

## Earning College Credits the Easy Way

By Tricia McQuarrie

Some homeschooling parents find formulating a plan for homeschooling through high school a challenge. Should our focus be on completing a challenging high school curriculum package? What about facing the college recruiters? What about spending money on costly umbrella schools that offer accredited diplomas?

These concerns motivate some parents to plan hours of unnecessary course work that they hope will lead to a diploma. Others choose educational paths that attempt to satisfy nagging doubts about future college entrance requirements. CLEP solved both these concerns for our family by allowing us to chart an independent course that ultimately will show college recruiters that our students are ready for the next step.

### What Is CLEP?

CLEP<sup>®</sup> stands for College-Level Examination Program and is also referred to as “testing out” or “credit by examination.” Simply put, students use independent study to prepare for a specific college course and then go to a local college to take a computerized multiple choice exam. If the student passes, he is issued the appropriate credits for the class as if he had taken the class at a college.

### How CLEP Exams Can Be Used

- \*Accumulate dual credit, earning credits that will count toward high school requirements and at the same time count toward a college degree.
- \*Shorten the years of study required to earn a college degree, since the student can start in the teen years.
- \*Save money, since the cost of taking CLEP exams is much lower than registering for a college class on campus.
- \*Show *any* "brick and mortar" college that your child is capable of performing at a college level, and you'll have the credits to *prove* it!
- \*Avoid having to take "basic skills" classes when entering college by taking CLEP tests to earn credits for college math and freshman English.
- \*Give your child the chance to delve into the subject being studied, yet move at a comfortable pace for optimum learning.
- \*Sharpen your child's independent study skills, which are a must in the college environment.
- \*Continue to share your worldview with your child when studying controversial topics that are included in many social science classes.
- \*Tackle tough subjects once and get the credit the first time around. For example, why do high school biology and then retake it for college credit?

### Free CLEP Help

A normal college course includes classroom instruction followed by testing and then the granting of credits earned. Using our free lesson plans, you will be able to take advantage

of your child's independent study skills, thus replacing the need for the instructional phase of the college class with appropriate books and videos we've selected as study tools. Your child will prepare for the exam, and the College Board will issue him or her credits for passing the test. These credits can be "banked" with the College Board and then transferred to the college of your choice in the future. Our website is 100% ministry-based.

### Do All Colleges Accept CLEP Credits?

More than 2,900 schools accept CLEP credits. The exams have a ninety-minute, multiple-choice format. There are other widely accepted credit-by-examination programs as well, such as the DANTES program. It's important to check with the colleges on your "wish list" to see how many credits they allow to be "transferred in" from any one testing source. The colleges we have listed are very "credit by examination" friendly, some even allowing you to "test out" of your entire four-year degree! Remember, too, that colleges have enrollment requirements, such as SAT scores and basic skills tests, and colleges often waive these requirements when a student has already accumulated college credits.

### "Backing Up" Your Transcript

Passing CLEP exams demonstrates to college admission officers not only that your student has mastered high school level work, but also that he or she is already doing college level work. This should be sufficient evidence to demonstrate proficiency.

However, some colleges want to see a portfolio of the student's completed high school work. This portfolio helps back up your homeschool transcript. Consider including some of the following components in your student's portfolio:

- Details about any work experiences and internships.
- Samples of the student's writing ability (passing the CLEP English Composition exam should be enough).
- List of contests won or any honors achieved.
- List of literature read during the high school years (classics, etc.).
- Any other samples of student work that show proficiency.

### Where Do I Start?

The most common question we receive is, "Where do I start?" Here's some advice that may help you along with some answers to our most frequently asked questions.

1. *Focusing on the actual test is a common error.* I want to encourage you to see the value in the entire process, start to finish. By tackling a CLEP exam, your child will:

- Develop independent study skills.
- Learn test preparation skills.
- Become familiar with college campus and testing centers.
- Probably pass a college exam, earning credits!

2. *The most important advice I can give is to follow through with the study, start to finish, and require your child to take the exam.* I see many homeschool parents who do not make their child take the exam, even after all the work has been done. These tests are not meant to represent your child's overall ability nor are they representative of your teaching skills or the success of the homeschool experience in general. There is nothing to lose in taking the test—so take it! I often tell my children how proud of them I am for simply learning the material and sticking with it! The credits are a bonus to the whole experience but *not* the focus.

