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ACCUPLACER Writing Sample Questions

The Next-Generation Writing test is a broad-spectrum computer adaptive assessment of test-takers' developed ability to revise and edit a range of prose texts for effective expression of ideas and for conformity to the conventions of Standard Written English sentence structure, usage, and punctuation. Passages on the test cover a range of content areas (including literary nonfiction, careers/history/social studies, humanities, and science), writing modes (informative/explanatory, argument, and narrative), and complexities (relatively easy to very challenging). All passages are commissioned—that is, written specifically for the test—so that “errors” (a collective term for a wide range of rhetorical and conventions-related problems) can more effectively be introduced into them. Questions are multiple choice in format and appear as parts of sets built around a common, extended passage; no discrete (stand-alone) questions are included. In answering the questions, test-takers must determine the best revision or editing decision in a particular case (or that no change should be made to the passage as originally presented). Two broad knowledge and skill categories are assessed:

- Expression of Ideas (development, organization, effective language use)
- Standard English Conventions (sentence structure, usage, and punctuation)

Sample Questions

Read the following early draft of an essay and then choose the best answer to the question or the best completion of the statement.

(1) The prevalence of nectarines in US supermarkets today is directly related to the company started by two unrelated men who shared a last name, an inventive bent, and a drive to succeed. (2) Moving from Korea to the United States in 1914, Ho “Charles” Kim founded the Kim Brothers trucking company in California in 1921 with his friend Harry Kim. (3) Much of the freight their trucks carried in the early years were fruit grown in the San Joaquin valley. (4) Kim Brothers soon expanded to include nurseries, orchards, and fruit-packing sheds. (5) Eventually the operation became a major employer, providing year-round jobs for about two hundred people and up to four hundred part-time jobs during harvest season coming after growing season.

(6) Kim Brothers succeeded even in the face of the Great Depression of the 1920s and 30s because the company produced and sold the first commercially viable nectarines. (7) The nectarine is a hybrid fruit. (8) It combines peach and plum, with the taste and texture of the former and the smooth skin of the latter. (9) With the help of a staff horticulturalist, Kim Brothers developed and patented the “fuzzless peach” known as the Sun Grand nectarine. (10) Though not the first nectarine—the fruit had existed in China for two millennia; the Sun Grand was unique in being hardy enough to ship great distances.

(11) By the 1960s, Kim Brothers included more than five hundred acres of farmland and grossed more than \$1 million annually. (12) Charles and Harry Kim were eventually recognized as the first millionaires of Korean descent. (13) They were also known for giving back to their community. (14) Charles was also instrumental in helping to create Los Angeles’s Koreatown (home today to more Koreans than any place other than North and South Korea).

1. Which is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 3 (reproduced below)?

Much of the freight their trucks carried in the early years were fruit grown in the San Joaquin valley.

- A. (as it is now)
- B. have been
- C. are
- D. was

2. Which is the best decision regarding the underlined portion of sentence 5 (reproduced below)?

Eventually the operation became a major employer, providing year-round jobs for about two hundred people and up to four hundred part-time jobs during harvest season coming after growing season.

- A. Leave it as it is now
- B. Revise it to “when the crops were ready to pick.”
- C. Revise it to “after the produce had ripened.”
- D. DELETE it and end the sentence with a period

3. Which is the most logical placement for sentence 7 (reproduced below)?

The nectarine is a hybrid fruit.

- A. Where it is now
- B. After sentence 3
- C. After sentence 10
- D. After sentence 11

4. Which is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 10 (reproduced below)?

Though not the first nectarine—the fruit had existed in China for two millennia; the Sun Grand was unique in being hardy enough to ship great distances.

- A. (as it is now)
- B. millennia. The
- C. millennia—the
- D. millennia) the

5. Sentence 13 is reproduced below.

They were also known for giving back to their community.

The writer is considering adding the following text at the end of the sentence.

by building churches, funding scholarships, and establishing the Korean Association of Southern California

Should the writer make this addition there?

- A. Yes, because it elaborates on the claim made at the beginning of the sentence.
- B. Yes, because it establishes the historical period in which Kim Brothers operated.
- C. No, because it introduces details that are irrelevant to the paragraph’s focus on nectarines.
- D. No, because it fails to explain whether the institutions that the Kims established still exist today.

