



Preparing for Testing: Student Letter

About CAE / CLA+

As a nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve student outcomes, CAE develops performance-based assessments that authentically measure your essential academic and career readiness skills.

CAE's Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+) evaluates the skills that are most in demand by employers: critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective written communication. Our research shows that these skills are predictive of positive career outcomes such as salary, employment, or graduate school enrollment¹².

You will be challenged to:

- Analyze and understand data;
- Evaluate the credibility of various documents;
- Identify questionable or critical assumptions;
- Deal with inadequate, ambiguous, and conflicting information;
- Identify additional information that would help resolve issues;
- Construct an organized and logically cohesive argument by providing elaboration on facts or ideas (e.g., explaining how evidence bears on the problem, providing examples, and emphasizing especially convincing evidence);
- Organize and synthesize information from several sources; and
- Marshal evidence from different sources in a written response.

During the testing process, you will be instructed to **support your responses** by utilizing information provided within the assessment, such as technical reports, data tables, newspaper articles, office memoranda, and emails. The assessment allows for **more than one single "correct" answer** with scores that reflect a range of plausible and effective response strategies. No prior knowledge of a particular topic is necessary to do well on this assessment.

After completing CLA+, your results will be scored by assessment experts and will be evaluated against CAE's **criterion-referenced** standards³. These standards are mastery levels that are descriptive of your critical thinking, problem solving, and written communication skills. Results of your assessment will provide information on your mastery of these skills. You can use your results to showcase your skills to your professors and potential employers or improve upon them.

¹ Zahner, D., James, J. (2016). Predictive validity of a critical thinking assessment of post-college outcomes. *Proceedings of the 2016 American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C.*

² Zahner, D., & Lehrfeld, J. (2018). Employers' and advisors' assessments of the importance of critical thinking and written communication skills post-college. *Proceedings of the 2018 American Educational Research Association, New York, NY.*

³ Zahner, D. (2014). CLA+ standard setting study final report. Council for Aid to Education, New York, NY.



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Test Logistics

CLA+ has two sections - a **sixty-minute** essay-based performance task, and a **thirty-minute** selected-response unit.

CLA+ is a proctored assessment, either in-person or remotely via a video call. If you are testing remotely, the video call (Zoom, WebEx, Google Meet, etc.) will run in the background while you work.

Important features:

- You will have a timer in the upper right corner, so you always know how much time you have left.
- When you first enter the assessment, you will have a brief tutorial to familiarize yourself with the layout.
- You have the option to flag a question if you need to return to it.