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TOEFL SOLUTIONS
for OPEN MINDS

TOEFL Quick Guide

A SIMPLE INTRODUCTION TO THE TOEFL





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The Reading Section

I don't know why you are taking the TOEFL, and neither does the TOEFL. No matter your reason for taking the test, the fact remains you have to do it. With that in mind, consider what this test was originally designed to do: determine whether you are prepared to enter an American college classroom. The passages in the Reading section mirror the kind of texts you can expect to be assigned in your first year of college.

The very first part of the TOEFL exam is the Reading section. In the Reading, you will find three academic passages, each followed by a series of questions. Each passage is approximately 700 words long. The subjects are unpredictable. Each TOEFL test is different, so there's no way for you to anticipate what kind of topic you will encounter on test day. However, when you register for the TOEFL, you will be asked about your field of study. Expect to have topics that are somewhat related to your major. Possible academic topics are not limited to, but include, *architecture, biology, astronomy, physics, anthropology, American history, meteorology*, and so on.

You will be given 60 minutes to complete the Reading section, and that's going to be a challenge. After each reading passage, you will find 12-14 questions about the text. In other words, you have 60 minutes to read approximately 2100 words (700 words per passage) and answer 40 questions (12-14 questions per passage). **Reading 2100 words and answering 40 questions in 60 minutes is tough.** You probably won't have enough time to read the passage and then answer the questions. The questions are arranged in the same order as the reading passage, so most TOEFL takers don't have a problem reading while answering questions at the same time. For example, if question two is in paragraph two, 95% of the time the answer to question three will either be in a later sentence in paragraph two, or in paragraph three. The answer for question three would not be in paragraph one, because that would put it out of sequential order. In other words, each question is placed in relation to where the answer is in the reading.

It's also important for you to be familiar with what the TOEFL test looks like on a computer screen. Look at the image on the following page. Be sure to monitor your time carefully on the top right. Time management is a crucial aspect of the entire exam, but it's particularly important for the Reading section. When you practice at home, be sure to practice with a clock.



- Hit NEXT to go to the next question.
- Hit BACK to go to the previous question.
- Never press HIDE TIME.
- HELP button is not needed.
- Hit REVIEW to see your answers.

*** Note that you will sometimes be given an extra reading passage. In these instances, you will have four passages and eighty minutes to complete the reading section.

The Reading Section Question Types

Question Type	Frequency (per section)	Question Values	Question Phrasing
1. vocabulary	10-12	1	"The word _____ in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to..."
2. detail	10-12	1	"According to paragraph 4, what...." "Which of the following..." "It is stated in paragraph 4 that..."
3. negative detail	4-6	1	"All of the following are mentioned in paragraph 3 EXCEPT..." "Which of the following is NOT mentioned in paragraph 2...."
4. inference	3-5	1	"What can be inferred from paragraph 5 about..." "Paragraph 5 implies that..." "Paragraph 5 suggests..."
5. author's purpose	3-5	1	"In paragraph 6, the author discusses _____ in order to..." "Why does the author mention..."
6. paraphrasing	3	1	"Which of the sentences below best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence in paragraph 4?"
7. sentence insertion	3	1	"In paragraph 2 there is a missing sentence. Where would the sentence best fit?"
8. pronoun referent	0-1	1	"The word _____ in paragraph 1 refers to..."
9. summary	2-3	2	"An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage."
10. organization	0-1	2-3	"Complete the table below to summarize information about _____ in the passage. Match the appropriate statements to _____"



The Listening Section

The Reading section of the exam is followed by the Listening section. Like the Reading section, you will be given 60 minutes to complete it. The Listening section consists of two parts, and each part includes three listening passages. One listening passage will be a campus conversation, and the other two will be academic lectures.

Both parts of the Listening section will begin with a conversation between a student and someone who works on campus. Besides professors, you might also hear conversations where students consult teacher's assistants, librarians, office workers, or advisors. These passages are intended to reflect the kind of conversations you will have on an American college campus. Each conversation will last between two to four minutes. Five questions follow every conversation passage, and the first question is usually a *gist question* (also known as *main idea question*).

Following the campus conversations are academic lectures. Each lecture is followed by six questions. The lectures are about five minutes long. Many students consider the lectures more challenging than the conversations. Most of the time, TOEFL lecture passages consist of one professor talking to a class. There are other instances, however, where the lecture sounds more like a discussion. The professor not only lectures, but also encourages students to ask questions and offer ideas. Both types of academic passages are meant to judge whether you are prepared to listen to and participate in a freshman level course at a North American university.

If you're going to succeed on the TOEFL, you must take notes. Some students feel more comfortable relying on their memory to answer questions. If you are strongly against taking notes, then don't take notes. Still, notetaking is an invaluable skill to utilize during the entire test, but it's particularly important for the Listening section. If you listen to a five-minute lecture without taking a single note, you will struggle to answer detail questions, and they are the most common question type in the Listening. If you can not follow the lecture and take notes at the same time, then practice. Keep practicing until you feel comfortable doing both.