(1) In the Sahara, near the border of Morocco and Algeria, a new species of spider, *Cebrennus rechenbergi*, has been found. (2) These spiders don't simply scurry across the sand on their many legs, like tumbling gymnasts, they propel themselves forward (or backward) in a series of quick flips. (3) They do this, however, only to elude predators, not to chase prey. (4) A human is thus unlikely ever to see these arachnids flipping toward him or her, only away.

(5) A spider of this species was discovered in the Erg Chebbi. (6) It is a sandy desert in southeastern Morocco. (7) A German robotics researcher who makes yearly treks to the region to study how desert creatures thrive in that climate caught one of the spiders and brought it back to his caravan. (8) The next morning, he was amazed to see the creature try to escape by flipping itself quickly away. (9) The researcher turned the spider over to an arachnid specialist for identification. (10) Ultimately, the spider was determined to be a member of a previously unknown species.

(11) *C. rechenbergi* are “huntsman spiders”—skilled predators—found only in the Erg Chebbi. (12) They are nocturnal creatures; during the day, they rest in tubes of silken thread they weave into the sand. (13) Agile and athletic, *C. rechenbergi* rear up on their back legs and lash out when attacked—or it somersaults away, rolling like tumbleweed.

(14) Few spiders propel themselves as *C. rechenbergi* do, and none do so as comprehensively. (15) Golden rolling spiders of Namibia, for instance, can tumble, but they do so only using gravity to roll downhill. (16) *C. rechenbergi*, by contrast, elude predators by rolling uphill, downhill, or on flat ground. (17) Their reproductive organs distinguish them from other *Cebrennus* spiders. (18) While these spiders run only 3.3 feet per second, they can tumble at 6.6 feet per second. (19) Even if this speedy escape method proves effective, however, it can be costly: tumbling away too many times a day will ultimately exhaust the spiders and lead to their demise.

6. Which is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 2 (reproduced below)?

These spiders don't simply scurry across the sand on their many legs, like tumbling gymnasts, they propel themselves forward (or backward) in a series of quick flips.

- A. (as it is now)
- B. legs like tumbling gymnasts;
- C. legs; like tumbling gymnasts,
- D. legs like tumbling gymnasts,

7. Which choice most effectively combines sentences 5 and 6 (reproduced below) at the underlined portion?

A spider of this species was discovered in the Erg Chebbi. It is a sandy desert in southeastern Morocco.

- A. Chebbi,
- B. Chebbi—this being
- C. Chebbi, and the Erg Chebbi is
- D. Chebbi, the Erg Chebbi being

8. In context, which is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 10 (reproduced below)?

Ultimately, the spider was determined to be a member of a previously unknown species.

- A. (As it is now)
- B. For example,
- C. Nevertheless,
- D. At the same time,

9. Which is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 13 (reproduced below)?

Agile and athletic, C. rechenbergi rear up on their back legs and lash out when attacked—or it somersaults away, rolling like tumbleweed.

- A. (as it is now)
- B. it will somersault
- C. they somersault
- D. they were somersaulting

10. Which sentence blurs the focus of the last paragraph and should therefore be deleted?

- A. Sentence 14
- B. Sentence 15
- C. Sentence 16
- D. Sentence 17

(1) Of her poetry, Lucille Clifton once said, “I write out of what I know and understand or what I wonder about.” (2) From her very first volume, *Good Times*, she gave tribute to the people she knew best: those who had grown up in blue-collar neighborhoods where children pondered whether Daddy could pay the rent and Mama could afford to make bread but where “good times” prevailed when they could.

(3) Family, injustice, being African American and female were Clifton’s enduring themes. (4) Clifton was born in Depew, New York, in 1936. (5) In her collection *Quilting*, the speaker in the title poem draws a parallel between a woman teaching her daughter how to quilt and the transformative powers of alchemy. (6) “Remember / this will keep us warm,” she says to the girl. (7) The speaker wonders, however, whether the skills of keeping warm will one day be forgotten and people will lose sight of lessons their ancestors had taught: “do the daughters’ daughters quilt?” she asks; “do the worlds continue spinning away from each other forever?”

(8) Concerned about those who are frequently excluded from the historical record, Clifton said that through poetry “I offer my presence for people who have not been able to speak until they are able to speak for themselves.” (9) Her poems often bore witness to what she called “the bond of live things everywhere,” a bond she evoked through seemingly simple but precisely chosen words.

