Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the ALI?

The American Language Institute (ALI), part of the School of Professional Studies at New York University, is a world-renowned center for English-language learning located in the heart of New York City. The ALI is dedicated to equipping and empowering our students with the language skills they need to function successfully in their chosen field, whether they are currently in an academic or a professional environment.

In addition to a comprehensive English language program, and professional English courses, the ALI offers an Academic English Program (AEP) which is specifically designed to support students seeking an opportunity to attend degree programs throughout the university, and to bring their proficiency to a level necessary to succeed at NYU.

What does the ALI Placement Test measure?

The ALI Placement Test is designed to evaluate your productive writing and interpersonal speaking skills (communication between two speakers) in English. It gives you an opportunity to show your English speaking and writing proficiency while performing tasks that are common for students attending a competitive American university.

Why do I have to take the test?

For some programs within NYU, English language proficiency is evaluated through several measures which may include TOEFL, TOEIC or IELTS scores, the ALI Placement Test, writing samples, interviews, English language course transcripts, or other means.

Each school and major determines which measures they will use, and which combination of assessments is appropriate for their program. If you have been asked to take this assessment, it is because the school or program to which you have applied would like evaluation of your writing and interpersonal speaking ability.

Why is my TOEFL score not enough?

The TOEFL is a valid and reliable measure of English. However, in order to succeed in many of the dynamic and challenging programs at NYU, strong interpersonal speaking skills are required. Additionally, many programs require evidence of your ability to write on unrehearsed topics and without access to resources. TOEFL is unable to measure interpersonal speaking, and writing samples are not accessible from that test. The ALI Placement test is able to measure these skills and provide opportunity for thorough review of your writing samples.
What does the test look like?

The ALI test consists of two parts. Part I is the Writing Test. For the writing test, you will have 50 minutes to complete two writing prompts. Each prompt will have a series of tasks you will be asked to address in your response.

Part II is the Speaking Interview. When you complete the writing test, you will be directed to sign up for an interview. During the interview, you will be asked a variety of questions that are intended to provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate your English speaking skills. The interview will last approximately 12-15 minutes.

How is the test rated?

The ALI Placement test is designed, conducted and rated by members of the faculty at the ALI. In addition to holding advanced degrees, and extensive experience in English language acquisition and learning, they have specialized training in language proficiency assessment. Each part of your assessment will be evaluated and given a level placement by a minimum of two ALI faculty.

How do I study for the test?

The ALI Placement Test is intended to measure your speaking and writing proficiency at the time the test is administered. Therefore, the best way to prepare for the exam is to practice writing a variety of texts in English and speaking the language as much as possible. You may be asked to write essays, articles, position papers or summaries of readings. You may be asked to state and defend your point of view on an issue, to provide explanation of a specific topic relevant to your major or field of study, or to report on a current event.

When is the test offered?

The ALI Placement Test is offered weekly, with interviews available at specific times. Because the interviews are conducted by ALI faculty, the tests are available on New York time (US Eastern Time). Every effort is made to ensure that a variety of evening and morning appointments are scheduled to accommodate time differences and the variety of international locations of students taking the exam. To accommodate US holidays, and/or the academic calendar at NYU, there may be several weeks during which the test is not available.

How do I sign up for a test?

You will receive instructions from the NYU school to which you applied if you are required to take the ALI Placement Test. Included in will be directions to sign up for both the written test and the interview.
How is the test administered?

The Writing Test and Speaking Interview are conducted online to allow students to be assessed prior to acceptance into a program and/or prior to arrival at NYU.

Are there practice tests?

No, at this time, practice tests are not available. As the test is a measure of your English proficiency, your placement result cannot be improved through test taking strategies.

Where can I take the test?

The test is available online and will be proctored online, via video chat, with a live proctor. Therefore, you can take the test anywhere you have access to high-speed internet and a quiet location.

What is a proctor?

Because the test is being offered globally and from any location, it is necessary that we have a way to ensure that the person who applies for admission to a program at NYU is the same person who takes the exam. For this reason, and to protect against plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty, a proctoring service will be used to ensure that the test is taken according to our security requirements.

What will the proctor do for my test?

The proctor will connect with you over the internet. You will be required to show your photo ID, which will be captured on video and shared with your school. The proctor will ask you to scan the room using your computer’s video camera and will continually monitor your computer system to ensure you are not using any other programs or accessing websites. The proctor will watch you take the test to confirm that you are producing the writing in your test and not using translation tools or other resources.

How will I know the results of my test?

Once your interview and writing samples are reviewed, your English Level Placement (ELP) will be sent to the school to which you have applied.

What level do I need to pass the test?

The ALI Placement test does not have a “passing” score. Your writing and speaking sample are evaluated according to the ALI Level Criteria, and you will be given a level placement of 1-9.

The school or program you apply to will decide which level of English proficiency (1-9) is appropriate to succeed in their program. The ALI does not determine the minimum ELP your school requires. The ALI will only administer the test and provide a level placement.
How often can I take the test?

The ALI test can be taken once every six months.

What if I have technical difficulties during the test?

If you experience technical difficulties during the writing portion of the exam, the proctor will be available to assist you with resolving the issue. If technical difficulties prevent you from completing your writing test, please contact ALI via email at ALI.test-group@nyu.edu. The proctoring service will be asked to confirm that you had technical problems and if confirmed, you will be rescheduled to complete the exam.