

# SHEPHERD HILL REGIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

## MCAS

# Survivor Handbook



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In Shepherd Hill Regional High School's continuing efforts to help you plan for MCAS testing, this handbook contains some suggestions and general guidelines. Obviously, each student will prepare, strategize and perform at different levels. **Performing at your personal best will be important**, for both Competency Determination status as required for graduation and **possible scholarship awards**.

Think of your MCAS administration as an event not unlike preparing for your driver's license, an athletic event or a musical performance. You don't just "show up" for the event; you plan, prepare, and perform.

Most of you have a huge advantage of having taken several MCAS covering the three basic subject areas – English Language (ELA), Mathematics and Science and Technology. All are composed of a combination of multiple choice and open response questions.

If you challenge yourself to attainable goals, increase in each subject area from 3 to 5 points; or increase your performance level (from "needs improvement" to "proficient" or from "proficient" to "advanced") in at least one subject area you will have succeeded in your preparation, strategy use and performance.

Please review the SHRHS MCAS Survivor Handbook, which provides you with general to specific strategies in each subject area. Stay focused on the task at hand. *Remember the English Language Arts, Mathematics and Science portions of the MCAS as required by the Massachusetts Department of Education will determine your graduation eligibility for 2013.*

**Good luck and perform to the very best of your ability.**

## MCAS TESTING SCHEDULE

Students will be assigned to MCAS testing rooms which will appear on their second semester schedule.

The second floor will be dedicated to the sole purpose of providing a quiet testing environment. All classes that usually meet on the second floor will be relocated for the testing sessions.

**Please visit the Guidance website for the actual dates of the testing.**

Test	Date	Number of Sessions	Time of Sessions
English: Composition A & B	March	2	8:00-11:30
English Reading: 1 & 2	March	2	8:00-11:30
English Reading: 3	March	1	8:00-9:30
Mathematics 1 (no calculator)	May	1	8:00-11:30
Mathematics 2	May	1	8:00-11:30
Biology 1	June	1	8:00-10:15
Biology 2	June	1	8:00-10:15

## ***How can I survive the MCAS Test and Perform to the best of my ability?***

### **General Strategies**

- Carefully read all directions. Ask your teacher to explain directions that you don't understand.
- Work on the easy questions first then go back and answer the most difficult.
- Use the process of the elimination method. Rule out any options that you think are wrong.
- Read each question carefully. **ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS!** You won't be penalized for the wrong answer. You may even get it right!!!!
- Show or explain your work when asked.
- Don't rush through or spend too long on any one question. Pace yourself!
- Check your written responses. If they don't make sense to you - they won't to anyone else!
- Make sure your writing is your neatest work. They can't give you points if they can't read it!
- Bring a calculator only when allowed.
- Come to the MCAS Test well rested and fed! Have a positive attitude!

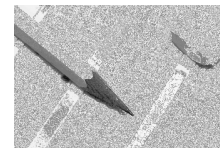


**OUTWIT, OUTPERFORM, and OUTLAST!**

## ***What types of questions are on the MCAS Test?***

### • **Multiple Choice Questions**

You will select 1 correct answer from a list of 4 choices.



### • **Short-Answer Questions**

These questions require a brief written response. You will write a short statement or do a numeric solution to a problem.

### • **Open- Response Questions**

These questions require responses in written paragraph forms, or in the form of a graph, chart or diagram.



***And Remember:***

**ALWAYS ANSWER  
ALL QUESTIONS!**

## Your first challenge:

The Long Composition Writing section of the English Language Arts test.



### **OUTWIT**

Study the "Recognizing Elements of Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry" pages to be familiar with the terms. *See the Appendix.*

Read the strategies for Long Composition.

**Boldface** words in the strategies may be found in the *Appendix*.

Within the next few weeks, ask your English teacher to explain any of these suggestions that may not be clear to you.

### **OUTPERFORM**

Proofread your essay twice if you did once last time. Proofread your essay once if you really didn't last time.

Use the available dictionaries if you didn't on the last test. Everyone needs one from time to time.

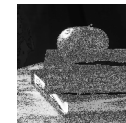
### **OUTLAST**

Have a positive outlook. You have read literature. Use what you remember.

It always helps to believe that you can meet the challenge you are facing!!