(10) Clifton’s powerful and innovative poems have been widely recognized and appreciated. (11) Poet Remica Bingham called Clifton a “master of economy and minimalism.” (12) Of Clifton’s ambitious lines, poet Kevin Young said, “There is a kind of quietude in that lowercase, but also a boldness of speech” that achieves a “powerful intimacy.” (13) One of her former students, poet Elisabeth Whitehead, recalls fondly Clifton’s college classroom as a place of quiet where poetry was loved and celebrated. (14) A fellow student hosted dinner for their final class, and before everyone had left that evening, Clifton had them gather and join hands. (15) “Then we went around the circle,” Whitehead recounts, “sharing an idea or a quote or passage from a poem in our last moments together.”

11. Which is the best decision regarding the underlined portion of sentence 3 (reproduced below)?

Family, injustice, being African American and female were Clifton’s enduring themes.

- A. Leave it as it is now
- B. Revise it to “and being”
- C. Revise it to “and the subjects of”
- D. DELETE it

12. Which sentence blurs the focus of the second paragraph and should therefore be deleted?

- A. Sentence 4
- B. Sentence 5
- C. Sentence 6
- D. Sentence 7

13. Which is the best version of the underlined portion of sentence 9 (reproduced below)?

Her poems often bore witness to what she called “the bond of live things everywhere,” a bond she evoked through seemingly simple but precisely chosen words.

- A. (as it is now)
- B. called:
- C. called—
- D. called,

14. Which version of the underlined portion of sentence 10 (reproduced below) provides the most effective introduction to the last paragraph?

Clifton’s powerful and innovative poems have been widely recognized and appreciated.

- A. (as it is now)
- B. passion for teaching others about poetry has
- C. desire to use poetry to speak for the powerless has
- D. many gifts as a writer and teacher have

15. In sentence 12 (reproduced below), the writer wants to echo Bingham’s observation from sentence 11. Which version of the underlined portion best accomplishes that goal?

Of Clifton’s ambitious lines, poet Kevin Young said, “There is a kind of quietude in that lowercase, but also a boldness of speech” that achieves a “powerful intimacy.”

- A. (as it is now)
- B. spare
- C. nuanced
- D. vivid

Answer Key

1. D
2. D
3. A
4. C
5. A
6. C
7. A
8. A
9. C
10. D
11. B
12. A
13. A
14. D
15. B

Rationales

- 1. Choice D is the best answer.** The singular “was” agrees with the singular subject “much.” Choices A, B, and C are incorrect because the plural “were,” “have been,” and “are” do not agree with the singular subject “much.”
- 2. Choice D is the best answer.** Deleting the underlined portion results in a clear, economical sentence. Choices A, B, and C are incorrect because “coming after growing season,” “when the crops were ready to pick,” and “after the produce had ripened” are unnecessarily wordy and somewhat redundant additions to the sentence given that “harvest season” already suggests what each of these choices introduces.
- 3. Choice A is the best answer.** Sentence 7 is most logical where it is now in the passage, as it helps define “nectarine” in sentence 6 and sets up the description of the nectarine’s composition in sentence 8. Choice B is incorrect because placing sentence 7 after sentence 3 would both interrupt the narrative of the founding and early success of Kim Brothers and disrupt the flow between sentences 6 and 8. Choice C is incorrect because placing sentence 7 after sentence 10 would both disrupt the flow between sentences 6 and 8 and introduce basic information about the nectarine later in the passage than is required by the writer’s development of the topic. Choice D is incorrect because placing sentence 7 after sentence 11 would both disrupt the flow between sentences 6 and 8 and interrupt the narrative of the later history of Kim Brothers.
- 4. Choice C is the best answer.** A dash is necessary between “millennia” and “the” to complete the separation of the parenthetical information “the fruit had existed in China for two millennia” from the rest of the sentence. Since a dash is used after “nectarine,” a dash must be used after “millennia” as well. Choices A and D are incorrect because neither a comma nor a parenthesis after “millennia” matches the dash placed after “nectarine” to set off the parenthetical information “the fruit had existed in China for two millennia.” Choice B is incorrect because placing a period after “millennia” results in a rhetorically poor sentence fragment.
- 5. Choice A is the best answer.** The proposed addition expands in a relevant way on the notion of the Kims “giving back to their community.” Choice B is incorrect because while the proposed addition should be made, the reason outlined in choice B is incorrect, as the addition does not specify the historical time period in which Kim Brothers operated. Choice C is incorrect because the proposed addition should be made and because the main focus of the passage at that point is not nectarines. Choice D is incorrect because the proposed addition should be made and because it would not be necessary at that point in the narrative to explain whether the institutions the Kims established exist today.
- 6. Choice C is the best answer.** A semicolon after “legs” results in two clear and complete independent clauses and a complete, logical sentence. Choice A is incorrect because a comma after “legs” results in a comma splice. Choice B is incorrect because a semicolon after “gymnasts” illogically suggests that scurrying across the sand on many legs is something that gymnasts would do. Choice D is incorrect because a comma after “gymnasts” results in a comma splice and illogically suggests that scurrying across the sand on many legs is something that gymnasts would do.
- 7. Choice A is the best answer.** A comma after “Chebbi” makes clear that what follows in the sentence (“a sandy desert in southeastern Morocco”) describes Erg Chebbi. Choice B is incorrect because a dash followed by “this being” is an awkward and unnecessarily dramatic way to combine sentences 5 and 6. Choices C and D are incorrect because each introduces repetition of “Erg Chebbi” into the combined sentence.

