

# TOEFL<sup>®</sup> NOW!

2011 Edition

An Insider's Guide to the TOEFL iBT - with tips, strategies, and extensive online resources to help you raise your TOEFL score fast!



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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2011 edition of TOEFL Now - TOEFL iBT Tips and Strategies. This book is a culmination of three years of my experience writing and grading TOEFL iBT exams. I have learned a lot about the TOEFL iBT over the last three years, specifically how the test is designed, and what key things you need to do in order to achieve an excellent score on the exam. I have also seen many, many students repeat the same mistakes over and over again, and I want to help you prepare for the TOEFL so that you can avoid making these mistakes yourself.

If you have just started studying for the TOEFL iBT the process might seem a bit overwhelming. There is a lot to do, and many of the tasks, like speaking about a random topic for one full minute without any preparation, can seem frightening. Luckily, everyone else who is preparing for the TOEFL is in the same situation you are, and the fact that you are reading this means you are already working hard to prepare for the exam. Good job!

Having seen many of the same mistakes repeated time and time again I have developed this guide to teach students specifically how to prepare for each of the four sections of the TOEFL iBT (Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking). Some of the key things I will teach you are:

- How to quickly structure your Writing and Speaking responses to include everything the exam graders are looking for.
- How to identify and answer all 10 types of Reading questions.
- The difference between responses that receive a 3 and ones that will receive a 4 or a 5, and how you can easily improve your responses just by adding a few key words and phrases.

Remember, the TOEFL iBT is hard. As far as exams go this might be the most difficult one you have ever taken. That's OK, it just means that you will

have to put in a bit of hard work to get a good score.

After you have gone through this guide you will have a much better understanding of how to prepare for the exam, what the exam questions will be like, and how you should structure your answers for the Writing, Listening, and Speaking sections. I am excited for you, and the skills that you are going to develop as you prepare for the test. The reward of a great score will be well worth the effort.

Study hard, practice, and good luck!

Best,  
Sarah Menkedick  
TESOL



This guide can be used in different ways depending on how much time you have to prepare.

## 1 Day:

Focus on the reading section, and getting familiar with the 10 different question types. If you review these a couple of times, and study the example questions you will be able to recognize and correctly answer similar questions on the test tomorrow.

Review how you should be formatting your writing and speaking responses and try to give four or five responses for the list of practice questions.

These are the things you can do to improve your score without really improving your English.

## 1 Week:

In one week you have time to review all the advice in this guide. You should spend three or four hours getting comfortable with the strategies presented under each section of the book. Each night spend between three and four hours on the following.

### Reading Section

Review the different question types and strategies on how to answer them.

Take at least one sample reading test and review the answers. On each question ask yourself "What type of question is this? What is my strategy for answering this question?" These sample reading tests are listed in the section "Reading: Online Resources".

### Writing Section

Review the sample essays daily and make sure that you understand exactly

how to structure your writing responses for each of the two tasks. Practice at least two writing tasks per day and compare the structure of your responses to the structure diagram provided in this book. **Listening Section**

Review the listening section of this guide to solidify what types of things you should be listening for and then spend at least 15 minutes listening to one native English conversation and one lecture.

Take a sample listening test and after you have finished write down what types of questions you encountered, and what types you found the most difficult. Spend extra time studying these question types and formulating your strategy. Sample listening tests are listed in the section "Listening: Online Resources".

## Speaking Section

Each night give two responses for each type of speaking prompt. Practice speaking in front of the mirror and trying to follow the response structure provided in this book.

## 1 Month Or More:

The good news is that you have lots of time to prepare, but that doesn't mean that you can put it off until the very end.

Set aside daily time to study. Everyday do at least one of the things that you will be doing every night when you have one week left (see above). In addition to doing those exercises try each of the "Fast-forward to Fluency" tips.





## Fast-Forward to Fluency - Tip 1

The TOEFL iBT is a measure of whether you are capable of studying and/or working in the United States. It is meant to test your ability to take university-level classes and to function at the level of a native speaker in the United States and/or other English-speaking countries.

It is **NOT** a test of grammar skills, so do not go into the TOEFL expecting to fill in blanks with the correct verb or vocabulary word. You will need to have a solid grasp of grammar and vocabulary to do well on the TOEFL, but those skills are not what the test is testing.

Rather, the TOEFL is testing your English fluency much more than your accuracy.

It will require you to have a high level of fluency - the ability to speak without constant pauses and hesitations, the ability to infer meaning from context (for example, the ability to guess the meaning of a word from the sentence it is used in), the ability to compare and contrast viewpoints, and the ability to grasp both the gist (basic meaning) of a lecture or reading passage and its key points.

**In order to prepare for this test, you need to focus much more on developing fluency than accuracy.**

How can you do this? Throughout this guide you'll find "Fast-forward to fluency" tips that will help you enhance your English fluency.

Now, here is your tip. **Practice speaking alone in front of the mirror.**

This will help you speak by yourself for long stretches of time without pausing or using a lot of filler words. On the TOEFL you will need to speak for around a minute without stopping. If you don't practice, you might find yourself leaving lots of blank spaces in your response. I heard many, many students do this when I was grading TOEFL exams. Practice speaking for two or three minutes about a subject without stopping and without saying

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“uh” and “um” too often. This will greatly increase your fluency and your speaking score.

The reading section contains: **3-5 passages and 36-70 questions** (12-15 questions per passage). You will have 60-100 minutes to complete the entire section.

The reading comprehension section tests your ability to understand brief academic passages like those you would be asked to read in a university course in the United States.



**Tip:** One of the most important things to keep in mind when studying the reading section is that the answer to every question can be found in the reading passage. This means you simply need to find the answer, or, depending on the question type, make a logical conclusion based on the information provided in the passage.

## Tips and Strategies

Now let's take a few minutes to outline and discuss your strategy on the Reading section of the TOEFL iBT. Then we'll look at the various question types that you are going to face along the way, and discuss how to answer those question.

**Every passage that we encounter on the reading section is going to be approached in the same way.**

1. Scan the passage looking for each of the following: Main Idea, Purpose, and Structure.
2. Answer questions based on the easiest question types first.
3. Find the answer by examining the question.
4. Eliminate wrong answers first.



## How To Scan The Passage

When you are reading in your second language it is very tempting to try to read slowly and carefully in order to understand every word. However, this won't help you prepare for the TOEFL. In fact, it will hurt your TOEFL score because you will run out of time.

Instead of reading the passages word for word you want to scan the passage and quickly identify the Main Idea, the Purpose, and the Structure of the passage.

Let's look at how we can quickly identify these three main points starting with the Main Idea.

To find the Main Idea of a passage ask yourself: **What's the MOST IMPORTANT idea in the passage?** Look for the answer in the first paragraph of the passage. Any questions that ask you about the Main Idea should be answered right away, because they are generally very easy to get right.

To find the Purpose of the passage you must ask yourself: **WHY is the author writing this?** Fortunately there is a relatively easy way to find the Purpose of each passage without reading all of it.

1. Read the first line of each paragraph and ask yourself: what is the topic and why does the author introduce it?
2. Read the first and last line of the final paragraph (this is the conclusion) and pay attention to how the author ends the passage.
3. Examine the notes you made and ask yourself: What's the common idea in each paragraph? Does the author present facts? Is she examining different view points? Is she answering questions?

