



Kingdom of Saudi Arabia  
National Center for  
Assessment in Higher Education

# STEP

## Standardized Test of English Proficiency

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### Student Booklet

تنظيمه  
إحضار أصل بطاقة الأحوال المدنية الخاصة بك بشرط أساسي لدخول الاختبار

- What is STEP?
- LC ( Listening Comprehension )
- RC ( Reading Comprehension )
- ST ( Structure )
- CA ( Compositional Analysis )

Third Edition  
2011

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## ▪ Background

Based on growing international needs for the English language, several academic and non-academic institutions have approached the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education calling for the development of an English test that could measure the proficiency of their applicants. Consequently the Center formed a committee consisting of specialists in the fields of English and Psychological Measurement. The Committee looked first into available international, regional and local test experiences and practices. It also visited and consulted institutions specialized in standardized language testing. After this survey the Committee reached a conclusion on the need and formation of the test.

## ▪ What is STEP?

STEP is an acronym for Standardized Test of English Proficiency. It is designed to be an objective and unbiased test of a person's level of proficiency in the use of English. The test is made up of the following four components:

1. Reading Comprehension (RC – 40%),
2. Structure (ST – 30%),
3. Listening Comprehension (LC – 20%),
4. Compositional Analysis (CA – 10%).

The Committee chose these four components and their respective weights after consultation and research into the approach of both regional and international bodies responsible for the production of similar English tests and feedback provided by national organizations requesting such a test. Contingent on statistical analysis and feedback on STEP results, the weighting of the four components may be subject to revision to meet the needs of the Arab Gulf region.

It should be added that STEP is uniquely designed by English language professors and experts native to the region and therefore knowledgeable of the abilities and the needs locally. This drastically lowers the possibility of cultural, social and regional bias and provides a more appropriate tool for objective assessment.

## ▪ Who should take the test?

The STEP should be used for those who are seeking:

- admission at a University or College as an undergraduate.
- admission to a Graduate Program.
- exemption from certain courses.
- teacher certification.
- employment in the private sector.
- a report of English proficiency for private use.

## ▪ Test Formation

The actual STEP test has 100 questions distributed among the four components previously mentioned. With additional time allotted for non-scorable trial questions and instructions, the total test time is 3 hours.

## Examples of STEP Items:

### ▪ LC (Listening Comprehension)

The following is a transcription of a dialogue that the test-taker may hear. Go to the Qiyas website ([www.qiyas.org](http://www.qiyas.org)) to listen to the passage and the questions.

It is important to understand that, when taking a real STEP test, you will not see the dialogue in your test booklet and you will not see the questions. You will only see the four possible answers (A, B, C, D) and the instructions in the box below.

### **Instructions**

**Listen carefully to the recordings and choose the best answer for each question, and mark it on your answer sheet.**

### ▪ **Recording Number 1:**

*Fahad:* Khalid. Did you have a good weekend?

*Khalid:* Well, it was good and bad. I visited my uncle in Khobar, but I had an accident on the way.

*Fahad:* Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. What happened?

*Khalid:* I hit a guy on a bicycle when I was turning a corner. He just popped out of nowhere.

*Fahad:* Was he hurt?

*Khalid:* Not seriously. I took him to the hospital. The doctor didn't think he had any broken bones, but he had some bruises around his left shoulder. Still, the doctor asked him to take x-rays of his left shoulder just to be sure and prescribed some medicine for the soreness of his bruises.

*Fahad:* Did his insurance cover the bill?

*Khalid:* No, I paid for it. The guy I hit is a street cleaner and doesn't have much money. Besides, it was actually my fault – although he should have watched where he was steering his bike!!

*Fahad:* How is your uncle?

*Khalid:* He's doing fine. He moved to Khobar from Dammam and is very happy with his new house. It was the first time I've visited him since he moved.

### Question Number 1: Khalid had an accident:

- A on the way to Dammam.      B riding a bicycle.  
C on the way to Khobar.      D going to the hospital.

The correct answer involves remembering where Khalid had his accident – **a location**. It is easy to see from reading the dialogue (which you will not see on a real test) that the correct answer is (C). Khalid was not on his way to Dammam, although he mentioned that his uncle moved from Dammam to Khobar, so (A) cannot be correct. The man he hit was riding a bicycle. Khalid was driving his car, so (B) cannot be correct. (D) is not correct, although Khalid did take the man he hit to the hospital.

### Question Number 2: Why did the doctor want the street cleaner to have x-rays?

- A The doctor thought the street cleaner's shoulder was broken.  
B The doctor wanted to be sure there were no breaks.  
C The doctor thought the street cleaner had bad bruises.  
D The doctor thought the street cleaner's ribs were broken.