## **English Language Arts MCAS Strategies**

### Long Composition



#### A. Type I Essay

1. Description: A short passage is provided from a work of literature, and a writing prompt is given which requires you to analyze the text for some specific meaning and literary element. For example, you might be asked to describe how a specific character is portrayed, or how the passage uses **figurative language**.
2. Approach:
  - a. Get sense of the overall **tone/ mood** of the section by looking at how the author uses diction (choice of words with attention to clearness), **imagery** and **figurative language**. *Does the passage seem happy/sad, amusing/serious etc.?*
  - b. "Read" the characters closely to discover what is revealed about them from direct and indirect **characterization**:
    1. What is revealed about each character from a description of appearance?
    2. What is revealed about each character from a description of the actions?
    3. What is revealed about each character from the things the character says?
    4. What is revealed about each character from the things that the character thinks?
    5. What comments are made by other characters or the narrator about a specific character?
  - c. What is the point of view?
    1. **First person**? Person tells the story through "I", "me", and "my".

2. **Third person:** omniscient (seeing and knowing all) or limited omniscient? Is the author an outside observer who does not take part in the events?
- d. Does the passage use **figurative language**? (metaphor, imagery, simile)
- e. Does the **setting** appear to be significant in any way? (time, place)
- f. You should read the prompt very carefully being certain that you understand exactly what question is being asked to answer.
- g. Underline key words and phrases which help define exactly what the question is in the prompt.

B. Type II Essay

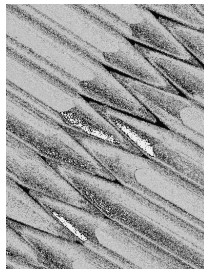
1. Description: Students are given a general situation and then asked to choose a literary work that will illustrate the same general situation.

An MCAS Test Long Composition Writing Prompt:

*Often in works of literature, there are characters – other than the main character – whose presence in the work is essential.*

*From a work of literature you have read in or out of school, select a character, other than the main character who plays a key role. In a well-developed composition, identify the character and explain why this character is important.*

2. Approach:
  - a. Select a short story, play, poem or novel.



You should be prepared with 2-3 major novels or plays with which you are very familiar and are able to discuss in details such as elements of **theme**, **point of view**, **setting**, and

- b. **characterizations.** You must be able to refer to specific characters and events.
- c. If at all possible, students should use a serious piece of literature, but if that is not possible, then any written work will be acceptable (be certain to explain the type of work very well).

C. Structure and Format for Long Composition type essays:

1. A high scoring essay will be in the range of 600-700 words, which shows analysis.
2. It is important that you demonstrate knowledge of good paragraphing and topic unity.
3. Essays should begin with an introduction, which establishes the direction of the essay and restates the question.
4. After writing the essay, it is important for you to proofread for grammatical (complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, verb tense) and mechanical (spelling, capitalization, punctuation, paragraph indentation) errors.

## Your second challenge:

The remaining sections of the English Language Arts test.

### OUTWIT

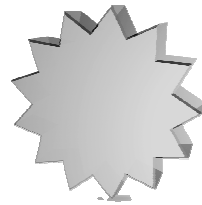
Study the Multiple Choice and Open Response strategies.

Review the "Recognizing Elements of Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry" pages to be familiar with the terms.

Review the strategies for Long Composition.

Again, ask your English teacher to explain any of these suggestions that may not be clear to you.

### OUTPERFORM



Read the questions before you read the passages.

Read the passages carefully. Reread the passages. Then answer the questions.

Answer ALL of the questions.

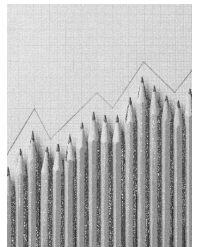
### OUTLAST

Use the strategies as you did on the Long Composition section.

