

How I Studied for the Analyzing and Interpreting Literature CLEP Exam

by Annie Margarita Yang

This exam was difficult to actually prepare for because there was nothing I could study. This test basically gives you a short poem or passage to read and you have to analyze and interpret it. This exam has an optional essay portion and TESC doesn't require it, so I didn't take it.

Literature never really was my strongest subject. However, TESC listed it as a requirement, and I read somewhere on the Internet that my college awards 6 credits instead of 3. So I thought, since I can get more credits for the same price and time dedicated to preparation, then why not? I passed with a score of 56! ☐

Below are the exam details as written by the College Board.

Description of the Examination

The Analyzing and Interpreting Literature examination covers material usually taught in a general semester undergraduate course in literature. Although the examination does not require familiarity with specific works, it does assume that candidates have read widely and perceptively in poetry, drama, fiction, and nonfiction. The questions are based on passages supplied in the test. These passages have been selected so that no previous experience with them is required to answer the questions. The passages are taken primarily from American and British literature.

The examination contains approximately 80 multiple-choice questions to be answered in 90 minutes. Some of these are pretest questions that will not be scored. Any time candidates spend taking tutorials and providing personal information is additional to actual testing time.

Because writing about literary texts is central to the study of literature, some colleges may require candidates to take an optional essay section in addition to the multiple-choice section. The essay section is 90 minutes long and is made up of two 45-minute questions. One question asks candidates to analyze a short poem, the other asks them to apply a given generalization about literature (such as the function of a theme or a technique) to a novel, short story, or play that they have read. The essay section is still administered in a paper-and-pencil format; the essay responses are graded by the institution, not by the College Board.

Knowledge and Skills Required

Questions on the Analyzing and Interpreting Literature examination require candidates to demonstrate the following abilities.

- Ability to read prose, poetry, and drama with understanding
- Ability to analyze the elements of a literary passage and to respond to nuances of meaning, tone, imagery, and style
- Ability to interpret metaphors, to recognize rhetorical and stylistic devices, to perceive relationships between parts and wholes, and to grasp a speaker's or author's attitudes
- Knowledge of the means by which literary effects are achieved
- Familiarity with the basic terminology used to discuss literary texts

The examination emphasizes comprehension, interpretation, and analysis of literary works. A specific knowledge of historical context (authors and movements) is not required, but a broad knowledge of literature gained through reading widely and a familiarity with basic literary terminology is assumed. The following outline indicates the relative emphasis given to the various types of literature and the periods from which the passages are taken. The approximate percentage of exam questions per classification is noted within each main category.

Genre

- 35%-45% Poetry
- 35%-45% Prose (fiction and nonfiction)
- 15%-30% Drama

National Tradition

- 50%-65% British Literature
- 30%-45% American Literature
- 5%-15% Works in translation

Period

- 3%-7% Classical and pre-Renaissance
- 20%-30% Renaissance and 17th Century
- 35%-45% 18th and 19th Centuries
- 25%-35% 20th and 21st Centuries

<https://clep.collegeboard.org/exam/literature>

I “studied” for this exam by using InstantCert. InstantCert provided prose, poems, and dramas to read and then asked untimed multiple choice questions. I didn’t complete all of the available questions—I only did questions when I had free time. This created a problem during my actual exam because I didn’t learn how to pace myself. I’m quite a slow reader so I was worried that I wouldn’t be able to finish the exam in time. I completed it with a few minutes to spare.

<http://www.instantcert.com/>

There were some tips I found on the Internet that I found beneficial. I was on <http://free-clep-prep.com> and used some of the resources listed on the site.

The poetic glossary defined terms I needed to know for poetry. I read the experiences of previous test takers and they said they had a lot of questions on poetic terms. My experience was the exact opposite—I can say that I'm quite lucky in this regard. I was able to focus on interpreting the literature instead of frantically trying to recall definitions. Although on my actual exam there were approximately only five questions total that asked about poetic terms, reading this through the night before was helpful in that it gave me a new perspective on reading and analyzing poetry. By knowing the terms, I could identify certain aspects in poems and think about how the aspects contributed to the poem's meaning.

http://highereducation.com/sites/0072405228/student_view0/poetic_glossary.html

I also briefly read through literary devices the night before. I say briefly because I read the poetic terms first, so some of the literary devices overlapped. Their definitions are worded differently and provided good examples so it gave me a new perspective of the same literary device. My friend told me one of the techniques that he uses for strengthening memory/recall of something is to have multiple ways of describing it. I believe it works.

Also, these definitions are quite handy for writing. I remember I learned literary devices in my high school AP English Language and Composition class. My teacher would print out the text to famous speeches and make us identify the rhetorical devices and write essays on how the devices made the speech meaningful, memorable, and inspirational. I forgot about that experience until I took this exam. After I took this exam, I continued to apply this knowledge in my own speech writing and found it helpful in making my speeches more effective. I also helped revise speech drafts for members in my local Toastmasters club and made one member incorporate literary devices. His speech ended up winning that night.

<http://literary-devices.com/>

Literature, especially poetry, can be messy business because everyone can read the same thing, but interpret it differently. That's why it's not my strongest subject. I enjoy learning concepts and facts that are more concrete. The night before though, I found this article on Wikipedia on techniques for analyzing poetry. Apparently, there are certain things to look for when analyzing a poem. I liked this article because it made me appreciate and understand poetry more.

It also mentioned how when you read poetry out loud, you'll understand it more than when you read it in your head. Poetry was originally oral and was made to be sung or chanted. Knowing this, I whispered or mouthed the poems during my exam. It definitely helped because I got a better feel for the rhythm.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry_analysis

One last thing... I was scared shitless when I took this exam and there was quite a chance that I would fail. My heart was racing in the beginning and I felt a strong sense of nervousness and anxiety. I had to calm down by praying for a few seconds throughout the exam and I believe this helped because when I didn't know the answer, I simply tapped into my intuition.

www.AnnieMargaritaYang.com