

## III. TOEFL

### A. Overview of the test

TOEFL® stands for the Test of English as a Foreign Language. This test is designed to measure the English language ability of people who do not speak English as their first language and who plan to study at colleges and universities.

More than 6,000 institutions and agencies in 110 countries rely on TOEFL scores to select students with the English skills needed to succeed in an academic setting.

#### About TOEFL Test

To succeed in an academic environment in which English is the language of instruction, international students need to not only understand English, but also to communicate effectively. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a test that assesses all four basic language skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. The TOEFL iBT (Internet-based test) helps individuals demonstrate the English skills needed for academic success, as well as help institutions make better decisions about prospective students' readiness for academic coursework in colleges and universities.



#### Why Take the TOEFL Test?

Most people take the TOEFL test as a prerequisite for admission into colleges and universities where English is used or required. In addition, many government, licensing, and certification agencies, and exchange and scholarship programs use TOEFL scores to evaluate the English proficiency of people for whom English is not their native language. The test predicts success in an academic setting in an English speaking country.

#### Who Should Take the TOEFL Test?

ETS, the company that developed the TOEFL test recommends that nonnative English speakers at the 11th-grade level or above should take the TOEFL test to provide evidence of their English proficiency before beginning academic work. The test content is considered too difficult for students below 11th grade.

Many institutions report that they frequently do not require TOEFL test scores of certain kinds of international applicants. These include:

- nonnative speakers who hold degrees or diplomas from postsecondary institutions in English-speaking countries (e.g., the United States, Canada, England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand)

- nonnative speakers who have successfully completed at least a two-year course of study in which English was the language of instruction
- transfer students from institutions in the United States or Canada whose academic course work was favorably evaluated in relation to its demands and duration.
- nonnative speakers who have taken the TOEFL test within the past two years
- nonnative speakers who have successfully pursued academic work at schools where English was the language of instruction in an English-speaking country for a specified period, generally two years.

## Forms of the Test

The test comes in the pBT, cBT, and iBT forms - meaning the paper-based test (being phased out), computer-based test (has been phased out), and the Internet-based test (to become the standard). We will focus on the test itself here and not the form in which it is administered.

### B. How to select a study book for your students

Look for a study manual that has a baseline examination and at least three, preferably as many as six or more, practice tests - as well as good, clear explanations of the test and test items. The study manual should be current and published within the last two years.

A baseline examination will help you and your students to get a good sense of their current strengths and weaknesses on the areas of the test. This will help you know what the students need to work on most to improve their scores.

The manual should have a clear explanation of the scoring system of the examination to help you know just how far they are from their goal. Students should know, or ask you to help them discover, the score they need for admission to the university or institution they wish to attend.

Progress tests will help you and your students measure their improvement as you guide their studies.

### C. How to use a study book

Once you have chosen a study manual, read the directions carefully. Typically, the first 10-40 pages of a manual will give very detailed instructions on how to best study for the test, test-taking tips, and basic information about the test. A smart instructor [you] will take the test at least once so they know exactly what is entailed.

Building a good study plan is an essential first step in helping your students. But, first, you must know the skill level of your students and where their skills are strong and weak. This will require giving your students a baseline test to determine their current skill levels.

Once an estimated baseline score has been established, carefully review your students' skill levels and develop a study plan that will help raise lower scores and strengthen the higher scores.

Irregularity of skill levels (strong verbal skills and very weak writing scores, for example) are not uncommon and working on raising the lower level skills will, most likely, yield the quickest results (ETS research suggests this is true).

Students will often want to study intensively for short periods of time, but they will generally be more successful with distributed practice over longer periods of time. It is not uncommon for students to want to take a major examination in four weeks or even less, and expect that they can significantly raise their scores in that period of time. Such an approach is usually self-defeating and should be discouraged. Many major tests require a minimum of three months to pass between examinations, as they have good research that indicates that student scores typically do not change significantly if less time is involved.

Once the study plan is implemented and the students are working regularly, administer periodic practice tests to measure improvements. The purpose of this is to give the student feedback on their improvement and to give them practice in the actual taking of the test. There is also a practice effect with such tests and students can improve their scores slightly with only practice. Familiarity with the test will help students better judge how much time is allowed for each question, for reading, for drafting and correcting their writing, for taking notes for conversational components, for double checking that each question has been answered, etc.

Baseline, practice and progress tests should be taken under conditions as close as possible as those at a testing center.

#### D. What taking the TOEFL test is like

Photocopy and take the first baseline test in the manual that you purchased [see accompanying notes]. Take the test under standardized conditions, taking only the allotted amount of time for each section. After taking the test, compute your score and think about the overall testing experience and suggest strategies for improving your overall and sectional scores. The exercise will help you know what to do with your students at that point.

#### E. Skills tested

The TOEFL iBT tests all four language skills that are important for effective communication: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

Test Section	Number of Questions	Timing
Reading	3–5 passages, 12–14 questions each	60–100 minutes
Listening	4–6 lectures, 6 questions each 2–3 conversations, 5 questions each	60–90 minutes
BREAK		10 minutes
Speaking	6 tasks: 2 independent and 4 integrated	20 minutes
Writing	1 integrated task 1 independent task	20 minutes 30 minutes

Some questions require test takers to combine more than one skill: To succeed academically in English-speaking colleges and universities, students need to be able to combine their language skills in the classroom.

Integrated questions, or “tasks,” in the test help learners build the skills and confidence needed to communicate effectively in the academic environments they plan to enter. The integrated tasks ask test takers to (1) read, listen, and then speak in response to a question (2) listen and then speak in response to a question, and (3) read, listen, and then write in response to a question.

The TOEFL iBT includes a Speaking section. This section includes six tasks, and test takers wear headphones and speak into a microphone when they respond.

The responses are digitally recorded and transmitted to ETS’s Online Scoring Network where human scorers rate them. The scorers are carefully monitored for accuracy, so test takers and score recipients can be assured of the reliability of the speaking scores.

The Writing section has been expanded. The test requires test takers to write a response to material they have heard and read, and to compose an essay in support of an opinion.

The test is now about 4 hours long. All sections will be completed in one day.

## F. Practice Testing and recalibrating goals

After a reasonable period of study, have your students take a progress test and re-evaluate their goals based on their performance. No two students will be exactly the same and goals should be individualized.

## G. Resources

Download the 94 page PDF file “TOEFL Tips” by ETS at:

[http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/TOEFL\\_Tips.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/TOEFL_Tips.pdf)