In the Listening section, you will not be able to jump around and skip questions like in the reading. You must answer every listening question in order. You can not go back to answer a question you skipped. The only thing you need to pay attention to on the screen is the clock and the next button (refer to the image on page two). A good rule of thumb is that it should not take you longer than 90 seconds to answer a question. If you are really struggling with a question and can not figure out the answer, it is best to take a guess and move on so you do not run out of time. However, in the Listening section, time management usually is not an issue.

The Reading and Listening section of the TOEFL exam follow a very similar format. Each section presents a passage and then asks multiple choice questions about the passage. The question types are slightly different in the Listening section. In this section, you will be asked *gist-content questions*, *gist-purpose*



questions, detail questions, attitude questions, function questions, inference questions, and organization questions. These sometimes go by different names in different books, but check the chart below for ways to identify each question.

*** Note that you will sometimes be given an extra part of the listening section. In these instances, you will have three parts, nine passages - three conversations and six lectures - and 90 minutes to complete the entire section.

The Listening Section Question Types

Question Type	Frequency (per section)	Question Values	Question Phrasing
1. gist-content	4-6	1	"What is the topic of the discussion?" "What is the professor mainly discussing?"
2. gist-purpose	1-2	1	"Why does the student visit the professor?" "Why does the professor mention...?"
3. detail	10-12	1	"What is stated in the passage about..." "According to the speaker,..."
4. attitude	3-5	1	"What's the professor's opinion of...?" "What can be inferred about the student?"
5. function	3-4	1	"What does the professor mean when he says..." "Why does the professor say this..."
6. inference	5-6	1	"What can be inferred about ...?" "What does the speaker imply about...?"
7. organization	4	1	"How does the professor organize the lecture on..."
8. connecting content	2-4	2	This is a question where you must fill out a table and indicate the correct information.



At this point, you are halfway through the exam and it is time to take a 10-minute break.

Stand up, leave the room, use the bathroom, stretch and eat something. You need to re-energize. You have been sitting in a chair and looking at a computer screen for two hours. Eat something light and nutritious before you go back and ace the rest of it.

The Speaking Section

When you return to your computer, you will begin the Speaking section. The Speaking section consists of six questions. The structure of the Speaking section is different from the Reading and Listening section. In the Speaking section, you will encounter six questions. The first two questions are independent questions and the last four are integrated questions. The questions in this section are in an open answer format. Let's take a closer look at each question since they all follow a different structure.

The first question is usually a free-choice question. In other words, the question will have a wide variety of possible answers. For example, *"If you could change one thing about your hometown, what would you change?"* The questions range in subject matter, so there is no way to prepare a specific answer before the exam. You might get asked a question about business, travel, education, family, friendship and so on. After the question is asked, you will be given 15 seconds to prepare a response and 45 seconds to speak.

The only difference between the first and second question of the speaking section is that in the second you are given a paired-choice question, which means you must decide between two choices. For example, *"Do you agree or disagree: all high school students should wear school uniforms?"* Just like the first question, you are given 15 seconds to prepare and 45 seconds to speak.

Question three is the first of four integrated speaking questions. This is probably the easiest of all the integrated speaking questions. At first, you will read a short announcement about a new rule or policy on campus. You will have 50 seconds to read and take notes on the reading. Be sure to write some notes because the passage will never return. After that, you will listen to a conversation between two students, a man and a woman. The conversation will last about two to three minute and they will discuss the previous announcement. Finally, you will be given 30 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. In your response, you are expected to report on the information given in both the reading and the listening.



After the campus announcement, you move on to a question about an academic topic. Academic topics are more difficult because they are less natural than conversations. Like question three, question four will begin with a short reading passage. You will be given 50 seconds to read the passage. After 50 seconds, the reading disappears. A short lecture will follow the reading. You can expect the lecture to somehow support or add further detail to the topic introduced in the reading. Once the listening is over, you have 30 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. In your response, describe the topic introduced in the reading and connect the main points of the lecture to the topic. Do not include your opinion or any other outside information.

The questions in the speaking section get more difficult as you progress. For task five, you will only listen to a conversation between students. When you have a reading passage before listening to a conversation or lecture, you are more prepared for the topic of the listening, so it's easier to follow. In task five you will hear one student complain about a problem related to campus life. Another student is going to try to help by offering two suggestions. Once the conversation is over, you have 20 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. The topics range from class grades to problems with roommates. Unlike any other integrated speaking question, you are expected to offer your personal opinion. After you report on the problem and suggestions offered by both speakers, you can launch into your own opinion on the matter. Choose one of the suggestions mentioned in the conversation as the basis for your stance.