***Remember, this is an untimed test. Take as much time as you need to do your best!***

## Open Response Questions: Shorter Essays

- A. Description: You are given an excerpt to read from a short story, play or novel. The writing prompt is based on some specific aspect of the passage.
- B. Types of Open Response Questions:
  - 1. Comparing/Contrasting
    - a. You could be given two consecutive reading passages and asked to compare/contrast specific elements found in each passage.
    - b. As you read, they should underline or note any obvious similarities or differences.
  - 2. Paraphrasing
    - a. This type of response tests your understanding of the passage by asking them to restate the author's meaning into your own words.
    - b. Usually students are asked to support your ideas by giving examples from the passage. Cite (quote)!
  - 3. Analysis of Main Idea
    - a. You may be asked to explain the main point, message or theme of the passage.
    - b. You should support their interpretation by citing specific lines and details from the passage.



C. Overall Approach:

1. You should underline the key words in the questions to focus on what is asked.
2. The more detailed your answer (use specific details from the text) the more likely that the response will earn the full credit.
3. After answering all the open response questions, students should go back and proofread all answers for grammar and mechanical errors.



**Multiple Choice Questions**

A. Overall Approach

1. You should read the questions before reading the passage carefully. When answering the multiple choice questions, you should be certain to find the specific answer to the question in the passage itself. In other words use the text to choose the correct answer.
2. Always do the multiple-choice questions first before attempting the open response questions. Multiple choice questions often help you to look at the passage in a number of different ways which can help when writing your answer to the shorter open response questions.

B. Types of Multiple Choice Questions

1. Vocabulary Questions
  - a. You are asked to identify the meaning of a word as it is used specifically in the passage (using context).



- b. You should go back to the section where the word is located and start rereading 2-3 lines before the section where the word is found. You should read 1-2 sentences past the word.
- c. Eliminate possible choices by putting in the meanings given by the possible choices. Any answer that does not make sense in the context of the passage should be eliminated.
- d. Be careful not to get tricked. Sometimes answers will include a key word from the passage but not the definition.

2. Main Idea / Passage Formation

- a. This type of question tests your understanding of the overall main idea and how specific passages fit into the overall passage's main idea. You need to identify the main idea is of a specific section within the entire passage.
- b. Look for answers which will state the main idea in the specific section of the passage. Do not select an answer which is too narrow (only mentions a detail), or one that is too broad (goes beyond what is in the specific section).
- c. Go back to the specific section referred to in the question and be certain that you can find support for the answer that you have selected.

### 3. Literary Terms

- a. Students will be asked to identify what type of figurative language is being used or to select an example from the answers given of a specific figure of speech. (see the appendix).
- b. In order to answer these questions correctly, students must be familiar with the figures of speech (see the appendix).

### 4. Inference Questions

- a. The answer to this type of question cannot be found specifically in the passage, but must be "inferred" from the clues given in the reading. You must take pieces of information and put them together to draw a conclusion.
- b. You must look for key ideas and words, phrases and ideas which will enable them to conclude what the correct answer is from what is implied in the passage and not directly stated.

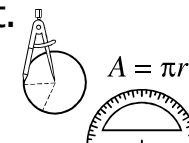
### 5. Emotional Questions

- a. This type of question will ask students to determine the emotion or **tone** of the author or of a character in the passage
- b. Go back to the passage and look for clues in diction (word choice) types of **imagery**, and use of **figurative language**. It is important that you support your choice, by finding specific references from the text.



## Your third challenge: The Mathematics sections of the test.

### OUTWIT



Study the Open Response, Multiple Choice, and Short Answer strategies.

Remember, a few weeks before the test, ask your Math teacher to explain any of these suggestions that may not be clear to you.

Answer every portion of the open response question (there is always more than one part to the question).

### OUTPERFORM

If you see questions that seem to cover math that is unfamiliar to you, don't give up! Answer ALL of the questions. You won't receive a penalty for an incorrect answer and you may select the correct one!

You can gain points on the open response questions by having a well written response.

Underline your question packet in any way that will help you identify sentences in the problem that:

- Ask you to do something (that is a form of a question)
- Ask you a question.

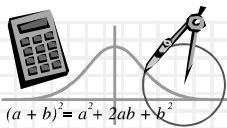
There can be more than one question to answer in each problem.

### OUTLAST

Bring your own calculator (Session 2). You will be familiar with it.