The answer to these questions is the Purpose of the passage.

Once we have found the Purpose we can identify the Structure of the passage. Identifying the Structure is important because some questions will ask you about different parts of the passage, and if you know how it is structured then you will know where to look to quickly find the answer.

The Structure of a TOEFL passage is very similar to the structure of most essays that you will be required to write in a university class, it and will contain these basic parts.

1. An **introduction** that contains the Main Idea of the passage.
2. **Three to five body paragraphs** that provide information about the topic and help to identify the Purpose of the passage.
3. A **conclusion** that ends the passage with a final statement from the author. This is also very important when identifying the Purpose of the passage.

## How to Answer Reading Questions

One of the biggest difficulties in the reading section is time. You only have 60 minutes to read three passages and then answer 39 different questions about those passages. This means that it is often very difficult to answer all the questions, and that's OK! Your goal is to get a high score, not answer every single question. Since some questions are easier than others you should skip difficult questions and focus on answering the easy questions first. You can always return to the difficult questions after answering the easy questions.

When we look at the question types that you will face on the Reading section we will discuss which types are generally easy to answer and which are more difficult.



## How to Find Correct Answers and Eliminate Incorrect Choices

For every question on the Reading section of the TOEFL you should follow the same four steps. **Note:** *While it may seem like these steps are very time consuming with a bit of practice you will be able to repeat them quickly and efficiently. They will save you time!*

1. **Read the question and reword it so that you understand it.** Questions on the Reading section will be intentionally worded in a way that may be confusing. Don't let them fool you, make sure you reword the sentence so that you understand what they are asking.

2. **Find the answer in the passage.** Often the question will tell you exactly what part of the text to look in. Read 3-4 sentences to get the context of what is being said.

3. **Answer the question for yourself.** Before looking at the answer choices tell yourself what you think the answer is. If you can't answer the question for yourself you may not have been reading the right section of the text, or you may need to read more to find the correct answer.

4. **Use a process of elimination (see below) to eliminate wrong answers and determine the correct answer.**

Another difficulty that you will encounter in the Reading section is the use of *trick answers*. A trick answer is one that is very close to the right answer, but is not actually correct. In order to avoid falling for trick answers you should always use a process of elimination to narrow down your answer choices.

Consider the following example:

The water **receded** from the town leaving it dry.

1. The word **receded** is closest in meaning to which of the following words

- (A) Attack
- (B) Leave
- (C) Stay
- (D) Attract

Start by eliminating any choices you know are wrong.

In this case the word Attack does not make any sense, so we can cross it out. The word Attract also does not make sense because it would mean the water was pulling the town towards it (thus the town would not be dry). This is also true for the word Stay. If the water were to stay, the town would be wet. However, the clue tells us that the town is dry, and therefore there must be no water. This means that the water must **Leave** the town.

**The correct answer is (B).**

## Question Types

Here is an overview of reading question types and how to understand and do well on each type of question.



Tip: You will do well on the reading section if you understand the types of questions on the test beforehand.

### A) Main Idea Questions

As we discussed above the Main Idea is one of the three key points we want to look for when we first reach a new passage. Questions that deal with the Main Idea are typically worth two points because you must be familiar with the passage, and understanding the Main Idea means you understand what the passage is about!

Luckily, we already know how to find the Main Idea of a passage. Remember, just ask yourself: **What's the MOST IMPORTANT idea in the passage?** Look for the answer in the first paragraph of the passage. Make sure you choose the main idea, the passage's clear thesis, and not a supporting detail.

Be suspicious of answer choices that focus mostly on the middle or the end of the passage.

### B) Tone/Attitude Questions

These questions ask you to state the author's opinion about the subject of the passage. For example:

*"Which of the following best describes the author's opinion about the 1960's student movement at Berkeley?"*

Pay close attention to the descriptive words the author uses (for example, **"significant"**, **"admirable"**, **"lamentable"**, **"unfortunate"**.)

Pay close attention to the introduction and conclusion of the passage. Often, the author will state his or her attitude towards the subject either directly or implicitly at both the beginning and the end of the passage.

Anytime you read any article, reading passage or paper in English, ask yourself: *What is the speaker's attitude towards her subject?* Decide what the author's thesis is and what his or her opinion towards the subject is.

## C) "Refers to" Questions

These questions ask you what a certain word refers to. For example:

*"What does 'it' refer to in line 16?"*

or

*"What does 'this' refer to in line 24?"*

Find the specific lines in the question and read them very carefully. Replace the "refers to" word with each answer choice and test if the sentence makes sense.

## D) "Closest in meaning to" Questions

These questions will ask you to choose the best synonym for a particular word depending on context. These are some of the easiest questions in the Reading section so you should plan to do them as you come to them.

For example:

*"The word 'aspires to' in line 28 is closest in meaning to..."*

Remember that this is asking you to choose the best synonym for this word **depending on context**, not on the dictionary definition.

Oftentimes the answer choices will try to trick you by offering words that are very similar to the dictionary definition of the word, but not similar to its meaning in the context of the sentence.

Try all the answer choices and see which answer choice fits best in the context of the sentence.



Tip: Pay close attention to words like "because", "therefore", and "one example of" in the passage. Look carefully for examples and explanations of ideas in the passage.

## E) Connecting Information Questions

These questions ask you to connect information. These questions will always direct you to a specific point in the passage, and therefore should be done on your first pass. For example:

*"The professor explains the concept of photosynthesis by..."*

Ask yourself, *How does the professor explain something? What example does the professor give of something? Why does the professor say something?*

The **question and the answer choices should be very close together in the passage**. If the professor mentions photosynthesis and then explains it using a metaphor, most likely he will use the metaphor immediately after mentioning photosynthesis.



If an answer choice is a sentence or idea in the passage located very far from the sentence or idea in the question, then this answer choice is probably incorrect. For example:

*“Why does the professor mention Mehi Lake?”*

If the question mentions Mehi Lake and Mehi Lake is used in the first paragraph of the passage, but two answer choices are sentences or ideas from the third or fourth paragraph of the passage, then these answer choices are probably wrong.

## F) Highlighted Sentence Questions

In these questions one sentence in the reading passage is highlighted. The answer choices will be four sentences; you need to choose the sentence that is closest in meaning to the sentence in the passage.

Be very careful because all of the answer choices will contain similar wording to the sentence in the passage, but you need to show that you understand the implied meaning of the sentence. This requires lots of practice writing sentences in different ways.

These are often hard questions, and should be skipped your first time through the section. That is, you should go back to them at the end once you have answered the easier questions first.

### Example:

*Despite poorly planned breeding techniques in the past several decades, German Shepherds remain some of the most popular show dogs.*

(A) Because of poor breeding techniques, German Shepherds are no longer popular show dogs.

(B) German shepherds were once popular show dogs; however, poor breeding techniques have decreased their popularity.

(C) German shepherds continue to be popular show dogs in spite of poor breeding techniques in recent years.

(D) Poorly planned breeding techniques have actually made German Shepherds some of the most popular show dogs.

## How do you choose the correct answer?

1. Read the sentence very carefully several times and understand the meaning.

2. Highlight key words: "despite" (which suggests a contrast between 1st and 2nd halves of sentence) and "remain".

3. Rewrite the sentence in your own words:

*German Shepherds are still popular even though they are bred with poor techniques.*

4. Finally, look at answer choices.

(A) is definitely not right because "are no longer popular" directly contradicts the first sentence.

