

Information for Students Regarding Preparation for ALEKS PPL

ALEKS PPL is a much different placement product from those we have used in the past. It is important to understand the purpose of the program, the way it works, and how you can use it as a tool to save time and money.

The Purpose:

First and foremost, the purpose of the ALEKS PPL assessment is to determine the course (in the sequence of math courses needed for your major) in which you are most likely to earn an A or a B with a reasonably expected struggle. Yes, you should expect to struggle a reasonable amount in any class you take. If you are not struggling at all, you might not be learning anything that you don't already know. However, you should be cautious if the struggle feels unreasonable or overwhelming. This is usually an indication that you are in a course for which you are under-prepared. The ALEKS PPL program helps us to prevent both of these situations from happening.

How it works:

The program uses artificial intelligence to determine your current knowledge. The first question of an assessment covers a topic somewhere near the middle of topics ranging from beginning number concepts up to more advanced pre-calculus topics. The second question is determined your response to the first. ALEKS makes this decision from both correct and incorrect responses. In other words, the program knows enough to recognize common mathematical errors. For this reason, you should try to give a response for every question even if you are not confident that you are correct. The assessment is typically around 30 questions, and most students finish within 90 minutes.

Since ALEKS is trying to determine the mathematical knowledge you retained from your previous math courses, there is no need to “study” prior to the initial assessment. If you would like to look over some material prior to the first assessment, reviewing precalculus and algebra 2 topics might be the most helpful. However, it should be noted that “cramming” for a few days prior to the assessment could lead to inaccurate placement as you are less likely to remember those topics later.

How it can save you time and money:

After completing the initial assessment, the ALEKS PPL program provides an individualized learning pathway for you to refresh the skills for which you did not show mastery. After spending a minimum of 10 hours working in the learning modules, you can take an additional assessment to hopefully improve placement. A word of caution: it typically takes more than 10 hours to see a significant change in scores. Typically, students see an improvement of one placement level after spending 20-30 productive hours in the learning modules.

As far as using the ALEKS program's learning modules to improve placement, here are some best practices:

- Be honest with the program, and do not use outside resources. If you use a website to find the answer to a problem, you will teach ALEKS what that website knows about the problem. ALEKS will then create a learning pathway for that website that will not be helpful to you. If you need a calculator for a problem, ALEKS will provide one on the screen.
- Work in the modules at a steady pace – 1-2 hours daily, 4-5 days each week is probably the best. Students who try to put all of the required hours into 1 or 2 days tend to forget topics and not assess well. (The human brain is not designed to learn information like this.) Creating a schedule of when you will work on it is usually very helpful with this. On a side note, you are welcome to

come to the Math Assistance Center on the 4th floor of the Lincoln Building to work through the modules. Computers are available, and tutors are familiar with the program in case you have any questions. Please check the MAC website (<https://cms.ysu.edu/mathematics-assistance-center/math-assistance-center>) for current hours.

- Try to keep the circumference of your learning pie as even as possible. Different wedges contain topics from different areas. ALEKS gives you options of modules, and students often try to avoid the areas where they are least comfortable (functions, rational expressions, radical expressions, etc.). Being sure to include these areas in the learning modules you choose will not only improve your score, it will better prepare you for the algebra and calculus classes you need to take. **Additional note: Students who reach an algebra placement with little or no knowledge in these areas will certainly struggle in College Algebra.
It may be helpful to remember that ALEKS will not place topics in your learning pathway unless you are ready to learn them. So, if the topic shows up, ALEKS has determined that you are ready to learn it.
- Be sure to take progress knowledge checks as the program suggests them. This is how ALEKS determines if you have retained what you've learned, which is critical to achieving an accurate placement.