

CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
Learning Express Library
September 2009

Learning Express Library consists of over 770 practice exams, interactive tutorials, career resources as well as 170+ ebooks. The practice exams and tutorials cover a broad range of vocational and academic topics. With the exception of four modules licensed from Delmar Publishing, all of the content is created by Learning Express, LLC.

Topical coverage in Learning Express Library is varied and extensive. It includes: High school Advanced Placement (AP) preparation, SAT preparation tests and tutorials, TOEFL, practice tests, GRE, GRE, GMAT, LSAT and MCAT practice exams, Microsoft Office tutorials, job search, resume writing and interviewing help, practice tests for automotive certification training, civil service practice exams, firefighter exams, law enforcement exams, US citizenship preparation and tests, and other standardized test practice materials and courses.

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION for COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

- #1 --- Not recommended
- #2 --- Recommended with reservations as noted
- #3 --- Recommended
- #4 --- Outstanding offer

OVERALL ASSESSMENT 3.5, 3, 3

Learning Express Library's content is unique. Designed as a collection of practice tests, tutorial courses, ebooks, and interactive learning modules, the Learning Express Library collection is especially suited to help students and adult learners succeed in academic and licensing tests, gain workplace skills, and improve proficiency in basic skills such as reading comprehension, writing, and math. Another advantage of the LEL collection is that it provides a self-paced interactive study platform with instant scoring, and diagnostic feedback. Tests and tutorials can be accessed from any computer with an Internet connection.

This product would be useful for colleges that have or wish to develop an online tutoring program. It is not clear how much use students will make of the Learning Express Library content unless it is assigned to them by their instructor or tutor. In this sense, it is unlike traditional library database offerings.

Since Learning Express offers unique features that other databases do not, the advantages for community college libraries are clearly evident. Students are able to access multiple testing modules and a number of basic skills needs are met by the database: reading comprehension, mathematical skills, and test preparation.

Such a collection can enhance the core curricula of California community colleges for: Transfer Education; Basic Skills and English; Language Proficiency; Economic and Workforce Development; Lifelong Learning; and the attainment of Associate Degrees and Certificates. These are some of the core curricula defined in the California Community Colleges System Strategic Plan at: http://strategicplan.cccco.edu/Portals/0/resources/executive_summary.pdf .)

INFORMATION DATABASE 3.5, 3, 3

Learning Express Library Standard Platform offers over 770 online practice tests and skill-building tutorials, as well as 170+ ebook titles. Only the most current versions of these electronic resources are counted. All tests, tutorials, and ebooks are full-text. Older, superseded materials (e.g. test books) are not included in the count.

The Learning Express Library organizes its collections of online practice tests and tutorials into Learning Centers. These Learning Centers are broad topical categories of materials that are supposed to contain everything the LEL has to offer in that particular area. For example, if a user wanted to access materials to practice for the GED (General Education Development) examination, that user would click on the GED Preparation to access a learning center containing all of the GED practice exams, preparation courses, and skills-improvement tutorials.

