

Choosing the Appropriate Basic Skills English Course: A Guide for Counselors and Students

Las Positas College now uses the “Accuplacer” English Assessment Test to place students in the appropriate level of English. But if a student’s scores are borderline or if they score very differently in reading comprehension than in sentence skills, it is difficult to know which basic skills course might be best for him or her. This guide describes the “ideal student” for the English 100A/100B sequence and the English 104 accelerated course. In combination with advice from a counselor, it should help students determine the best path to take on the way to English 1A.

The English 100A/100B sequence is taken over two semesters. The 100A/100B curriculum and instructor approach assumes the student:

- Would benefit a great deal from one-on-one faculty support;
- Will not be expected to work as quickly or as independently;
- Needs more time to master the grammatical concepts introduced in class, for example general sentence structure, run-ons, fragments, quotation mark use, and pronoun use;
- Needs some specific focus on reading comprehension, which helps students who are not fast readers or who have difficulty understanding or “thinking critically” about non-fiction readings;
- Would benefit from an initial focus on writing shorter works like paragraphs, to help the student get control over topic sentences, support, and coherence, and only later move into longer essays.
- Would appreciate a more detailed presentation of the process involved in writing longer works like reading logs and essays, and how to maintain unity and coherence and develop sufficient support over a longer piece of work;
- Would appreciate a gradual transition into writing in-class essays, which by the time of the 100B exit exam will require student to read a non-fiction essay and write a well-supported critical essay in response to it in the space of two hours.

The English 104 course is an accelerated, one-semester course that combines most of the curriculum from the 100A/100B sequence. The 104 curriculum and instructor approach assumes the student:

- Can work more independently and at a faster pace (The student will probably have more facility with finding errors and making improvements in his or her own work.);
- Has good time management skills;
- Would appreciate and be able to handle reviewing sentence structure and grammar basics at a faster pace (The 104 student is often a fairly fluent writer, but may need to brush up on these basics to gain greater control over and consistency in their sentences);
- Feels more confident about comprehending and thinking critically about reading assignments;
- Is fairly comfortable with writing essays, even if he or she knows they could make substantial improvements to bring their writing up to college level.