TEST OF ACADEMIC REASONING FOR ADMISSIONS (TARA)

Content Specification

For assessment in October 2026 and January 2027

Overview

The purpose of the Test of Academic Reasoning for Admissions is to determine a candidate's potential to achieve on an academically demanding undergraduate degree course. Questions draw upon general academic skills, rather than on subject-specific knowledge. The test is designed to be challenging in order to differentiate effectively between able applicants, including those who might have achieved the highest possible grades in school examinations.

The test consists of three modules:

Critical Thinking

Problem Solving

Writing Task

Candidates take all three modules.

The time allowed to complete each module is 40 minutes. Each module is separately timed. If a candidate finishes a module early, the time will not be carried over to the next module, so candidates should be careful to manage their time accordingly.

The Critical Thinking and Problem Solving modules each contain 22 multiple-choice questions. The Writing Task contains a choice of three prompts, of which a candidate answers only one.

The TARA is a computer-based test. Candidates will be provided with an erasable booklet for working. Calculators and dictionaries may NOT be used.

Content

The format of the TARA is:

Module	*Format*	*Time*
Critical Thinking	22 multiple choice questions	40 minutes
Problem Solving	22 multiple choice questions	40 minutes
Writing Task	One task from a choice of three	40 minutes

Critical Thinking: reasoning using everyday written language.

The skill of Critical Thinking is essential for many areas of academic study and often involves considering an argument put forward to promote or defend a particular point of view. Historians put forward arguments to explain and interpret past events, while scientists use argument to evaluate evidence from their experiments. Whatever the subject of study, it is necessary to understand the arguments presented by others and to be able to assess whether the arguments establish their claims.

Problem Solving: reasoning using numerical skills.

Many of the problems encountered in academic and professional work are novel: no ready 'off-the-peg' solution is available. The task is to find or create a solution. This module will assume the basic mathematical knowledge and skills listed in Appendix 1.

Writing Task

The Writing Task provides an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their capacity to consider different aspects of a proposition, and to communicate them effectively in writing. Answers are limited 750 words to promote the disciplined selection and organisation of ideas, together with their concise, accurate and effective expression. Dictionaries or electronic spell-checkers are not permitted.

Scoring

In the Critical Thinking and Problem Solving modules, each question is worth 1 mark. No marks are deducted for incorrect answers. Results for each module are reported **separately** on a scale from 1.0 (low) to 9.0 (high) to one decimal place.

The Writing Task is not marked. A copy of the response is made available to each participating university to which the candidate has applied.

APPENDIX 1:
Problem Solving - mathematical knowledge and skills needed

Number concepts

- simple fractions
- place value (for example, knowing that the '5' in '7654' indicates '50')
- ideas about percentages (for example, the idea that 1% could be thought of as '1 in every 100', and that if 20% of a cake has been eaten, then 80% of it must be left)

Numerical operations

- the four rules of number (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division)
- percentage operations (for example, if something was sold at £10, and is now advertised at '20% off', how much would the customer pay?)
- calculations in everyday contexts (complex calculations with fractions and decimals are not required)
- calculation of an average (mean)

Quantities

- time and the calendar
- money
- measures

Knowledge of the following relationships is also required:

1 km = 1000 m 1 m = 100 cm 1 cm = 10 mm 1 kg = 1000 g

Sometimes questions may use other common units of measurement (e.g. feet, tonnes, gallons), but knowledge of numerical relationships between these (e.g. 12 inches = 1 foot) is **not** required.

Space and spatial reasoning

- area (including the calculation of the area of a rectangle)
- perimeter (including calculation)
- volume (including the calculation of the volume of a box)

Tables and graphs

- extracting information from graphs and charts
- extracting information from tables