(B) Seems right, because there is a contrast between 1st and 2nd halves of sentence. However, is the meaning the same? This sentence says German shepherds were popular show dogs but are now no longer popular show dogs. This directly contradicts the "remain some of the most popular show dogs" of the first sentence.

(C) "Continue to be" has a similar meaning to "remain" here, and "in spite of" has a similar meaning to "despite". Also, this sentence contains a contrast between 1st and 2nd halves. Good choice.

(D) at first looks similar in meaning to the first sentence but upon close reading is actually very different in meaning. The key words here are “have actually made” - have poorly planned breeding techniques made German Shepherds good show dogs? No - the first sentence says “despite” poorly planned breeding techniques German Shepherds are good show dogs. Again, make sure you pay close attention to those key words in the first sentence and find equivalents in the answer choices.

**(C) is the correct answer**

## G) “Except” Questions

This type of question asks you to find the exception, or the one answer choice that is different from the others. These are often very hard because the answer is not found in the passage. Because of this you should do these questions on your second pass, after having answered the easiest questions first.

### Example:

*“All of the following are tree-dwelling animals except:”*

- (A) Sloth
- (B) Monkey
- (C) Baboon
- (D) Gorilla

Examine the passage and check if each animal is tree-dwelling or not.

Find a specific sentence in the passage to support your answer. These questions can be very tricky, because most likely all animals will be mentioned in the passage, but one of the animals will be mentioned in a different context or in contrast to the other animals.

Find the specific place in the passage where each animal is mentioned and check it very carefully.

## H) “Infer” Questions

These questions will ask you to infer something from the passage. The question will refer to a specific area of the passage, and the answer choices will all be concepts or ideas that can be suggested or implied from reading that section of the passage.

These are also tricky questions, so do them on your second pass, after you have answered all the easy questions first.

### Example:

*Choose which answer choice can best be inferred from paragraph two.*

### Paragraph 2:

*Impressionist painters often painted scenes of gardens and domesticated environments. They did not focus on wild nature, such as mountains and rivers, like the landscape painters of the 19th century. They preferred light, airy colors to dark ones, and often painted using reflections in water or sky. They also focused on the overall essence of a subject rather than details. This was a huge departure from 17th and 18th century European painting.*

*(A) 19th century landscape painters were inspired by the work of the impressionists.*

*(B) Painters in the 17th and 18th centuries preferred focusing on details rather than essence.*

*(C) Impressionist painters did not find wild nature beautiful enough to paint.*

*(D) 17th and 18th century painters often used very dark colors in their paintings.*

Look carefully at each choice.

(A) cannot be inferred from the paragraph, because even though the passage mentions the landscape painters of the 19th century it does not say anything about their being inspired by impressionists.

(B) The paragraph says that Impressionists focused on essence rather than details. It goes on to say that this focus "Was a huge departure from 17th and 18th century European painting." Therefore, we can infer that painters in the 17th and 18th centuries preferred focusing on details, not essence.

Nothing in the passage suggests that impressionist painters did not find wild nature beautiful, or that 17th and 18th century painters used dark colors, so we know (C) and (D) are incorrect.

**(B) is the correct answer**



Tip: Be very, very careful of keywords here. Connecting words such as "this", "then", "however" and "whereas" will give you clues about where the sentence should go.

## I) Add a Sentence

This will ask you to add a sentence to a part of the passage. There will be four places where you can add the sentence. You want to choose the place where the sentence flows most smoothly.

Try out each of the four possibilities and read the section of the passage



out loud to yourself to see if the sentence makes sense.



Tip: Practice cutting up paragraphs and putting them back together in order to get a feel for how sentences are connected.

## J) Summary Questions

These are very important, as they are worth two points. They will give you one sentence that sums up a main idea from the passage, and ask you to choose three more sentences from five answer choices.

Choose the most important ideas from the answer choices. Most of these questions try to trick you by providing specific details from the passage instead of main ideas. **Do not choose specific details.**

Read each answer choice carefully and decide if it is a main idea or a specific detail. Then make your selections.



## Reading: How to Practice

Now it's time to practice these new tips and strategies that you have learned. Here are some ways you can practice preparing for the TOEFL iBT using the reading tips and strategies above.

Practice with a sample reading test. These are listed in the following section.



First, read the passage and answer the questions **WITHOUT** looking at this book.

Then, carefully re-read the reading section of this book. Read the passage again. Before you answer a question, decide what type of question it is and what you need to do to answer that type of question correctly. Make sure you can identify the question type and explain to someone else, or simply explain out loud to yourself, what you need to do to answer the question.

**This will help you to remember all the different types of questions and the strategies you need to answer them.**

Finally, go ahead and answer the question. Once you have done all the questions this way, compare your score to your first score. You should see that it has improved considerably!

Do this each time you take a reading practice test. First, read the passage and answer the questions without looking at this book at all. Then, re-read the passage and before you answer each question, decide what type of question it is and how you should answer it. Then answer the questions and compare your first and second scores.

## Reading: Online Resources

ETS, the official website of the TOEFL has sample reading tests.

<http://www.ets.org>

English For Students has some good reading comprehension questions. The passages here are shorter and easier than the ones you will find on the test, but the questions are very similar to the actual test questions. This is a great place to start if you want to get comfortable with the test format and structure and gain confidence before you move on to more challenging reading passages.

<http://www.english-for-students.com/TOEFL-Reading-Comprehension.html>

I-Courses has a great selection of free sample tests, and an online students community where you can ask questions to other students who are preparing for the TOEFL. The sample reading tests are a great way to review all the question types mentioned in this section.

<http://i-courses.org/>

Test Magic also has TOEFL reading comprehension practice with a longer and more authentic passage.

[http://www.testmagic.com/Knowledge\\_Base/Toefl/Reading/tests/02\\_kangaroos.htm](http://www.testmagic.com/Knowledge_Base/Toefl/Reading/tests/02_kangaroos.htm)

EnglishGoes E-learning Center lets you practice the computer-based TOEFL reading. This is a helpful practice exercise because it mimics the actual computer-based test format. This will allow you to get comfortable with the way the real test looks.

<http://www.englishgoes.com/evn/toeflreading2.htm>

Online Universities is an excellent place to get familiar with the content and style of academic lectures.

Read the lectures and then ask yourself the types of questions you would find on the TOEFL

- Identify the main idea of the lecture
- Identify the speaker's tone and attitude towards her subjectt
- Identify the supporting details and examples the professor uses
- Highlight difficult words in the lectures and find synonyms for them
- Write a summary of the lectures

<http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2009/03/100-free-lectures-that-will-make-you-a-better-writer/>



## Fast-Forward to Fluency - Tip 2

**Get comfortable listening and reading texts that are slightly above your English level.**

TOEFL listening and reading passages are difficult. They might be much more difficult than anything you have heard or read up to this point. You will probably not understand every word. Some of the texts might be about subjects you know little to nothing about: for example, biology, chemistry, physics, or anthropology.

You need to be able to read and listen to these kinds of texts without having to understand every word. You need to be comfortable with ambiguity. What does this mean? You shouldn't panic if you do not understand parts of the text or if the text seems extremely complicated.