3. *What makes a student successful?* I would say that learning style is very important. If you have been taught to be an independent learner, then that is definitely a plus when attempting to earn credit by examination. Motivation? Yes, I think that plays into it too. That's why I encourage parents to gear that first exam to an area in which the child appears to be more gifted. This increases the odds of success, and some of the material may end up being review. How about study time? It is important to hold the student accountable on the readings and yet not to pressure him. Many students take the exam without following our important recommendation to take each practice exam *twice*, researching their incorrect answers.

4. *If the student fails the test the first time, he can always retake the exam.* Other testing sources (CLEP and DANTES offer many of the same exams) often offer duplicate tests, so he may be able to arrange to take the duplicate exam right away. If not, he should wait the required period of time, keep studying, and take it again! The student could take the exam as many as five times before he would come close to paying what it would cost to take the college course.

5. *I am often asked, "Which subject should we start with?"* This really depends on the student. Some are gifted in certain areas, so you should obviously choose an exam that goes along with your student's interests. If he has no specific area of interest, I recommend starting with the DANTES computer exam, because most teens are interested in this subject and "know the lingo" already! This is an easy class to organize in a co-op or group setting.

6. *Can I use other texts?* Certainly! We offer the lesson plans as a guide, but you can add your own text to our suggestions *or* just use your own. The choice is yours. However, I cannot tell you if your material covers all that is in the exam; you will have to make that call.

7. *Do I have to finish the class in the suggested time frame?* Absolutely not! Even though the lessons are broken down as "weekly" assignments, you are free to allow your students as much time as needed to complete each lesson.

8. *Do you have room in your local classes?* Unfortunately, our local classes are full. However, these classes are so easy to organize! The class time is structured so that we simply review the reading assignments, answer any questions the kids may have, review flashcards or quizzes within the material, view the video, etc. For most subjects, all this can be done in an hour. The classes are a fun way to make CLEP a positive "social"

learning event for the kids and to hold them accountable. The lesson plans easily can be used in your co-op, and you have virtually no prep! Consider starting with a small group of kids (three or four). Believe me, when others hear about your group, the word will spread quickly! Before long, *your* classes will be full, too.

9. *"But you're cheating!"* Believe it or not, a family member actually said this to one of our CLEP moms. In response to that I would say that our children spend an average of about four months on one subject exam, thoroughly absorbing the material. Does the word *cramming* bring back memories for you? No cramming or short-term memory learning here! During that time frame, students are reading from two to three texts related to the subject of the CLEP exam. They also view lectures via video and take several practice exams.

Our students have become excellent learners, sharpening their independent study skills, which is a must in college. The credits they receive are College Board approved, and the American Council on Education (ACE) has recommended the number of semester hours of credit for each CLEP exam. Your CLEP and DANTES credits are earned, learned, and well deserved!

### Our Personal Journey

When our oldest daughter was entering seventh grade, we were blessed to attend a seminar on the topic of distance learning that was led by the Bruce Eagleson family. The seminar was held at the ENOCH convention (New Jersey) and was "perfect timing" for us. We were just beginning to formulate a vision for homeschooling through high school and had the typical questions about diplomas and college entrance. We also were deeply concerned about the potential to encourage compromise of our daughter's worldview by taking college classes, especially those under the social sciences umbrella.

The knowledge we share on our website is an accumulation of information passed on to us by others who have paved the way, and we are truly grateful for their pioneer spirit. We thank them for their willingness to share their wisdom with us. We also give all the glory to God for always making our path straight during our homeschool journey. CLEP is just one more example of how God has shown us the "way to go" each step of the way.

We hope you are blessed by the information we are sharing. Currently, our eldest daughter (now 18) has close to forty college credits and will be finishing her associate of arts degree this coming year. Our second daughter (age 16) has twelve credits. Only three more students to go, and we look forward to again accessing our own web pages for their success!

After learning all I could about CLEP for my children, I decided to use the same knowledge for my own benefit. Working with Thomas Edison State College, I am now two classes away from graduating myself, using some of my own lesson plans to get my degree!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our family; simply use the buttons provided on the website. We hope our experience is an encouragement to you as

you embark on your own journey.

---

### **Biographical Information**

Copyright, 2009. All rights reserved by author below. Content provided by The Old Schoolhouse<sup>®</sup> Magazine, LLC.

*Tricia McQuarrie is the owner of the CLEPPrep website (<http://CLEPPrep.tripod.com>) and the administrator of a nonprofit private school cooperative in New Jersey. She and her husband manage their statewide sports association for homeschooled teams, and also are the organizers for their county support group. Tricia enjoys sharing ideas with other support group leaders and encouraging home educators to homeschool through high school. Tricia and her husband, Brian, have five children, and they live at the shore in southern New Jersey.*