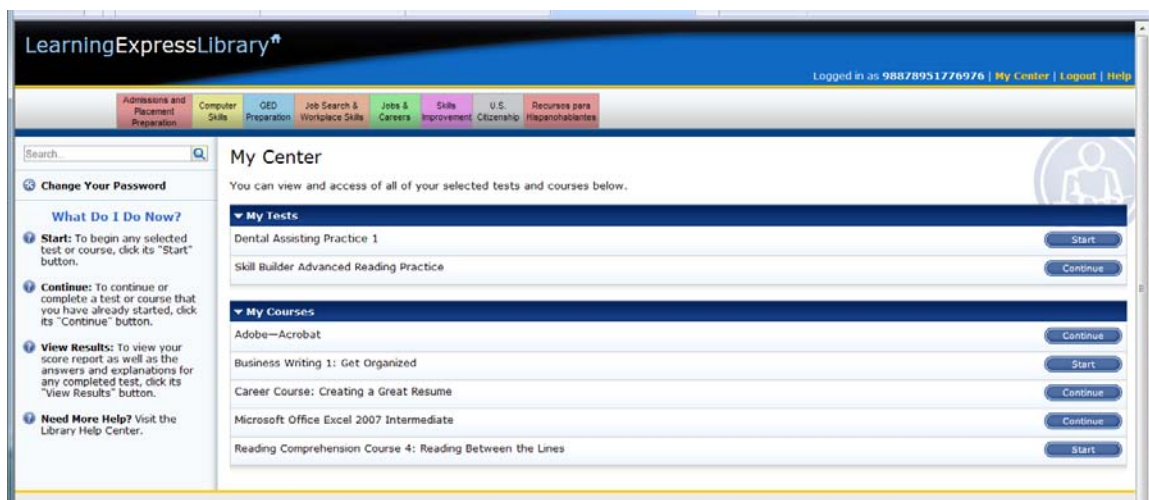


The list of Learning Centers included in the Standard Platform includes:

- Admissions and Placement Preparation
- Computer Skills
- GED Preparation

- Job Search and Workplace Skills
- Jobs and Careers
- Skills Improvement
- U.S. Citizenship
- Recursos para Hispanohablantes (Resources for Spanish-speakers)

The materials in each of the Learning Centers are broken down into further subcategories of materials. For example, within the GED Practice Exams, a student may find exams in language arts, mathematics, science, and in social science. To select any of the exams or other materials, the user selects it by clicking on the link that reads “Add to My Center. If that user has not already created a user account, the user will be prompted to enter a unique username and password to create “My Center.”



“My Center” for a user includes that user’s list of saved tests and courses as well as a record of that user’s progress through courses. Personalized score reports for tests are also included in “My Center”.

A new user to the LEL can access the collections through a library-supplied gateway or link. To begin any of the tests or tutorials in the LEL collection, a user will need to enter a unique username and password. This username-password combination will allow a user to access the tests through “My Center.” Returning users may be able to access the database by going directly to <http://www.learningexpresslibrary.com> and then by entering their username/password.

Learning Express Library’s collection of ebooks constitutes a separate searchable collection of career resources apart from the Learning Center materials. Users may access this ebook collection by clicking on the link to *Browse [the] complete library of ebooks*.

On a page that includes categories of resources (for example, health occupations, math skills, and civil service) users can access full-text PDF versions of test preparation books and study guides. These test preparation books can be downloaded and saved on an individual’s computer. These test preparation and civil service examination guides and

are similar to collections published by ARCO and carried in many public libraries. The advantages of having electronic versions of the test preparation guides are clear. These materials often go missing or become damaged or marked by patrons. Having electronic versions of the titles reduces the need to purchase multiple copies of a title since many patrons can access the material at once.

In some instances, however, the electronic test preparation modules in the Learning Centers may not be based on the most current print versions of the examination guides. For example, the Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) Automotive Test Preparation materials in the Learning Centers are based on the Delmar Learning Materials series for these exams and the tests (A1-8; L-1, P2, X-1 and C1) all carry a copyright date of 2004 despite the fact that there are more recent print guides available from the publisher.

SEARCH INTERFACE 3, 3, 2.5

Users can locate desired materials (tests, tutorials, and courses) by choosing from among the available Learning Centers and browsing the contents or by clicking on the supplied link from the homepage to browse the complete list of Learning Centers.

Alternatively, a user can enter terms in the search box located on the main search page. After the user executes a search, results of that search are displayed in the main window, shown below. Search results are from tests, courses and other materials in the Learning Centers. The screen below shows the results of a search that was executed using the term “cosmetology.”

The screenshot shows the LearningExpressLibrary search interface. At the top, the logo "LearningExpressLibrary" is displayed on the left, and the user's login information "Logged in as 98878951776978 | My Center | Logout | Help" is on the right. Below the header is a navigation bar with categories: Admissions and Placement Preparation, Computer Skills, GED Preparation, Job Search & Workplace Skills, Jobs & Careers, Skills Improvement, U.S. Citizenship, and Recursos para Hispanohablantes. The search box contains the term "cosmetology". The search results are titled "Search results for: cosmetology" and indicate that the user will find Test and Course results. The results are organized into two sections: "Results in Tests (2 items)" and "Results in Courses (1 item)".

