Program in Intensive English (PIE) Placement Test Guide

This guide will help you to understand the Program in Intensive English (PIE) placement test better. As you read this information, you will learn what your test score means and will become familiar with the parts of the test.

What is the PIE placement test?

All international students who want to study at Northern Arizona University (NAU) must know and use English well. PIE placement test scores show how proficient international students are in using English for academic purposes. To become an NAU student, you need:

If you are an **undergraduate** student:
- A score of 70 or above on the PIE English placement test

If you are in a special undergraduate program:
- The minimum score that is set by your specific program

Is it possible NOT to take the PIE placement test?

Yes, if you are an **undergraduate** student, you may not need to take PIE placement test if you have:
- A score of 70 or above on the TOEFL iBT (525 paper)
- A score of 6.0 on IELTS

*Some undergraduate student programs require a higher score for incoming juniors and seniors

Yes, if you are a **graduate student**, you do not need to take PIE placement test if you have:
- The minimum TOEFL or IELTS score that is set by your specific graduate program

How long does the PIE placement test take?

The PIE placement test takes about 4 hours to complete.

What kind of test is the PIE placement test?

The PIE placement test is a paper-and-pencil test. For Reading and Listening, you will have a paper copy of the test tasks and you will use a Scantron sheet to mark your answers. For Speaking, you will have your task on paper and will use a recorder to record your answer. For Writing, you will handwrite your answer.
Can I take the PIE placement test online?

No, you cannot take the PIE placement test online.

Do I need to know how to type on a computer to take the PIE placement test?

No, you do need to know how to type on a computer to take the PIE placement test. The writing part of the PIE placement test is handwritten. You will use a pen and a pencil.

Can I take a sample test?

There is not a sample test. You can review the information below to learn more about the tasks you will need to complete on the test.

What do I need to do to get a high score?

The PIE placement test measures your overall academic English ability. You need to continue to practice your English listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in order to do well. Also, on the day of the test, make sure that you are well rested and ready to take the test.

Taking the test

You will now see some of the materials you will use during the PIE placement test. You will use a Scantron sheet and a recorder for the test.
What is a Scantron?

A Scantron is a special answer sheet (see the picture). You will fill in the bubble to mark your answer A, B, C, or D.
How do I use the Scantron answer sheet?

Here is the question you see on paper:

20. What is the main idea of the passage?
   A. Mary’s stay in Japan
   B. Mary’s chemistry class
   C. Mary’s body language
   D. Mary’s host family

The correct answer to Question number 22 is C, so here is how you mark your answer on the Scantron sheet:

How do I mark my answer correctly?

Because a special machine reads your answers, you need to fill in the answer bubbles correctly (see the picture).
What is a recorder?

A recorder (see the picture) is a special device to record your voice for the speaking tasks. Do not worry if you have never used a recorder. The person administering the test will give you a good explanation of how to use a recorder. You will also have a chance to practice using it before you answer the speaking test questions.

What skills does the PIE placement test assess?

The PIE placement test has 4 skills:
- Reading
- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing

What will I do in the Reading section?

The Reading part of the test takes about 70 minutes. This section tests how well you understand written English. There are about 6 reading texts. You will read each text, and then answer the questions.

What kind of reading questions will I see?

You will see 6 types of questions: detail, main idea, inference, text organization, vocabulary, and purpose or attitude.

- Detail questions ask for some specific information that the text talked about. You can always go back to the reading and find the answer to such questions in the text. Most detail questions look like this:
- Main idea questions ask you about the text or a paragraph as a whole. You need to understand the topic as well as the specific idea on that topic. For example, the topic might be *Summer vacation* and the specific idea might be *It is important to get vaccinated before travelling abroad*. Most main idea questions look like this:
  - This paragraph is mostly about …
  - The passage talks mainly about …
  - The text describes …
  - The story as a whole tells …
  - The article is about…
  - The reading tells …

- Inference questions ask you to make decisions, conclusions, or judgments based on the information in the paragraph or passage. These inferences are not stated directly, rather the information in the text gives us a hint. To answer such questions, you need to think and reason. Most inference questions look like this:
  - Based on …, we can infer that…
  - We can tell from this . . .
  - We can figure out that . . .
  - We can guess that . . .
  - We can expect that . . .
  - The reason he did that was probably . . .
  - You can assume . . . probably . . .
  - You can conclude from this paragraph/passage that . . .
  - Which is more likely to happen . . . ?

Some inference questions ask about the purpose or attitude of the author. This might look like:
  - The author thinks that…
  - The purpose of this reading is to…

- Text organization questions ask you about organizational patterns of the passage or paragraph. Organizational patterns show the purpose of the text. Common types of organizational patterns include chronological order (sequence of events), compare/contrast, and cause and effect, classification and division, problem and solution. Most text organization questions look like this:
  - The relationship between the ideas in Paragraph 2 and 3 is …
  - The text organization of the text is …
  - The text structure of Paragraph 1 is …

- Vocabulary questions ask you about the meaning of words used in the reading text. Most vocabulary questions look like this:
  - The word … in Paragraph 3 is closest in meaning to…
Are all the reading texts the same?