This question asks for **a reason**. Choice (A) is not correct because the doctor did not think there were any broken bones. Choice (B) is correct -- the doctor wanted to be certain that there were no broken

bones. The doctor did say that he would probably have bad bruises, so at first choice (C) may seem to be correct if the dialogue was misunderstood. Choice (D) is not true. The doctor decided to take x-rays just to make sure that there were no breaks. He wanted to be certain.

**Question Number 3: Who paid for the hospital and doctor's charges ?**

- A Khalid's uncle.
- B Khalid's insurance.
- C Khalid's friend.
- D Khalid.

The responses are presented as short answers to the question about who paid the hospital and the doctor. Khalid's uncle has nothing to do with paying the hospital or the doctor, so choice (A) is not correct. Nothing is said about Khalid having insurance, so choice (B) is not correct. Choice (C) is not correct because Khalid is simply responding to his friend's question about what he did on the weekend. Thus, **by process of elimination**, the correct answer must be choice (D).

**Recording Number 2:**

*Rashid:* Mansour, can you give me a hand this afternoon?

*Mansour:* I'd love to Rashid, but I have a dental appointment. Can you wait until tomorrow?

*Rashid:* Not really. I need to finish moving out of my old apartment today or else pay for another month.

*Mansour:* Why don't you check with Mohammed? I don't think he has any classes today.

**Question Number 4: What did Rashid mean by saying, "Can you give me a hand?"**

He wanted Mansour to:

- A give him support.
- B cheer him up.
- C hold him.
- D help him.



Rashid was using an idiom to ask Mansour if he would help him move. Only choice (D) is correct.

**Question Number 5: What is Mansour doing this afternoon?**

- A Going to class.
- B Meeting a friend.
- C Seeing a dentist.
- D Moving his furniture.

Mansour mentioned in the dialogue that he has a dental appointment, so the correct response is choice (C).

**Question Number 6: What if Rashid doesn't move out of his old apartment today?**

He will have to:

- A pay more rent.
- B move tomorrow.
- C wait another month
- D pay for moving.

Rashid mentions that he can't wait until tomorrow because he will have to pay another month's rent on the apartment he is moving from. Only choice (A) is correct.

**Question Number 7: It can be inferred that Mohammed is:**

- A a doctor.
- B a student.
- C a dentist.
- D a classmate.

Mansour suggests that Rashid ask Mohammed to help him move today because Mohammed doesn't have any classes. From that statement, we can guess that Mohammed is a student. Choice (B) is the correct response.

▪ RC (Reading Comprehension)

## Instructions

Read the following passage, then choose the best answer to each of the questions that follow, and mark it on your answer sheet.

- (1) A man driving along a busy town road last Tuesday morning suddenly realized he had a dangerous uninvited passenger in the car with him. It was a cobra snake that twisted itself around the steering wheel and his hands, tying the man into the car.
- (2) The cobra, a *rare* type of snake indigenous to the Kingdom, would not let him go and threatened to bite him if he moved. The driver stopped the car in the middle of the road and waited for someone to stop and ask what he was doing.
- (3) A large crowd gathered in the street to stare at the unfortunate man, with no one daring to open the car doors. Al-Bilad newspaper reported that eventually a brave man opened a door and grabbed the cobra by the head. The cobra put up great resistance. *It* was then killed. The driver rushed from his car and refused to get back in again, screaming about more snakes under his seat. None were found however. \*

\*An article taken from Arab News with modification.

## Questions

1. According to paragraph (1), what was the man doing last Tuesday morning?
- A Driving his car.                      B Leaving town.  
C Steering his wheel.                 D Inviting a passenger.

**Question 1** is a direct question. Only choice (A) is correct. Choice (B) might seem to be correct, but no information is given as to whether he is *in* town or *driving to or from* town. Choices (C) and (D) are not correct, although the passage mentions the steering wheel of the car the man is driving and it also mentions a passenger. Choice (C) is incorrect because it does not identify what wheel the man is steering. Choice (D) is incorrect because the man certainly did not invite the snake into the car.

2. What word is closest in meaning to the word **rare** in paragraph (2)?

- A back
- B huge
- C unusual
- D strong

**Question 2** is a word meaning question. The closest in meaning to **rare** from the choices given is (C).

3. We can infer from the passage that the cobra \_\_\_\_\_ the man.

- A bit
- B twisted
- C crippled
- D frightened

**Question 3** calls for the reader to 'view' the scene in his or her mind and then decide which of the choices is the most logical. Choice (D) is the only one that fits the action related in the passage although there is no direct statement that the cobra frightened the man. It did not bite the man as in choice (A), although it threatened to. It did twist itself around the steering wheel and the man's hands, but it did not twist the man himself as choice (B) would imply. And certainly, the cobra did not cripple the man as choice (C) says.