- 8. Choice A is the best answer.** “Ultimately” reasonably suggests that some time passed between the researcher turning over the spider to an arachnid specialist for identification (sentence 9) and the actual identification of the spider as a member of a previously unknown species (sentence 10). Choice B is incorrect because “for example” wrongly suggests that what follows in sentence 10 is an example of what is described in sentence 9. Choice C is incorrect because “nevertheless” wrongly suggests that what follows in sentence 10 happened in spite of what is described in sentence 9. Choice D is incorrect because “at the same time” wrongly suggests that what follows in sentence 10 either occurred simultaneously as what is described in sentence 9 or that it happened in spite of what is described in sentence 9.
- 9. Choice C is the best answer.** The plural “they” agrees with the plural noun “*C. rechenbergi*,” and “somersault” appropriately maintains the present tense used throughout the paragraph. (“*C. rechenbergi*” is consistently plural in number here, as signaled most closely by “rear” earlier in sentence 13.) Choice A is incorrect because “it” does not agree with the plural noun “*C. rechenbergi*.” Choice B is incorrect because “it” does not agree with the plural noun “*C. rechenbergi*” and because “will somersault” inappropriately shifts the sentence into future tense. Choice D is incorrect because “were somersaulting” inappropriately shifts the sentence into past progressive tense.
- 10. Choice D is the best answer.** The main focus of the last paragraph is on *C. rechenbergi*’s form of movement, making sentence 17’s reference to the spiders’ reproductive organs irrelevant at that point in the passage. Choices A, B, and C are incorrect because sentences 14, 15, and 16 contribute relevant information consistent with the main focus of the last paragraph on *C. rechenbergi*’s form of movement.
- 11. Choice B is the best answer.** Using “and being” creates effective parallelism and clarifies what the writer means by “Clifton’s enduring themes”: “family,” “injustice,” and “being African American and female.” Choices A, C, and D are incorrect because using “being” or “and the subjects of” or deleting the underlined portion entirely results in faulty parallelism.
- 12. Choice A is the best answer.** Sentence 3 establishes that the focus of the second paragraph is on “Clifton’s enduring themes.” Sentence 4, which provides basic biographical information about Clifton, is not relevant at this point in the passage and should therefore be deleted. Choices B, C, and D are incorrect because sentences 5, 6, and 7 are all part of the same example illustrating an “enduring theme” of Clifton’s work and are therefore relevant to the focus of the second paragraph.
- 13. Choice A is the best answer.** No punctuation is necessary after “called.” Choices B, C, and D are incorrect because punctuation is not necessary after “called.”
- 14. Choice D is the best answer.** The main focus of the last paragraph is on Clifton as both a talented writer and teacher. Choices A and C are incorrect because each focuses on Clifton’s poetry but not on her teaching, which is also central to the last paragraph. Choice B is incorrect because it focuses on Clifton’s teaching but not on her poetry, which is also central to the last paragraph.
- 15. Choice B is the best answer.** “Spare” is closest to conveying the same meaning as “economy and minimalism,” used in sentence 11. Choices A, C, and D are incorrect because “ambitious,” “nuanced,” and “vivid” do not convey the same meaning as “economy and minimalism,” used in sentence 11.