No, some reading texts are shorter and easier while other are longer and harder. Also, some texts have more questions than others.

What will I do in the Listening part?

The Listening part of the test takes about 45 minutes. This section tests how well you understand spoken English. There are about 8 listening passages. You will hear each passage once. While you listen, you may take notes on the test paper. After each passage you will have time to answer the questions before the next passage begins.

What kind of listening questions will I see?

You will see 4 types of questions: details, main ideas, inferences, and purpose, tone or attitude. To learn more, see the information above about reading question types.

Are all the listening passages the same?

No, some listening passages are shorter and easier while other are longer and harder. Also, some passages have more questions than others.

What will I do in the Speaking part?

The Speaking part of the test takes about 30 minutes. This section tests your ability to speak academic English. It has three types of tasks: narrative, independent, and integrated.

- Task 1 is a narrative task. You will have 1 minute to prepare and 1 minute to speak. You will be able to take notes on the test paper. You will look at pictures and describe what is happening. You will need to give a title to the set of pictures. Then you will need to use the numbers of the pictures to connect ideas. To get a good grade, you need to give many details and explain ideas well.

- Task 2 is an independent task. You will have 1 minute to prepare and 1 minute to speak. You will be able to take notes on the test paper. For this task, you will need to answer a question. It can be an open-ended question, a question asking to compare two choices, or you will have two pictures that you will need to compare.

- Task 3 is an integrated task. You will have 4 minutes to prepare and 1.5 minutes to speak. You will be able to take notes on the test paper. For this task, you will have a graph and a short listening passage (about 3 minutes). First, you will study the graph, then you will listen to an audio. After that, you will have 2 minutes to prepare your spoken response. You will need to summarize and integrate the information from both sources and to give your own opinion on the topic in your spoken response.
What will I do in the Writing part?

The Writing part of the test takes about 35 minutes. This section tests your ability to write academic English. It has three types of tasks: email, independent, and integrated.

- Task 1 is an email. You will have 10 minutes to write. In order to get full points, you need to: 1) fill in the subject line, 2) introduce yourself, 3) explain the reason of your email, and 5) ask for a reply. Make sure that your ideas are clear and organized well as well as that you use good vocabulary and correct grammar.

- Task 2 is a synthesis task. You will have 1 minute to prepare and 20 minutes to write. For this task, you will have a graph and a short listening passage (about 3-4 minutes). First, you will study the graph for 1 minute. Then you will listen to an audio. After that, you will have 20 minutes to write your response. You will need to summarize and integrate the information from both sources in your written response.

How will my reading be graded?

Your score is the number of right answers, so you need to answer every question. Do not forget to mark your answers on your Scantron answer sheet. The reading section is out of 30 points.

How will my listening be graded?

Your score is the number of right answers, so you need to answer every question. Do not forget to mark your answers on your Scantron answer sheet. The listening section is out of 30 points.

How will my speaking be graded?

Two experienced teachers will listen to your recorded responses and will use a rubric to give you a grade. The teachers will evaluate your development of ideas, pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. The speaking section is out of 30 points.

How will my writing be graded?

Two experienced teachers will read to your written responses and will use a rubric to give you a grade. The teachers will evaluate your development of ideas, organization, grammar, and vocabulary. The writing section is out of 30 points.

How will my final score be calculated?

The scores for all four sections of the test will be summed, and your total score will be out of 120 points.
What if I do NOT have the score I need?

If your score is too low to become an NAU student, you need to study English more. You can study on your own and take the PIE placement test again when offered. You can also become a PIE student and study English at the PIE.

What happens with your English test score?

The PIE uses the English Placement Test to place students in different levels of instruction in PIE. We offer an optional exit exam at the end of the semester for all students enrolled in the PIE.

Students with an F-2 visa must take the exit exam to advance to the next level or to exit from the program.

Levels of instruction in the PIE

- **Level 2**: This level is for students with scores of 16-31 on the PIE Test. These students take 20 hours of instruction.
- **Level 3**: This level is for students with scores of 32-44 on the PIE Test. These students take 20 of instruction.
- **Level 4**: This level is for students with scores of 45-56 on the PIE Test. These students take 20 of instruction.
- **Level 5**: This level is for students who have of 57-69 on the PIE Test. Students either take 20 hours of instruction at the PIE or are enrolled in 4 credits of English 105 along with 16 hours of PIE instruction.
- **Level 6**: This level is for undergraduates who want more time to prepare for university study or for students who plan to apply to graduate programs in the U.S. Students in this class possess PIE Test scores in the 70-100 range and may either take full-time English or enroll in 4-6 credits of regular NAU coursework along with 13-20 hours of PIE instruction.