4. The head of the cobra was grabbed by:

- A a newsman.
- B the driver.
- C a brave person.
- D an unfortunate man.

For **question 4**, a newsman is not mentioned in the passage, so choice (A) is not correct. The driver cannot move his hands because the cobra has twisted itself around his hands and the steering wheel of the car, so choice (B) cannot be correct. Choice (D) is not possible because the driver himself is the unfortunate man referred to in the passage. Only choice (C) can be correct.

5. What does the word **It** refer to in paragraph (3)?

- A The car.
- B The driver.
- C The cobra.
- D The seat.

**Question 5** asks the reader to identify the word that is referred to by **It** in paragraph 3. The readers must ask themselves WHO or WHAT was killed. The only possible choice here is (C) unless the reader misunderstands the passage.

In addition to the medium and longer reading passages, you may also find a short statement that has only 1 or 2 questions. Here is an example:

**Question 6 relates to the following:**

*Sarah said she didn't understand the assignment until she asked her friend what the teacher wanted them to do.*

6. What did Sarah ask her friend about the assignment?

- A How to write it.
- B What it was about.
- C When it was due.
- D Why the teacher gave it.

For **question 6**, choice (B) is the correct answer. She asked her friend what the assignment was about.

## ▪ ST ( Structure )

**The ST questions of the test** call on the test-taker to choose the correct response on the grounds of correct grammar. An incorrect choice may seem possible, but will result in a construction or meaning that is not appropriate. The grammar points under consideration may be:

- verb tense (including irregular verb forms, the conditional, passive/active voice, reported speech, and modals).
- subject/verb agreement.
- correct use of adjectives, adverbs, definite/indefinite articles, prepositions, clauses/phrases, gerunds/infinitives, count and non-count nouns.

### Instructions

**Choose the best answer to complete the following sentences, and mark it on your answer sheet.**

1. I've \_\_\_\_\_ seen that video. I watched it last night.

- A always  
C usually

- B never  
D already

**Question 1:** The correct answer has to be (D). Choosing (A), (B) or (C) would seem OK at first, but they don't communicate a logical idea or they don't fit with the use of the simple past in the second sentence.

2. Ali was thirsty after exercising, so he \_\_\_\_\_ a glass of water.

- A drinks  
C drank

- B is drinking  
D was drinking

**Question 2:** Choice (C) is the correct answer. With the main clause in the simple past, it's not possible to have (A) or (B) since they both indicate present time. Choice (D) doesn't work because we don't have an understanding here that would allow for a continuous tense. The verb must be in the simple past. The action is over and done with.

3. It \_\_\_\_\_ to rain while Tariq and I \_\_\_\_\_ to school.

- |                       |                        |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| A begin / was driving | B began / were driving |
| C began / drove       | D begin / drive        |

**Question 3:** The use of the word **while** indicates that the second blank must have a verb with an **-ing** ending. Choices (C) and (D) are therefore not possible. Choice (B) is correct because **were driving** agrees with the plural **Tariq and I**. It also has the necessary simple past form for the verb in the first blank.

4. Samir: Are you going to watch television tonight?

Ali: I know I should study, but I \_\_\_\_\_ watch it for my favorite program.

- |         |         |
|---------|---------|
| A would | B won't |
| C may   | D can't |

**Question 4:** The correct choice is (C). The modal **should** indicates action that ought to be done, but introduces a degree of uncertainty. Choosing anything other than (C) is inappropriate.

5. Are the kids sleeping right now? No, they \_\_\_\_\_ playing with their toys.

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| A not be | B are    |
| C be     | D aren't |

**Question 5:** The words **right now** in the question signal that we must use the present continuous. Only (B) can be correct.

6. Musa: Would you like some coffee?

Ali: \_\_\_\_\_; I don't like coffee.

- A Yes, thank you                      B No, thank you  
C Maybe, if you don't mind        D Of course

**Question 6:** This is a short dialogue in which Musa makes an offer to Ali. Ali responds negatively to the offer. The only option that fits the circumstances is (B), a polite 'no' to the offer of coffee.

7. Khalid always gets up \_\_\_\_\_ 6 o'clock in the morning.

- A in    B on  
C at                                         D for

**Question 7:** This involves recognizing that the preposition that is used for clock time in English is always **at** – choice (C). Nothing else will work.

### ▪ CA (Compositional Analysis)

The main topics normally covered by CA questions are capitalization, punctuation, sentence ordering or combining, and incorrect structures. Here are some examples.