Practice reading texts from academic textbooks and listening to lectures by academics or professionals. Don't just read the newspaper or English language novels, and don't just listen to the radio. You should definitely do both of these things to improve your English, but **make sure you do other things to specifically prepare for the academic English that you will find on the TOEFL.**





## Fluency: Online Resources

Listening to real university lectures is one of the best ways to prepare yourself.

Princeton University offers a wide variety of lectures. Academic Earth offers lectures from a range of universities.

<http://www.princeton.edu/WebMedia/lectures>

<http://academicearth.org>

Take a FREE online course. Yale University offers an excellent selection. Open Culture lists a wide range of courses from many different universities. There is no better way to get a feel for academic English than to take an actual class.

<http://opa.yale.edu/news/article.aspx?id=6139>

<http://www.openculture.com/2007/07/freeonlinecourses.html>

Read as many academic texts and articles as you can. Google Scholar has a great collection of articles.

<http://www.google.com/literacy/scholar.html>

The listening section consists of **4-6 lectures and 2-3 conversations**.

Lectures are 3-5 minutes long and conversations are 3-4 minutes long.

The Listening section is designed to test your ability to understand both academic lectures (what you will hear in class every day), as well as the sort of conversational English that you will encounter in your day to day life at an English speaking university.



Now let's take a look at how we can approach this section and what tips and strategies we can apply to make sure you score the as high as possible.

The questions in the Listening section of the test are similar to the questions that are presented in the Reading section. There will be 6 questions for each lecture and 5 questions for each conversation. They will test your understanding of both the main ideas and supporting details from the readings and lectures. Like the readings, they will also ask you to connect ideas and make inferences about the speaker's meaning.

However, there is one big difference between the Reading section and the Listening section. **In the Listening section of the TOEFL you will NOT be allowed to skip questions and then go back to them later.**

You must answer every question sequentially (in the order they are presented to you). You should also note that, while most questions will be displayed on the screen, some questions will be auditory (you must listen to the question).

## Tips and Strategies

This section requires you to spend an extended period of time listening carefully, meaning **your full attention should be focused on the lecture or conversation, and NOT on trying to take notes.**

The lectures and conversations contain many elements of regular everyday speech - pauses, "ums", random thoughts, hesitations, and tangents that are meant to test your understanding of conversations between native speakers.

For example, the speaker might say *"Hey, that reminds me of"*, or *"actually, let me say something about that"*, and then briefly discuss a separate issue.

Native speakers rarely speak very precisely and clearly with one another in the types of conversations you hear on language learning tapes.

**The listening exercises you do at a language school or in university courses will probably NOT prepare you for the TOEFL iBT listening.**

The exercises language students often use for listening practice are **NOT** authentic. They are very simple and general and do not contain the types of hesitations and colloquial expressions that real native speakers would use.

Expressions like *"hey"*, *"like"*, *"no way!"* and idioms will all be sprinkled into the listening conversations and lectures. You do not have to understand the meaning of every single one of these expressions, but you should be able to understand speech that contains a lot of them.

Do not pay too much attention to these expressions or pauses. **They are meant to distract you.** You should simply be accustomed to hearing them so that they do not make the lecture or conversation a lot harder for you to understand.



Tip: If you feel uncomfortable hearing native speakers talk quickly using a lot of filler words ("um", "eh" and "uh"), then you should try watching American movies and television shows in order to familiarize yourself with this kind of speech.

## Listening Lecture: Structure

While the Listening lectures are challenging, they almost always follow a standard structure similar to the passages in the Reading section. Knowing this structure is very helpful because it allows us to break the lecture into smaller pieces, each of which will be used to answer specific questions. Let's take a look at main parts of a lecture.

**1. Main Idea:** This is exactly like the Main Idea from the Reading section. **It tells us what the lecture is going to be about.** Usually this will directly follow a greeting by the professor.

**2. Purpose:** This answers the question **WHY** the professor is talking about this.



Tip: In many lectures a student will ask the professor a question. The answer that the professor gives usually helps to reinforce the Purpose of the lecture.

**3. Examples:** The rest of the lecture will be filled with examples that clearly demonstrate the purpose of the lecture.

**4. Conclusion:** This is where the professor will summarize what was discussed in the lecture. They will probably repeat the Purpose of the lecture and its Main Idea when making their conclusion.

For example, if the lecture is for a Chemistry class and the professor is talking about how to correctly read and interpret the Periodic Table then the **Main Idea is understanding the Periodic Table**, and the **Purpose of the lecture is to inform the students about how to correctly use the**

**Periodic Table** when examining the properties of elements.

To start the Conclusion the professor might say something like *“As you can tell using the Periodic Table is incredibly important when you want to know the properties of a certain element, and how elements will interact with one another.”*

Even if you don't understand everything during the lecture remember that the conclusion will summarize most of the information that you need to know.

## Listening Lecture: Content

While listening to the lecture there are several things that you want to take note of in order to efficiently answer all the questions. Let's review each of these one at a time and go over a few examples.

**Pay attention to the professor's tone and her attitude towards her subject.**

Oftentimes questions will ask you about the professor's attitude or opinion towards her subject. Is she trying to be funny? Is she very serious? Is she respectful of what she is talking about. For example, if she is talking about the NASA Space Program, is she respectful of it or does she think it's a bad thing?

**Listen carefully for the main idea in the first paragraph of the lecture.**

The professor will almost always start the lecture by announcing what he is going to talk about. The first question following the listening lecture is nearly always about the main idea of the lecture.



Tip: Do not be fooled by answer choices that focus on supporting details or ideas that the professor mentions in the last minute of the lecture. Choose an idea that is mentioned at the beginning of the lecture and is consistent throughout the lecture.

## Learn how to connect information.

Many questions will ask you to connect ideas. These questions will often begin with:

*"Why does the professor say this..."*

or

*"What example does the professor give of..."*

or

*"How is x an example of y?"*

## Pay careful attention whenever the professor uses a metaphor to explain a concept.

For example, *"photosynthesis is like cooking"*. There are often questions about why the professor uses a certain metaphor.

### **Question:**

*"Why does the professor mention cooking?"*

### **Answer:**

*To explain the concept of photosynthesis.*

Pay close attention whenever the professor gives examples.

For example, the professor might say: *"Brown bears are good examples of hibernating animals, because they spend seven months living off their body fat and not feeding."*

Questions will ask you things like, *"Why are brown bears a good example of hibernating animals?"* Make sure you can connect these kinds of information.

Listen carefully for reasons and explanations.

As you are listening, you should always be thinking **"why?"**. When the professor says, *"Many scientists were very excited to work on the Manhattan project,"* wait for the professor to explain **WHY** they were excited.

Train your ear to be very sensitive to words like **"because"**, **"therefore"**, **"the reason for this is..."**, **"this caused"** and **"the effect of this was..."**. Listen very carefully for these kinds of transition words because they will show you the relationships between ideas.

**Example:**

*"Jazz musicians broke from standard musical formulas because most of them did not have the formal, classical training of other musicians. They also believed that music should be about individual style and improvisation."*

**Question:**

*"Why did jazz musicians break from standard musical formulas?"*

Read a reading passage and see how many "why" questions you can come up with. Find the answers to each one. This will help you to easily answer



questions about the reasons and explanations for ideas in the listening lectures.

