

# Everything High School Students Need to Know About Taking the COMPASS

## What is COMPASS?

COMPASS (COMputer adaptive Placement Assessment and Support Services) is a placement tool designed to measure your current skills in writing, reading, and math. Throughout the assessment, which is given on a computer, COMPASS will adapt to your abilities. Questions may increase or decrease in difficulty depending on how previous questions were answered.

## Why do I need to take the COMPASS?

Placement tests are required for all students who apply to Kirkwood Community College. Math test scores cannot be more than two years old in order to be admitted. Writing and reading COMPASS scores cannot be more than three years old. *As a High School student*, you must meet minimum test scores in order to enroll in classes at KCC. For example, to enroll in the course Composition 1 (ENG 105) a COMPASS writing score of 70 or higher is required. To have unrestricted access to reading courses, a student must score at 82 or higher in the reading test. To qualify for math classes at the level of Intermediate Algebra (MAT 102) or higher, a student must score at least 56 or above on the Algebra COMPASS test. So, certain classes, especially math and English, may require minimum scores for enrollment. *See the [Placement Test Scores Guide](#) for details.* Note also that ACT scores can be used in place of COMPASS scores.

## Can I retake it if I don't do well?

Students may take the COMPASS two times in a calendar year. The test is free and available at most KCC centers. The closest and most accessible test center for Mount Vernon students is on the main Kirkwood campus in Cedar Rapids. Students do not have to wait to take the COMPASS a second time, however it is highly recommended that a student complete rigorous review work prior to taking the test again. Kirkwood actually recommends that, in order to re-test, students: (1) are within ten points of the cut-off for their desired course, or (2) have completed recent and relevant course work that correlates with COMPASS placement scores. Recent course work is defined as course work completed in the last 12 months. KCC also recommends that students brush up before testing by reviewing sample test questions and other resources (see below). After testing twice in one academic year with the COMPASS, high school students will not be eligible to re-test until the following academic year. Remember, COMPASS is taken as a placement test to assure that students begin their community college work at an appropriate level of difficulty and one that is most likely to produce success. COMPASS results are used only in a few specified Kirkwood programs as part of the actual admission criteria.

## How long will testing take?

You may take as little or as much time as you wish to complete the assessment. The COMPASS is not timed, however, the average completion time for all three (3) sub-tests (writing, reading, math) is two hours.

## What should I bring with me?

All examinees are required to bring official photo identification, which can be your driver's license. You may also be asked to record your social security number at the time of your testing. You may bring your own calculator for the math test, or you can use the computer-based calculator that is provided.

## Where do I go?

Once you turn on campus, simply follow the signs to Cedar Hall. The Testing Center is located in room 2055, Cedar Hall.

### **How can I Prepare for COMPASS?**

It is important that you refresh your math, reading, and writing skills. Particularly focus on math if it has been a year or more since your last math class. The following websites are great resources:

· For general test taking tips go to <http://www.act.org/compass/student/tips.html>.

Also go to <http://www.act.org/compass/sample/index.html>

· For sample Reading Skills test questions go to <http://www.act.org/compass/sample/pdf/reading.pdf>.

· For sample Writing Skills test questions go to <http://www.act.org/compass/sample/pdf/writing.pdf>.

· For sample Numerical Skills, Pre-algebra, and Algebra sample test questions go to

<http://www.act.org/compass/sample/pdf/numerical.pdf>.

· For sample College Algebra, Geometry, and Trigonometry sample test questions go to

<http://www.act.org/compass/sample/pdf/geometry.pdf>.

**To get questions answered call the Kirkwood Community College admissions office: 800-363-2220**

**To schedule or cancel a testing appointment call the KCC test center in Cedar Hall: 319-398-5456**