1. Her name is Sara. Sara is twenty four years old.

The best way to combine these two sentences is:

- A She is name Sara and Sara is twenty four years old.  
B Her name is Sara and she is twenty four years old.  
C She is Sara and twenty four years old.  
D Her name Sara and her is twenty four years old.

**Question 1:** This item requires combining two sentences with a coordinating conjunction. Since the information in the two sentences is about the same subject, Sara, we need to use **and** to join them, which is the case in all the options. (continued next page) →

However, only choice (B) is correct because it uses the subject pronoun to replace the proper name Sara in the second clause. Choice (A) has faulty word order, choice (C) is missing a subject and verb in the second clause, and choice (D) uses the object pronoun **her** instead of the required subject pronoun **she** in the second clause and omits the verb 'is' in the first clause.

**Note that item 2 below requires the ERROR only to be identified.**

2. Which one of the underlined words or phrases in the following is **INCORRECT**?

When I saw the man with an umbrella, it reminded me that I need to buying one. We don't have much rain in my city, but London gets a lot of rain.

A saw

B buying

C don't have

D a lot of

**Question 2:** Choice (A) is fine: **when** introduces a time clause using a simple tense. Choice (B) uses an **-ing** verb following **to**. This is probably the mistake since often **to** is followed by the simple form of the verb to form the infinitive. If it is an infinitive, the verb form cannot have an **-ing** ending. However, it is good to look at all options. Choice (C) is a simple present negative and is used here for a general statement of fact, so it is correct. Choice (D) is fine since **a lot of** can be used for both count and noncount nouns. This confirms our choice of (B) as the error. There is no need to indicate the correction – simply identifying which one is INCORRECT is all that is asked for.



3. Choose the correct order to make the following sentences into a paragraph:

- (1) There wasn't much time left before my flight would depart.
- (2) My father rushed to the airport to bring my ticket.
- (3) I was very happy when my vacation came.
- (4) At the airport I discovered that I had forgotten my ticket.
- (5) Thanks to my father, I was able to leave on time.

A (4), (5), (1), (3), (2)

B (3), (4), (1), (2), (5)

C (3), (5), (2), (1), (4)

D (4), (3), (5), (1), (2)

**Questions 3** is a matter of arranging the sentences sequentially so that they are in the correct time order. In this example, only choice (B) can fit the logical time sequence.

4. In which of the following sentences is the capitalization correct?

- A Khalid can never convince people here in Saudi arabia that he is originally from New York City because he speaks Hejazi Arabic so well.
- B Khalid can never convince people here in Saudi Arabia that he is originally from New York city because he speaks hejazi Arabic so well.
- C Khalid can never convince people here in Saudi Arabia that he is originally from New York City because he speaks Hejazi Arabic so well.
- D Khalid can never convince people here in Saudi Arabia that he is originally from New York City because he speaks Hejazi arabic so well.

**Question 4** involves identifying which words must be capitalized. Besides the first word in the sentence, the following words must all be capitalized: Saudi Arabia, New York City, Hejazi, and Arabic. By checking each sentence for these words one by one and eliminating sentences where they are not capitalized, you will find that (C) is correct.

5. In which of the following sentences is the punctuation correct?

- A Although I was late arriving at the office I was able to finish my duties: I may arrive late sometimes, but my work is always done on time.
- B Although I was late arriving at the office, I was able to finish my duties; I may arrive late sometimes but, my work is always done on time.
- C Although I was late arriving at the office, I was able to finish my duties; I may arrive late, sometimes but my work is always done on time.
- D Although I was late arriving at the office, I was able to finish my duties; I may arrive late sometimes, but my work is always done on time.

**Question 5** is simply a matter of identifying where full stops, semi-colons, colons, and commas should be. Sentence (D) is correct. If a dependent clause comes first in a sentence, it should be set off from the main clause by a comma. For this reason, a comma is needed after the word 'office' which is the last word in the dependent clause. A semi-colon can be used instead of a full stop in cases where the following sentence is directly related to what has been said in the previous sentence. Thus, after the word 'duties' we can put a semi-colon. A full stop would also be correct, but since the following material is so closely related to the previous material, a semi-colon is definitely a good choice. A comma should precede the coordinating conjunction 'but'. The full stop after the word 'time' indicates completion.



## The Center's Mission

Providing educational and professional measures that help achieve fairness, maximize the effectiveness of educational institutions, offer consultations and produce specialized studies in the field of educational assessment.

### **Notice:**

Some colleges and universities require their applicants to take the STEP (Standardized Test of English Proficiency). Students must refer to their intended schools and ask about their conditions for admission.