***Again, this is an untimed test. Take as much time as you need to do your best!***

## Mathematics MCAS Strategies



### I. Open Response Questions

1. Read and reread the question until you feel comfortable enough to attempt it.
2. Remember that the method you use is as important as the correct answer.
3. Underline the actual question(s). Stay focused on how to answer it.
4. Outline the task: look for and organize the facts.
5. Choose a technique that will help you solve the problem, such as drawing a diagram, making a chart, writing an equation, etc.
6. Reread the question and make sure your answer makes sense.

### II. Multiple Choice Questions

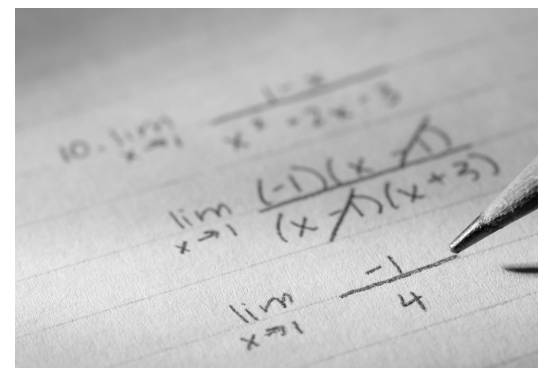
1. Cover the answers and work the problem, if possible. Then look for the matching answers.
2. Eliminate extreme answers that don't fit the situation.
3. Use estimation skills.
4. If you are having trouble with a problem, try substituting the answers and choose the one that works.
5. First do the easy problems, or the ones that you are sure of.

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6. Reread the problem to see if you have answered what was asked.

### III. Short Answer Questions

1. Read the question more than once.
2. Use the calculator for help if allowed.
3. Units of measurement can give hints on how to solve a particular problem.
4. Make sure to label your answers with appropriate labels.



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## Your fourth challenge: The Science section of the test.

### **OUTWIT**

Students will be tested in Biology content. (The only retest to date is in Biology).

Remember that the Science department has incorporated many opportunities to practice questions from previous MCAS tests in their departmental Preparation Plan as well as providing you with these strategies.

**Study the scientific design process before the test** (the steps to properly set up and carry out an experiment). Now is the time to ask your Science teacher any questions that you may have.

Remember to also use the writing strategies from the English Long Composition section that are appropriate.

### **OUTPERFORM**

Remember that you will be familiar with the format of the questions and how to answer them.

You are working for a score of at least 220 out of a total of 280 points.

Make any marks on the questions that will help you identify what is being asked.

### **OUTLAST**

After these two sessions, you **will have finished** the MCAS test!!!

Again, try not to let down on your efforts and take as much time as you need to do your best!

### **Science MCAS Strategies**

- 1) Prior to the test, review your textbook and notebook in order to refresh your basic knowledge of the subject matter. **DO NOT** dwell on small bits of information but review **BIG PICTURE INFORMATION**.
- 2) **NEVER** leave a multiple-choice question blank. If you do not know the answer, eliminate the one or two answers that make no sense and make an educated guess from the remaining choices.
- 3) On Open Response questions, never leave a question blank. Begin your answer by rephrasing the question and have a solid conclusion after the body of your answer. Each open response question has a maximum value of 4 pts. **Every point can make the difference.**
- 4) **Be certain** that if an Open Response question has more than 1 part, that you answer the whole question. Often times students answer the first part of the question correctly, and forget to answer the rest of the question. If you knew the first part of the question, you probably know the second part of the answer. **Every point can make the difference.**
- 5) Whenever possible, predict what you think an outcome will be or why you think your design will work in an Open Response Design Question. ---- **REMEMBER THIS IS SCIENCE AND SCIENTISTS PREDICT OUTCOMES.** Use data and reasons to support your prediction.

### **YOU CAN MEET THE CHALLENGE !!!!!**



## APPENDIX

### MCAS VOCABULARY TERMS

<b>Argue</b>	Prove your points by using facts
<b>Analyze</b>	Separate into parts and explain
<b>Cause &amp; Effect</b>	Tell what happened and why it happened
<b>Compare</b>	Find how two or more things are alike
<b>Contrast</b>	Find how two or more things are different
<b>Criticize</b>	Tell about the value of something
<b>Define</b>	Give a clear meaning
<b>Describe/Discuss</b>	Look at the good and bad points and give a detailed answer
<b>Diagram</b>	Make a drawing or chart and label <u>all</u> of the parts
<b>Evaluate</b>	Give the strengths and weaknesses but include more of your own opinion
<b>Explain/Interpret</b>	Tell how and why about a subject
<b>Identify</b>	Pinpoint and explain
<b>Illustrate</b>	Give examples OR use a drawing or chart (this depends on the subject)
<b>Justify</b>	Prove your answer
<b>List</b>	Put the answer down point by point
<b>Prove</b>	Show evidence or proof about something
<b>Relate</b>	Compare showing similar points
<b>Review</b>	Critically examine and comment on major points
<b>State/Summarize</b>	Tell the main points
<b>Trace</b>	Follow an event from beginning to end emphasizing the main points

