

# UIL Computer Applications Update for 2020-2021

Being a contest based on Microsoft Office, Computer Applications will continue to make incremental changes to keep abreast of the changing technology. Again, this year, competitors will be using Office 2013, Office 2016, or Office 19. (Office 10 is no longer acceptable.)

The Computer Applications contest is well past its 20-year anniversary as a UIL contest and definitely past its early probationary period. However, in recent years, participation in this contest has diminished probably due primarily to the Legislature's not requiring a basic computer course, as BCIS or BIM.

Recently, I polled a large number of coaches and got some very thoughtful responses and suggestions. At a meeting in June 2019, at Capital Conference, a number of coaches wrestled with ideas to increase participation. Some of the suggestions were outstanding, and we will definitely try to implement many of these.

- Provide more training
  - Add an exercise and/or video to the UIL website that creates a database and table which walks through using a select query, an update query and a report. *We've added videos on "How to Build a Database" and "UIL Grading" for use by coaches and certainly by students. We still recommend the Five Lessons to Prepare for UIL Contests.*
  - Add more sessions for advanced skills at Capital Conference that overlap the sessions for beginning coaches. *With the Virtual Capital Conference, we curtailed the sessions to one for new coaches covering beginning information and basic Access skills and one for intermediate coaches covering a plethora of skills.*
  - Encourage ESC centers to offer training for coaches in active areas that would be willing to offer a workshop to their peers, and we would provide instructional data. *We would love to entertain this, but it would require coaches making requests of their ESC centers to host an all-day, stem-to-stern session on Access and probably some of the advanced elements of Excel.*
- Consider giving more points for Computer Applications
  - Ask UIL to consider team points, without advancing teams other than possibly one team per District to advance to Region. *This remains in the baliwick of the powers that be at UIL, but we still hope to make some kind of change eventually.*
  - Consider a wild card for this contest. *Ditto that last note.*
- Tie the contest more to the CTE umbrella
  - Skilled contestants are often able to get their Microsoft Certificate in Word, Access and Excel. *I need help from coaches to undertake this. I would love to work with some coaches that are skilled in this area to get this contest under the umbrella of aiding in Microsoft Certification or other certifications!*

- Encourage participation under CTE to benefit school funding and student benefits. *Ditto that last note.*
- Make downloadable files available for years 2012 thru the present. *Done, thanks to UIL!*

Some suggested that the tests were too difficult, but the preponderance of coaches felt that making all tests easier would result in tiebreakers at the top rung, and they were not in favor of making an across the board change to easier. We will likely leave Invitational A and B on a fairly basic level as we have done in the past. The District test will likely be a bit more difficult to bridge better to the Region test, and the Region will probably ratchet or two down a notch in difficulty.

Many of us have been working with this contest, changing and honing it from the early days and bridging the enormous gap that occurred as we redesigned the Keyboarding Contest into the Computer Applications Contest. We've weathered many changes together, and there will be more as technology evolves. I offer my personal thanks after 20+ years as contest director to the coaches who have been so supportive and who have worked so hard helping their students develop new skills and helping to improve the contest.

## **Additional Information**

Technology keeps changing, and the Computer Applications Contest continues to be pulled forward in the wake. With Microsoft Office 2019 now available, Computer Applications, in the spirit of using the "current or near current version of Microsoft Office," will allow use of either Office 2013, 2016 or 2019 for all contests.

For the official UIL tests, the Constitution clearly specifies the following parameters:

- Each contestant must provide his/her own laptop computer, printer and blank paper.
- Each contestant must have a saving device, as thumb drive, removable disk or CD.
- Optionally, a keyboard, keypad and a mouse may be added.
- All coaches are required as graders or their student(s) may be disqualified.

If a coach has a significant reason to miss the grading of a test and is excused, he/she should provide a substitute to be available to grade. A substitute does not necessarily have to be familiar with the contest, but it helps. Grading this contest is fairly tedious, and it is important to have all coaches present. Experienced coaches serve as guides for newer coaches. Without experience in the grading room, the lengthy process of grading would be even longer.

Since 2012, we have created an Access database with multiple tables annually that we post on the UIL website to be used with the Region and State tests. This is posted as 20XX Starter Files in mid-January. The consensus of using this type of downloaded data has been consistently positive. Using downloaded files has minimized typographical errors on these tests and has been closer to what is common in the business world usage of Microsoft Office or like systems. If a student has to enter all the data for a test and makes an error on one or more values, then

every field that is calculated based on the fields with the typos are also incorrect, and this complicates grading.

## **Publications...**

*Computer Applications Handbook – Be certain that all competitors and coaches read and learn Instructions for Conducting a Contest. This handbook may change, but that happens infrequently. It is posted on the UIL website and accompanies all Computer Applications Study Packets with the prior year's test, and all contest directors should be adhering to the specifications herein.*

*Constitution & Contest Rules – The following changes have been included in the C&CR in recent years: All coaches are expected to serve as graders, and if a coach does not grade or arrange for an alternate grader, his or her student(s) may be disqualified. Networked systems are not allowed. Each contestant must have a laptop or notebook computer plus a printer. No sharing is allowed. Optional mouse, keyboard and keypad units are acceptable.*

## **Contact Information...**

On most Saturdays while you're grading invitational tests, I'm available in my office on my cell (830.370.8966). If you hit a roadblock in your grading and want a mediator, don't hesitate to call. Remember that the point is to have a level playing field, make the tests difficult enough so that the cream rises to the top and that the top places are earned, not just decided with a tiebreaker. Our mutual goal is to help the students become very, very competent with this powerful package.

I'm also available during the week by email: [hexco@hexco.com](mailto:hexco@hexco.com). If you are attempting an old test and run into a roadblock, I encourage you to email me with the name of the test, the specific instructions in your email from the test causing the problem, and your actual attempt (either your Access, Excel or Word document or more than one). Please do not send a copy of the entire test and a pointer to an instruction or just describe your problem and reference a point in a test for me to ferret out the old test and try to read down until I find the place where you're stuck. I can usually answer very quickly, if I have the appropriate information.

This is your contest. We listen to all the input from both the competitors and the coaches. We want to wield this into the best possible contest, and we know there will continue to be some growing pains every time technology creates changes. Let's continue working together to make this a positive experience as we tread through this continuing transition.