Category	Item Name	Description	Action
Tests	Cosmetology Practice Exam A	This instantly scored cosmetology practice exam offers the essential help you need to pass the test and earn your cosmetology license... more info	Add to My Center
	Cosmetology Practice Exam B	This second cosmetology practice exam offers even more of the essential help you need to pass the test and earn your cosmetology license... more info	Add to My Center
Courses	Milady Cosmetology Practice Course	A complete test-preparation course for Cosmetology State Board Licensing Exams. more info	Add to My Center

One of the drawbacks of the interface is that it does not offer the user tips on how to conduct a search or information on how search results are ranked.

It appears that Boolean searching is supported by this database but it does not appear the results from searches are listed in order of relevance for all searches. For example, a search for “*Adobe or Internet Explorer*” will return results from the various categories of materials in all of the Learning Centers, but for this search, the tests that were at the top of the results list were the *TOEFL iBT Listening Practice Tests (1-3)* followed by the *TOEFL Reading Practice and Speaking Practices Tests*, respectively. Courses in which the terms “*Adobe*” or “*Internet Explorer*” appeared in the title or description of the course were returned but were listed below the TOEFL tests. It appears that the search engine returns results from searches in a particular order of category (Tests, followed by Courses, followed by Exams) irrespective of a relevancy ranking.

Another drawback of Learning Express Library’s search engine is that it does not integrate results from the Learning Centers and the ebook content. For example, a search for the “SAT exam” entered from the database main page will retrieve content from the Learning Center only. If a user wishes to find an ebook containing SAT practice materials, that user will need to launch a separate search within the ebook search interface. The full-text of ebooks is, however, searchable.

The product is not structured like a traditional library subscription database. Users are not able to access any content from Learning Express Library until they have created an account and logged in. This might make it more difficult to demonstrate the Learning Express content to students, or for students to easily browse the contents of the product. Even once a user has registered and logged in to their account and found content they wish to view, they must select the “Add to My Center” button before they can actually access the content.

It is possible that the requirement to login is so that all access can be tracked and tied to an individual student. Learning Express Library seems to be oriented towards accountability rather than ease of access.

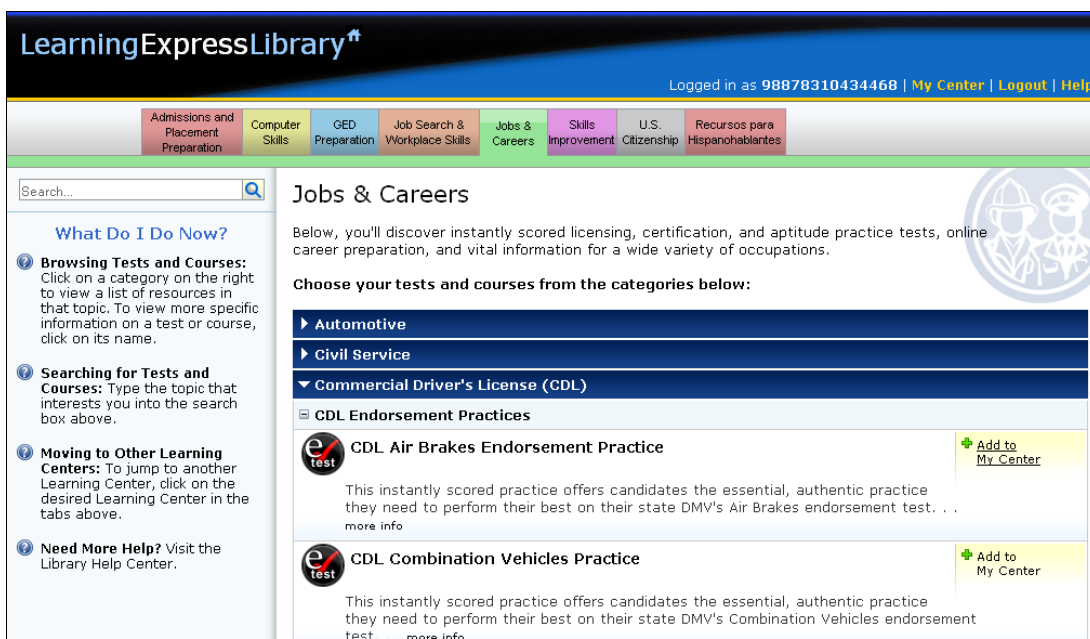
If a user loses their password there is no automated method of retrieving it. They must call the support phone number. If the user forgets their username, they have to create a new username, and thereby lose access to any tests they have completed under the old username. Perhaps for this reason, Learning Express recommends that the student ID number be used as the username. Per a conversation with a vendor rep, they are looking into setting up a password reminder or reset feature.