## Elements of Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry

**Allegory** is the representation of ideas or moral principles by means of symbolic characters, events, or objects. For example, the fables of Aesop use allegory to teach lessons about life.

**Alliteration** is the repetition of an initial (usually consonant) sound, as in *swift, silent serpent*

**Characterization** is the creation and development of characters, the people who carry on the action in a literary work.

**Figurative language** is words used in an imaginative, non-literal sense. Similes and metaphors (see below) are examples of figurative language.

**Figures of speech** are forms of expression in which the author uses language in an imaginative, non-literal sense to make a comparison or produce a desired effect.

A **simile** is a comparison using *like* or *as*. An example:  
*Her eyes gleamed as stars.*

A **metaphor** is an implied comparison that does not use *like* or *as*. An example: *They were tigers on the playing field, ferociously mauling their opponents.*

**Personification** is the giving of human qualities to objects, ideas, or animals. An example: *The sun smiled down on the village.*

**Hyperbole, or exaggeration**, is overstatement for the purpose of emphasis. Example: *His ears were so sharp he could hear dogs bark in the next county.*

**Flashback** refers to a scene that shows an earlier event, often one that happened before the opening scene of a literary work. Example: *a novelist may include a flashback to show an event that happened during the childhood of an adult character.*

**Foreshadowing** is the suggestion of events to come. An example: *gray clouds at the beginning of a story may foreshadow a storm that occurs later*

**Imagery** is description or figurative language. Authors create vivid images, or word pictures, through their creative use of language. These images

## **Elements of Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry**

Continued

may appeal to the five senses. An example: *The frightened screech of an unseen animal tore through the night.*

**Irony** is a situation or event that is the opposite of what is or might be expected. An example: it would be *ironic* if a lifeguard had to be saved from drowning.

**Mood** is the atmosphere or feeling of a work. The mood will not be specified but will be relayed with the use of language and/or situations. An example: *the mood may be joyful, gloomy or suspenseful.*

**Plot** is the sequence of events that take place in a short story, novel or other literary work.

**Repetition** is the repeating of a word or group of words for effect. Example: Archibald MacLeish's poem "The End of the World" includes these lines: *There in the sudden blackness of the black pall – Of nothing, nothing, nothing – nothing at all.*

**Rhetorical question** is a question that is asked only for effect or to make a statement, not to get an answer. Example: *How much longer will we put up with this injustice? Isn't it time that we took action?*

**Satire** is writing that uses humor, irony, or wit to attack or make fun of something, such as people's follies or vices

**Setting** is the time and place in which events occur. An example: *the setting of Shakespeare's play Macbeth is eleventh-century Scotland.*

**Structure** refers to how the parts of a work are organized and arranged. For example: *the structure of a novel or biography may be based on chronological (time) order with occasional flashbacks (see above). The structure of poetry includes the number, from, and pattern of lines and stanzas.*

**Symbolism** is the representation of ideas or things by symbols. A symbol is something that stands for something else. Example: *an author may use a rose as a symbol of beauty or a snake as a symbol of evil.*

**Theme** is the central or principle point of main focus or underlying meaning. An example: *many authors have written on a theme that life is short, so everyone must make the most of each day.*

**Tone** is an attitude or viewpoint that an author shows toward his or her subject. An example: *tone may be serious, sympathetic, optimistic or angry.*

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## **Website Resources**

**Department of Education MCAS page:**

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/>

**Sample test questions:**

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/testitems.html>

**Student Work/ Scoring Guides:**

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/student/>

**MCAS Graduation Requirements:**

<http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/graduation.html>

*Compiled by:  
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