The final task of the speaking section is also the most difficult. In task six, you are expected to listen to an academic topic for two to three minutes and then report on the information you heard. You will be given 20 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. In your speaking response, you must be able to identify the topic of the lecture and the most important details. Notetaking is crucial in this task. The better your notes, the more you will be able to speak about.



The Speaking Section Question Types

Question Type	Question Details	Question Explanation	Time Breakdown
Independent Speaking	Question 1 Open Choice	Ask about your general opinion on a wide range of possible issues.	15 seconds to prepare 45 seconds to speak
	Question 2 Paired Choice	Ask about your general opinion on a wide range of possible issues. You have just two options.	15 seconds to prepare 45 seconds to speak
Integrated Speaking	Question 3 Campus Announcement and Conversation	Report on the opinion of one of the speaker's in the conversation and explain why he or she feels that way.	50 seconds to read 60-120 seconds to listen 30 seconds to prepare 60 seconds to speak
	Question 4 Academic Reading and Lecture	Explain the academic topic introduced in the reading and describe the main points about the topic described in the lecture.	50 seconds to read 60-120 seconds to listen 30 seconds to prepare 60 seconds to speak
	Question 5 Campus Conversation	Describe the problem of one of the speakers. After that, decide which suggestion would be best.	120-180 seconds to listen 20 seconds to prepare 60 seconds to speak
	Question 6 Academic Lecture	Sum up the topic and main points from the lecture.	120-180 seconds to listen 20 seconds to prepare 60 seconds to speak

**You're almost finished.
Just one more section to go...**



The Writing Section

The last section of the TOEFL is the Writing section. In this final portion of the exam, you will be expected to write two essays: an integrated and independent essay. The integrated essay is almost identical to speaking task four, except you have to write your response. The independent essay question is much the same as one of the two independent questions in the speaking section, except you have to write your response.

The integrated writing assignment is the first of two tasks in the Writing section. To start, you will be given a short reading passage on some academic topic. You will have three minutes to read and take notes on it. The reading passage will return after the listening passage, so do not worry if you fail to read everything. You should use the reading passage to prepare you for the listening. The listening passage will most likely contrast the main idea and details of the reading. Use your notes from the reading to predict what will be discussed in the listening. Finally, after the listening passage, the reading will return and you will have twenty minutes to complete your essay. According to ETS, the company that makes the TOEFL, your essay needs to be somewhere between 150-225 words. However, I find that students who write between 250-300 words score higher.

The very last task of the exam is the independent writing assignment. For this task, you will be asked a simple question and you must articulate your opinion on the matter. The topics are the same as in the independent speaking section: *jobs, lifestyle, education, family, friendship, the future, technology* and so on. For this essay, ETS states that you must write between 300-350 words. In my experience, students score higher when they write over 350 words. Many students find the independent writing challenging because they do not know how to write so much about their opinion. Be sure to include specific reasons and personal examples to support your stance on the question.

At this point of the test, many students just want to go home. Once students start their independent writing task, they have been sitting and taking the exam for at least three hours. So, many TOEFL takers rush through their independent essay because they want to leave as soon as possible. This is a **huge mistake**. Be sure to give yourself enough time before you begin your essay to write an outline, and leave yourself a minute or two after you finish to go back and check for spelling and grammatical errors. There is no *spell check* on the exam. You will be shocked by how many mistakes you made in your essay when you go back to edit. Be sure to take your time and check everything before you leave.

In a nutshell, that's the TOEFL test. There are more things to learn in terms of strategy, but this is a good overall view of what you can expect from each section of the exam. Be sure to take a couple of practice exams before test day. Also, do not be disheartened if you fail to earn the score you wanted the first time around. Most students take the TOEFL more than once.



The Writing Section Question Types

Question Type	Question Details	Question Explanation	Time Breakdown
Integrated Essay	1. Read an academic text 2. Listen to a lecture 3. Write your essay	Connect the topic of the reading with the academic lecture. Show how the main points in the reading are contrasted by the lecturer. Only report on the information you heard and read. Essay should be at least 250 words.	3 minutes to read 2-3 minute to listen 20 minutes to write
Independent Essay	1. Read a simple question about your opinion 2. Write your essay	Write about your opinion. Include supporting reasons and personal anecdotes. Essay should be at least 350 words.	30 minutes to write

Congratulations!

At this point, you have finished your TOEFL.

I hope you found the information in this quick guide useful.

And if you're anything like me, you know the quickest and easiest route to success is to seek advice from an expert.

My TOEFL website, [TST Prep](http://TSTPrep.com), has articles, tests, courses, and teachers ready to help you get the TOEFL score you need as quickly and easily as possible.

Thanks for reading. Send an email to contact@tstprep.com anytime you want to talk TOEFL.

-- **Josh MacPherson**, Head Instructor at **TST Prep**