## Learn how to figure out meaning from context and tone.

Each listening lecture will have one or two questions in which you will hear part of the lecture repeated. You will then need to infer the meaning of one specific statement. These questions are asking you to listen carefully to the professor's tone of voice and also to pay careful attention to the context of a particular part of the lecture.

Let's look at an example from a lecture about how World War II changed the American economy and society. The question will ask you to listen again to part of the lecture.

### **You will hear:**

*As I'm sure most of you know, World War II greatly altered European power structures. However, you might not know just how greatly World War II changed the economy and landscape of the United States.*

### **Then the question will ask you to listen to an even more specific section:**

*As I'm sure most of you know, World War II greatly altered European power structures.*

Then you will need to answer a specific question.

### **Question:**

*What does the professor mean when she says this: "as I'm sure most of you know"?*

- (A) The professor does not believe students know this.
- (B) The professor expects students to have studied this.
- (C) The professor wishes students knew more about this.
- (D) The professor thinks students should know this.

As you can see, this question is not asking you for factual information or for specific details from the lecture. This question is all about the professor's implied meaning.

What is the professor implying here? From the context, you can see that she expects students to know that World War II changed European power structures. She does not spend time explaining how it altered these power structures. Rather, she goes on to explain how World War II affected the United States. So, you know **the correct answer is (D)**.

Let's look at another example. Some questions will only ask you to listen to one particular section of the lecture. Let's say you listen again to this part of the lecture.

**You will hear:**

*Dogs are much more responsive to conditioning than other animals. Why do dogs respond so well to conditioning, you ask? Well, part of the reason they respond so well is because they are pack animals.*

**Question:**

*Why does the professor say this: "Why do dogs respond so well to conditioning, you ask?"*

- (A) The speaker is responding to a student's question.
- (B) The professor believes this is a logical question students might ask.
- (C) The speaker does not think the students understand.
- (D) The professor wants the students to take notes on this point.

You need to decide the speaker's purpose for saying this. Listen carefully

to her tone. Pay very close attention to what comes before and after this sentence.

(A) Often there will be a very literal answer choice like this one. **Most of the time, it is not correct.** Most of the time, these questions about the speaker's implied meaning will not have such obvious answers. They will ask you to be more observant; do not fall for the trap of choosing the easiest answer!

(B) The professor is using a rhetorical device - asking a question that she knows most people would ask in order to make her point very clear.

Look at the context - she makes the point that dogs are responsive to conditioning, and she knows her students would wonder why, so she asks this question and then answers it. She is anticipating what students might think in order to keep moving forward with her lecture.

(C) Look at the context. Is there anything to indicate in the context of the speaker's statement that students are confused? No. The professor does not give any signs that indicate the students don't understand her.

(D) Nothing here indicates that the professor wants the students to take notes.

**(B) is the correct answer.**

These types of questions are often seen in the listening lectures. Listen carefully for them. They are almost always rhetorical questions that the professor does not expect students to answer - the professor simply wants to ask them so that she can answer them clearly and continue with her lecture. She is anticipating students' questions, not actually responding to them.

Think about implied meaning, not literal meaning.

Before you even look at the answer choices, think carefully about what the professor is implying. Pay close attention to the context of the professor's statement and the overall lecture as well.

If the professor says, *"I'm sure I don't need to explain this to you, but..."* think of what she is implying here. Why would she say this? Most likely, it is because she assumes that students already know what she is talking about.

If she says, *"I'm sure I don't need to explain the use of symbolism to English literature students, so I'll just give a brief overview"* she is implying that English literature students probably know a great deal about symbolism and therefore it's not necessary for her to give them more information.

If you know how to recognize this language on the Listening lecture you'll do great! Now let's move on and learn about the Listening conversation.

## Listening Conversation: Structure

As we have seen before in both the Reading section and the Listening lecture there is a structure that can be applied to the Listening conversation. Understanding this structure means that you will have a better chance of answering questions correctly, so let's take a quick look at it.



The Listening Conversation will take place in an academic setting, and will usually take place between a student and someone who works at a university (a professor, academic advisor, librarian, etc).

The student will usually have some sort of problem or issue that he/she needs solved. It might be that he didn't come to class for awhile and needs to ask the professor for notes or assignments. Or, it could be that he is writing a research paper and needs help from a librarian on how to find documents from a particular historical era.

The Listening Conversation is meant to test your ability to understand the types of conversations and situations that occur in an academic setting, but away from the classroom.

A Listening Conversation will almost always include the following parts:

- 1. Introduction:** The two people talking will greet one another.
- 2. Problem/Subject:** As mentioned above a student will normally have an issue that they need to solve.
- 3. Answer/Reaction:** The second person will usually respond to the first person and give them advice or present a solution to the problem.

**4. Solution:** The conversation will end with a closing that clearly states what the solution to the problem.

In order to score well on the Listening Conversations you will need to be able to understand WHAT the problem is, WHY it is a problem, WHAT the proposed solution is to the problem, and HOW this solution solves the problem.

## Listening Conversation: Content

Let's take a look at what things you need to be able to do in order to get a good score on this section.

Pay attention to both speakers' tone of voice and to the way they respond to one another.

Is the student upset? Excited? Frustrated? Nervous? Tired? Is the person the student is talking to angry? Sympathetic? Helpful?

Think of all the ways in which you can read a person's emotions when you are speaking with them - you can tell if they are happy, angry, or bored. Do the same thing with the conversation. Try to decide how each of the speakers' feel and how they feel about each other. Nearly all TOEFL conversations will contain questions about one or both of the speakers' attitudes.

Listen carefully for the student's problem or issue.

Identify it right away at the beginning of the conversation. TOEFL conversations are only 20-25 sentences. **Within the first 5 sentences the student should have identified the reason for the conversation.** Oftentimes, questions will try to trick you by offering three or four supporting details from the middle or end of the conversation as answer

choices.



Tip: Remember that the main purpose of the conversation will always come at the beginning, in the first quarter of the conversation.

## Listen carefully for reasons and explanations.

Oftentimes the student will give reasons or explanations for why he has a problem.

For example, let's say the student's problem is not being able to get into a particular History course.

The student might say, *"I really wanted to sign up for this course but it was already full when I tried to sign up. I need to take that course in order to graduate!"* These are reasons for his problem.

## Listen carefully for possible solutions.

In response to the student's reasons and explanations, the other person will offer solutions.

He/she might ask, *"Have you tried going to the graduate history department?"* or he/she might suggest, *"Why don't you talk to the professor about getting into the class?"* Often TOEFL listening conversation questions will ask you what kind of solutions the speaker proposes.



Decide if the student likes the proposed solutions or not.

Does the student accept the solution or idea proposed by the other speaker? Or does he/she reject it?

For example, if the other speaker says, *"Why don't you talk to the professor about getting into the class?"* does the student respond by saying, *"Yes, that's a great idea!"* or *"I've already tried that, and it didn't work"*?

TOEFL listening conversation questions will often ask you about why a student did or did not like a particular solution.

Identify the final decision the student and the other speaker decide on.

By the end of the conversation, the student and the other speaker should have identified a way the student can deal with his/her problem.

Ask yourself these questions: **WHAT** solution did they agree upon, and **WHAT** is the student going to do after this conversation?

