii. Feasibility reports
    iii. Research/laboratory reports
    iv. Instructions, procedures and process descriptions

b. Persuading and Making Recommendations
    i. Proposals

ii. White papers

iii. Grants

III. Technical Writing Process – 13%

a. Individual and/or collaborative writing
b. Choice of content delivery method
c. Drafting and organizing content
d. Research (primary and secondary)

IV. Document design – 15%

A. Elements of document design
   i. Page formatting
   ii. Textual formatting
   iii. Graphic formatting

B. Strategies of document design
   i. Readability
   ii. Usability
   iii. Accessibility

V. Revising, Editing and Final Sections – 33%

A. Revising for
   i. Completeness
   ii. Concision and clarity
   iii. Accessibility Organization
   iv. Content accuracy

B. Editing for
   i. Concision
   ii. Grammatical accuracy
   iii. Technical and referencing accuracy

C. Final sections
   i. Cover letters

   ii. Executive summaries
   iii. Abstracts

REFERENCES

Below is a list of reference publications that were either used as a reference to create the exam, or were used as textbooks in college courses of the same or similar title at the time the test was developed. You may reference either the current edition of these titles or textbooks currently used at a local college or university for the same class title. It is recommended that you reference more than one textbook on the topics outlined in this fact sheet.

You should begin by checking textbook content against the content outline provided before selecting textbooks that cover the test content from which to study. Sources for study material are suggested but not limited to the following:

1. Alfred, Gerald J; Brusaw, Charles T; Oliu, Walter E. (2020) *Handbook of Technical Writing,* 12th Edition.
2. Markel, Mike. *(2025) Technical Communication,* 14th Edition. Bedford / St. Martin's.
3. John Lannon and Laura Gurak. (2019). *Technical Communication 16*th Edition. Pearson

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

All test questions are in a multiple-choice format, with one correct answer and three incorrect options. The following are samples of the types of questions that may appear on the exam.

1. A report that studies the practicality of a proposed plan and then recommends an action is a/an
   a. feasibility report.
   b. Lab/test report.
   c. Inspection report.
   d. Investigation report.

2. Which of the following graphics is best for displaying continuous change over time? a. Bar chart
   b. Line graph
   c. Schematic diagram
   d. Table

3. The major difference between proposals and many other technical documents is that proposals are a. long and formal
   b. written by committees
   c. overtly persuasive
   d. presented orally as well as in writing

Questions 4-8 refer to the following group of numbered sentences:

1) The rabbits did not build up as much fat in the walls of their arteries as expected.
2) One group was left unattended except at feeding time, while the other received some old-fashioned tender loving care (TLC) every day for at least one hour.
3) Researchers at Ohio State University made an unexpected finding while feeding a group of rabbit's highcholesterol diets in preparation for an experiment.
4) The TLC rabbits developed only one-third as many fatty deposits as the others.

5) Investigating further, the team fed high doses of cholesterol to two new groups of rabbits.
6) One researcher mentioned that she had given these rabbits special treatment, greeting and cuddling each four to five times a day.

4. If the sentences are arranged into a coherent paragraph, which sentence will come third in the sequence?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 5
   d. 6

5. If the sentences now numbered 1 and 6 were combined into one sentence, the new sentence would begin with which of the following?

   a. When
   b. Although
   c. Because
   d. Thus

6. One significant difference between technical language and lay language is that technical language tends to be more
   a. subjective
   b. sophisticated
   c. abstract
   d. exact

7. Which of the following is a major flaw in a classification?
   a. overlap in the categories
   b. use of the same criterion throughout
   c. division into more than ten groups and subgroups
   d. categories with different numbers of subdivisions

Answers to sample questions:

1-A; 2-D; 3-B; 4- D; 5-A; 6-D, 7-A