Some course content requires installation of special software. For example one course in the Computer Skills section required the installation of a nonstandard media player executable file, which identified itself as the “learn.com streaming multimedia player”.ⁱ This might be a problem for users accessing Learning Express content from a computer that they did not have permission to install software on, or one running an operating

system or browser not supported by the Learning Express plugin. Installation of the plugin failed on one reviewer's PC running Windows 2000 with the Firefox browser.

The reviewers conclude that improvements to the interface can be made to make it easier for users to create individual accounts, retrieve lost account information, and to access content and modules.

Learning Express Library Tests and Courses browse screen.



USER SUPPORT SERVICES 3, 3, 3

The databases provides a Help Center contain tutorials on topics such as how to Access LearningExpress Library, How to Find Tests and Courses, on MyCenter, and how to Navigate LearningExpress Library. Tutorials are available in HTML and Flash media formats.

Live telephone support for users is available only between the hours of 6 A.M. – 2 P.M., Pacific Time, (9 A.M. and 5 P.M. EST) Monday through Friday only. Support is available through e-mail at libraries@learningexpressllc.com.

The database vendor does provide usage statistics for site administrators. Statistics provided includes numbers of site visits (per month) to courses subscribed to. While statistics show number of visits by course type, these statistics do not show other usage details such as number of sessions by time of day, number of documents

retrieved/downloaded, or number of turn aways. Again, because this product is not a “database” in the typical sense, COUNTER compliant usage statistics may not apply.

MARC records are available from the vendor for download and incorporation into online catalogs. It should be noted, however, that by subscribing to LearningExpress Library, an institution is not granted perpetual access to the ebook content. If a subscription ends, then so does access to ebook content and catalog links to LearningExpress ebooks will then need to be removed (weeded) from a library’s OPAC.

COST 3.5, 3, 3

This is a product with content of special interest to community colleges and their vocational programs, available for a reasonable price. Some content modules are available for separate purchase, making it an even better value for community college libraries.

AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE

Remote access is available via IP address authentication, referring URL, and username and password and EZProxy server.

ADA/Section 508 Compliance

Vendor states that “The LearningExpressLibrary.com database has been ADA compliant to the fullest extent possible since February 2004, as provided under section 508 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973.” It is unclear what is meant by “to the fullest extent possible” since vendor did not provide a voluntary product accessibility template detailing the accessibility features and limits of the product.

Similar Products

Delmar/Cengage Learning

<http://cengagesites.com/academic/?site=3133>

Desire2Learn

<http://www.desire2learn.com>

Gale Testing & Education Reference Center (TERC)

<http://www.gale.cengage.com/TestingAndEducation>

SmartThinking

<http://www.smarthinking.com>

OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT

"Case Study." American Libraries 40.8/9 (Aug. 2009): 91-91.

Kundanis, Barb. "Print or database? Both!" Library Journal 133.5 (March 15, 2008): 94(1).

ⁱ *According to the vendor, the Computer Skills module no longer requires a download.*
(10/29/2009)