Become familiar with colloquial expressions.

You will be asked to identify what the speaker means when he/she says things like, *"I can't believe it!"* or *"No way!"* or *"I hear you on that."*

You should pay attention to the speaker's tone and the context of the expression, but you also need to do a lot of listening practice to get comfortable with expressions like these.

Remember that most of the time these expressions do not have a literal meaning. For example, if the speaker says, *"I can't believe it!"* it does not literally mean that he/she cannot believe something, but rather that he/she is shocked, surprised or upset by it.

The Listening Resources section at the end of this chapter has recommendations on good material for getting used to colloquial English expressions.

Think about the speaker's purpose in order to decide what he/she means.

Let's take the example of the student who needs extra time to finish his paper. If he says, *"I'm really in a tough spot here,"* what is his purpose?

He is trying to convince the other person to help him. He is trying to show that his situation is difficult.

Meanwhile, if he says, *"Yeah, not very responsible, right?"* then he is admitting that his behavior is irresponsible, and showing that he knows he made a mistake.

Getting better at this is a matter of practice. As you listen to practice Listening exercises always try to identify the purpose of the conversation as quickly as possible. This becomes much easier once you have done it a few times.

## Listening: Online Resources

The **ETS website** offers timed sample listening tests. This is helpful because it gives you an idea of how long the passages will be and how much time you have to answer.

<http://www.ets.org>



**Tip:** Take notes after you have finished the listening test about the types of questions you answered and about any problems you faced. Write down questions you found difficult so that you can practice these particular types of questions.

**Exam English** also has a listening lecture which you can listen to and then answer questions about. Do not follow the site's advice about taking notes. Just listen. If you need to, listen to the full lecture twice before answering the questions.

[http://www.examenglish.com/TOEFL/toefl\\_listening.htm](http://www.examenglish.com/TOEFL/toefl_listening.htm)

**English Independent Study Lab** is an amazing resource for listening materials. They have dozens of links to all sorts of authentic listening material, from history and science lectures to radio documentaries. You should click on the Listening 300-400 page, since these listening exercises are more difficult and similar to what you will find on the TOEFL.

<http://legacy.lclark.edu/%7Ekrauss/toppicks/toppicks.html>

**OM Audio** is another indispensable resource for preparing for the listening conversations. Remember that the listening conversation will be in a casual style, and will contain pauses and colloquial expressions.

**Note:** *This site is in Spanish only, but the English content is excellent!*

One excellent advantage of this site is that its advanced recordings teach you how to recognize emotion. For example, you can listen to conversations that express surprise, relief, and suspicion. This is very helpful in preparing you to recognize speaker's tones and attitudes in the TOEFL

conversation.

Do the comprehension questions after the recordings and study the lists of definitions of the different idioms and colloquial expressions used in each conversation.

<http://www.ompersonal.com.ar/omaudio/contenidotematico.htm>

**Online Universities** is a wonderful resource to familiarize yourself with listening to academic lectures. The site allows you to read a written transcript of the lecture and listen to it at the same time.

If you don't feel comfortable listening to full academic lectures, you can read along and listen first, and then just listen later. Print the transcripts and underline the key points in the lectures as you're reading.

<http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2009/03/100-free-lectures-that-will-make-you-a-better-writer>

**Academic Earth** is the place to go for video lectures. Seeing the professor speaking also helps to reinforce meaning. You can choose from a wide variety of subjects here, so make sure you listen to lectures in all sorts of academic disciplines.

Remember that on the TOEFL you could hear lectures about biology, history, chemistry, or other subjects. If you are not used to hearing science lectures, listen to them. If you are not used to hearing liberal arts lectures, listen to them.

<http://academicearth.org>

## Fast-forward to Fluency - Tip 3

**Speak!** Even an hour or two a week of English conversation can increase your familiarity with the natural flow and rhythm of English.

Remember the TOEFL speakers are all North Americans, so make sure you are familiar with North American English.

## Fluency: Online Resources

If you live in a part of the world that people travel to, meet someone and show them your city.

**Couch Surfing** is a great way to meet native English speakers who are often happy to practice English if you meet for a coffee or go to a bar.

<http://couchsurfing.org>



The speaking section contains two types of speaking tasks, **Independent** and **Integrated**. You will perform two independent tasks, and four integrated tasks.

**Independent** means that you are expected to show your own individual opinions and ideas and to demonstrate that you can express these opinions clearly and in an organized format.

**Integrated** tasks are meant to show that you can clearly and intelligently discuss issues you have read and heard about. The speaking integrated tasks want to make sure that you can not only understand complex issues when you read about and listen to them, but that you can also explain them to other people.

The tasks in the Speaking section are graded on a scale of 0 to 4. There are 5 key points that the judges will be looking for:

1. **The response meets the requirements of the task.**
2. **The response has a clearly defined structure.**
3. **The speaker includes specific details in his/her response.**
4. **The speaker uses speech that is clear and sustained.** That is, despite making minor mistakes in grammar or pronunciation the speaker continues to give a clear and intelligible explanation.
5. **The speaker demonstrates a solid understanding of English grammar.** Minor mistakes are acceptable, though they should not change the intended meaning of the response.

While this may sound overwhelming at first, note that the first three points are the same ones we learned how to identify and use in the Reading and Listening sections (Main Idea, Purpose, Examples, Conclusion).

In the next section we will examine how to use this same structure and skill set in the Speaking section. We will also spend several pages focusing on the last two points so that when test day comes you will be ready to present clear and effective responses.



## Tips and Strategies

Speaking is the most challenging section of the test for most students. The speaking tasks can feel very unnatural and can be difficult even for native speakers. After all, how often do you have to sit down and talk for two minutes straight about a certain subject?

However, **do not let the Speaking section intimidate you.** The most important thing to remember is that while your pronunciation and your fluency are important, **the organization of your response matters most.**

What does this mean? It means that even if you have excellent pronunciation and you speak clearly and fluidly, you will still lose points if your speaking response is disorganized, and you probably will not receive a score higher than 2 or 3.



Tip: Remember, you DON'T have to sound like a native speaker to score well. Your organization and how understandable your speech is are more important than what you sound like.

Since your goal is to form clear, understandable responses to the prompts we can now begin to build our strategy for the Speaking section. The following three steps can be applied to each Speaking task:

**1. Learn the vocabulary you need to perform each task.**

**2. Improve your fluency.** This means listening to native English speakers, and practicing speaking every single day. There is no better way to improve fluency than to practice. (Resources to help improve fluency are listed at the end of this chapter as well as throughout the book in the Fast-forward to Fluency sections.)

**3. Learn the structure for each task and use it for your response.** Let's take a look at each of these points one by one (**Note:** The majority of the

rest of the chapter will be devoted to examining the structure of each of the Speaking tasks as well as several examples that will integrate points one and two into the structure of the task.)

## 1. Learn the Vocabulary

Having ideas that are clearly connected (structure) will make your responses easier to understand, and will raise your Speaking score.

There are many common transition words that you should know for the TOEFL. Practice using the words below as much as possible.

One great way to practice is to take an English newspaper or magazine and read articles looking for these words. Highlight or circle each word as you see it. When you have finished reading two or three articles go back and focus on reading the sentences that contain these keywords. Look for the transitions in ideas that they represent.

### **Progression Words:**

First  
Second  
Third  
Then  
Next  
Before  
After  
Finally

### **Connection Words:**

Because  
And  
So

Also  
Additionally  
Therefore  
Thus

## Contradiction Words:

But  
Despite  
However  
Although  
Rather

## 2. Improve Your Fluency

I want to repeat one key point again because it is so important. **You DO NOT have to sound like a native speaker.** Rather, fluency refers to how you sound. The more natural and confident your speech sounds the better you will score.

There are two things that you want to avoid doing on test day. They are:

1. Avoid speaking in a rehearsed or “computer” voice.
2. Avoid frequent pauses or using filler words like um and uh.

The easiest way to avoid sounding rehearsed is to simply practice speaking and listening to English everyday. The more you practice the more confident you will become with the natural rhythms of the English language.

The easiest way to avoid frequent pauses is to understand the structure of each task and follow the structures of the examples provided in this book.

## 3. Learn The Structure For Each Task.

Using the same structure (Main Idea, Purpose, Examples, Conclusion) that we examined in both the Reading and Listening sections you will be able to easily organize your speech for each task, thus avoiding unnecessary pauses.

Now that we have covered the basics of the Speaking section let's take an indepth look at each of the Speaking tasks.

## Speaking Independent: Task 1

One type of task will ask you to answer a question about your life, interests, and/or personality. This task gives you the most freedom in responding. You will have 15 seconds to prepare and 45 seconds to respond.

Here are some example prompts:

*Who is your personal hero? Explain how this person has influenced you.*

*What is your favorite movie? Explain why.*

You will have 15 seconds to prepare your response to this task. Use these fifteen seconds to make a very quick, very basic outline.



**Tip:** The most important thing to remember here is to make sure your response is organized. No matter how clearly and fluently you speak, if you ramble with no organization it will be very difficult to get more than a 2.

Let's go through the last prompt listed above (*What is your favorite movie? Explain why.*). Your outline should list two or three reasons for why you have this opinion.

**Outline:**

"Amelie"

always wanted to go to France

good directing

When you hear the beep and need to begin speaking, make sure you very clearly state your opinion first. *"My favorite movie is Amelie for two reasons."*

Right from the beginning, the grader knows that you have a clear opinion. He/she also knows that you have reasons to support your opinion. When you are listing these reasons, **remember to always transition from general to specific**. Also, make sure you use transition words to help your response flow more smoothly.

Here is a full length example:

*"My favorite movie is Amelie for two reasons. First, I have always wanted to go to France and Amelie was filmed in France. I am studying French and I love the sound of the language. I also think Paris is romantic and I want to go to the Louvre. Secondly, Amelie had very good directing. The way the director moved the camera made the movie exciting. So, for these reasons, Amelie is my favorite movie."*

Let's look closely at this response:

*"My favorite movie is Amelie for two reasons. [Main Idea] First, [transition word] I have always wanted to go to France and Amelie was filmed in France. [First reason] I am studying French and I love the sound of the language. [detail]"*

Second, [transition word] *Amelie* had very good directing. [Second reason] *The way the director moved the camera made the movie exciting.* [detail]

So, [transition word] *for these reasons, Amelie is my favorite movie.*" [conclusion]

You can see here that this is the same basic structure we have seen in the past two sections. (**Note:** *Reason & Details is the same thing as Examples from our previously listed structure.*)

**Main point > Transition Word > Reason > Details > Transition Word > Reason > Details > Transition Word > Conclusion**



Tip: Remember that you have 45 seconds to respond to the speaking independent prompts, so do not spend too much time on only one reason. If you feel less confident speaking, then focus on stating each reason clearly and don't spend too much time on details.

Follow that organization and even if your pronunciation and your fluency are not very strong, you can still get a 3.



## Speaking Independent: Task 2

The other type of speaking independent task will ask you to state your opinion about a particular debate or issue. You will have 15 seconds to prepare and 45 seconds to respond.

Here are some example prompts:

*Some people believe that animal testing is helpful for humans and should be continued. Other people believe that animal testing is morally wrong and should be stopped. What do you think? Support your opinion with specific details.*

*Many people like to travel if they have vacation time. Other people prefer to stay home. Which do you prefer and why?*

*Some people think teenagers should have part-time jobs. Other people think teenagers should concentrate only on school. What do you think, and why?*

Follow the same organization from the other Speaking task. State your opinion (Main Idea), give reasons to support that opinion, and then support those reasons with specific details (Examples).

You will have fifteen seconds to prepare, so prepare brief outline.

Let's look at a response to the third prompt listed above.

### Outline:

Teenagers should not have part-time jobs

Focus on school

Have to work all lives

## Example response:

*"I do not think teenagers should have part-time jobs. This is because teenagers should focus on school and teenagers will have to work their whole lives after they leave school. First, teenagers should focus on school. Having a part-time job will distract them from school and they might get bad grades. Next, teenagers will have to work all of their lives, so they should take advantage of not having to work when they are in high school. They should enjoy being young and play sports or spend time with friends. This is why I do not think teenagers should have part-time jobs."*

Here, the speaker has given his opinion and supported that opinion with reasons and details. This is a very good response. However, it would be even better if the speaker could contrast his point with the opposite point. Let's look at the same response, this time with an extra sentence from the speaker.

*"I do not think teenagers should have part time jobs. This is because teenagers should focus on school, teenagers will have to work all their lives. First, teenagers should focus on school. Having a part-time job will distract them from school and they might get bad grades. Next, teenagers will have to work all of their lives, so they should take advantage of not having to work when they are in high school. **Some people say that working in high school will give teenagers good work experience, but I think they can get work experience later and it is more important for them to focus on other things.** These are the reasons why I do not think teenagers should have part-time jobs."*

Here, you can see that the speaker was able to contrast his point of view with that of people who have a different point of view. If you have enough time, you should definitely try to do this. It could mean the difference between a 3 and a 4.

However, you only have 45 seconds to speak, so if you do not think you have enough time then simply focus on clearly stating your opinion, reasons and details.

## Speaking Integrated: Reading and Listening

There are four speaking integrated tasks. You will have 30 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to respond to each of them. Two of these tasks will ask you to read a passage, listen to a conversation or lecture, and then give your responses.

You will be asked to explain how the reading relates to the listening. The prompt you will be given will look like these:

*Explain the woman's opinion about the article in the local newspaper.*

*Explain how the advertising campaign the professor describes relates to the theory of merit marketing.*

*Explain how dogs relate to the description of Pavlov's laws.*

**The first thing you need to ask before you respond is: Does the listening support or contradict the lecture?**

In every speaking integrated task like this the listening will very clearly either support or contradict the reading.

**Example:** Let's say you read a brief passage about how college football teams are a very good thing for colleges and they should receive more money. Then you listen to a brief conversation between two students, in which one student argues that the college football team receives too much money and most of this money is wasted. The student says that the money spent on the college football team could be spent in much better ways.

In this case, the listening obviously contradicts the reading. You should state this very clearly at the beginning of your response. Then, you should list the student's reasons for disagreeing with the reading, and list all of those reasons.

Your response should follow this format:

**1. State whether the listening supports or contradicts the reading.**

*The student disagrees with the article about college football teams.*

**2. List reasons and specific details from the listening and the reading passages.** The best way to do this is to list one reason from the reading passage and then one reason that directly contradicts it from the listening passage.

*"The article says that college football teams are a good thing for colleges because they encourage students to feel very patriotic about their school. However, the student says that students only feel patriotic when the football team wins, and if the football team loses they feel poorly about the school. She says this is a bad thing since student's opinions change very quickly instead of remaining strong. Next, the article says that college football teams should receive more money because they can get better players and do well in games, which means people will buy lots of tickets. This is good because it brings a lot of money to the school. But, the student says that actually the money spent on tickets for football games just goes to buying better players and uniforms and stadiums for the football team, so most of that money doesn't actually go to libraries or things that are good for schools. Finally..."*

You can see here that this response follows a very simple and clear organization. The speaker first states the main point: the listening passage contradicts the reading passage (in this case, the student disagrees with the article about college football teams). Then, the speaker gives one point from the reading and shows how the listening contradicts it.

Remember that these speaking integrated tasks will **ALWAYS** follow the same format. If the listening and reading tasks contradict, there will be a contradicting point in the listening passage for almost every point in the reading passage. Listen very carefully for all of the points that contradict the points in the reading passage.

Use the exact same technique if the listening passage supports the reading passage.

Example: Let's say the reading passage is about merit marketing, and the listening passage is about one particular advertising campaign for granola bars.

The reading passage describes what merit marketing is: the use of words like "deserve" and "treat yourself" and "relax" and "allow yourself" to give consumers the idea that they deserve a certain product, or they have won the right to a product through hard work.

In the listening passage, the professor describes an advertising campaign for granola bars. The campaign uses the slogan "You deserve good health and deliciousness!" It appeals to women who work hard and raise children and who merit a good product that is also very easy to eat and carry.

1. You want to first state this main point.

*The advertising campaign the professor describes is a clear example of merit marketing.*

2. Give your reasons and details.

*The reading passage states that merit marketing is when a company tries to sell a product by telling customers they deserve it. The advertising the professor describes uses the slogan "You deserve good health and deliciousness!" which is a sign of merit marketing. Also, the reading passage says that merit marketing tries to make the customer feel good about working hard. The advertising campaign the professor describes tries to make women feel good about working hard and raising children, so this is another example of merit marketing.*

You can see here how the response shows that the listening lecture directly supports the reading passage.

## Speaking Integrated: Listening Only

The other two types of speaking integrated tasks will ask you to listen to a conversation and a lecture and then contrast the two. These tasks are always the same and if you understand how to listen and respond to them, you will get a very good score.

The first task will ask you to listen to a conversation.

The people in the conversation will probably be friends or classmates, or perhaps a professor and a student. Their speech will be informal and will probably involve pauses, fillers like “um” and maybe colloquial expressions. If you want to do well on this task you should be familiar with colloquial and informal speech.

In every one of these conversation passages, one of the speakers will have a problem, and the other speaker will propose several solutions. The speaker with the problem will either choose one of the proposed solutions or come up with a different solution.



**Tip:** The single most important thing you need to do is identify the speaker’s problem, the proposed solutions, and the speaker’s decision.

Again, **your pronunciation and fluency here are less important than the content and organization of your response.** Even if you speak very clearly and with almost no accent, you will not score more than a 2 if you do not identify the problem, solutions, and decision.

Here is an example of a response that received a 4.

*“The man’s problem is that his roommate copied part of his paper and got a good grade on it. The man says this is plagiarism and it could get them both in trouble. Plus, the man feels angry at his roommate. The woman tells the man to confront his roommate and force his roommate to tell the*

*professor that the paper was copied. The man says this is not a good idea because his roommate will be very angry with him and it will be difficult to live together. So the woman suggests that the man ask the monitor of his dorms if he can switch roommates. The man says that would be a lot of trouble, but he does not like his roommate very much so maybe it is a good idea. He decides to talk to his dorm monitor."*

Here the speaker identifies the man's problem, states the two possible solutions offered by the woman, and describes what the man decides to do.

**In the other type of listening task, you will hear a lecture about an academic subject.**

This lecture could be on anything from the causes of the Vietnam war to the characteristics of postmodern literature.

The lecture is meant to mimic an academic course you would take at an American university. The professor will introduce his/her subject and then give various points and explanations to elaborate on the subject.

Tip: The single most important thing you need to do here is list the main points from the lecture.

The prompt will look similar to these:

*Using examples from the lecture, explain how postmodern literature differs from modernist literature.*

*Drawing on points from the lecture, explain how Dadaism greatly influenced 20th century art.*

*Using examples and key points from the lecture, explain how sea turtles are good examples of migrating animals.*



Your response should be very direct and straightforward. Make sure you summarize the main points from the lecture, and most importantly, make sure you complete the task set forward in the prompt.

If the prompt says, *"Explain how Dadaism greatly influenced 20th century art"* then make sure you begin your response by saying, *"Dadaism influenced 20th century art by..."* and then make sure the rest of your response gives examples from the lecture about how Dadaism influenced 20th century art.

Many people make the mistake of getting too rushed and simply listing points from the lecture without being careful to clearly complete the task in the prompt.

## Speaking: How to Practice

It is very important to be comfortable speaking on your own for 1-2 minutes in order to do well on the TOEFL. You will need lots of practice speaking by yourself about different topics in order to get a good score.

Research a particular topic - for example, the legalization of marijuana. Find one article that supports this topic and one article that is against it. List the main points from each article in an outline like this:

### Pros:

- Stop drug war
- Fewer people in prison
- More money for education

### Cons:

- Could lead to legalization of more dangerous drugs
- Bad for people's health
- Will not end drug war

Then, practice contrasting these two topics for one minute. Remember not to use the exact same wording from the articles. You need to use your own words. Flip the articles over so that you cannot see them as you are speaking.



Tip: Remember to use contrasting words such as "therefore," "whereas," and "however".

Practice speaking for one minute about:

- Your favorite movie/book/item/friend/animal

- Your dream vacation
- A place you would like to travel
- What you would do with a million dollars
- What you would do if you did not have to work
- One thing foreigners should do in your country
- Your pet peeve (something that bothers you)
- One thing you would change about your town/city

Make a list of “would you rather” questions. Then practice comparing and contrasting each answer.

- Would you rather be a doctor or a lawyer?
- Would you rather live somewhere that was always warm or always cold?
- Would you rather move a lot or live your whole life in one place?
- Would you rather live in the city or the countryside?
- Would you rather have one close friend or a group of casual friends?
- Would you rather watch a movie or read a book in your free time?
- Would you rather have a dog or a cat as a pet?

💡 Tip: Remember that you will have fifteen seconds to prepare your responses, so do not rush to start speaking. Time yourself with a stopwatch: give yourself exactly 15 seconds to prepare and use that time to organize your response.

## Speaking: Online Resources

Find short articles (less than 500 words) from news sources such as The **New York Times** and practice summarizing the main points out loud.

<http://www.nytimes.com>

Read articles on **How Stuff Works** and summarize the main points of the articles. This will help you to discuss more complicated technical or scientific issues from lectures and readings.

<http://www.howstuffworks.com>



## Fast-forward to Fluency - Tip 4

**Listen to authentic English conversations.** The conversations you hear on the TOEFL will be between native speakers using colloquial language and speaking quickly. You need to be comfortable with authentic, conversational English.

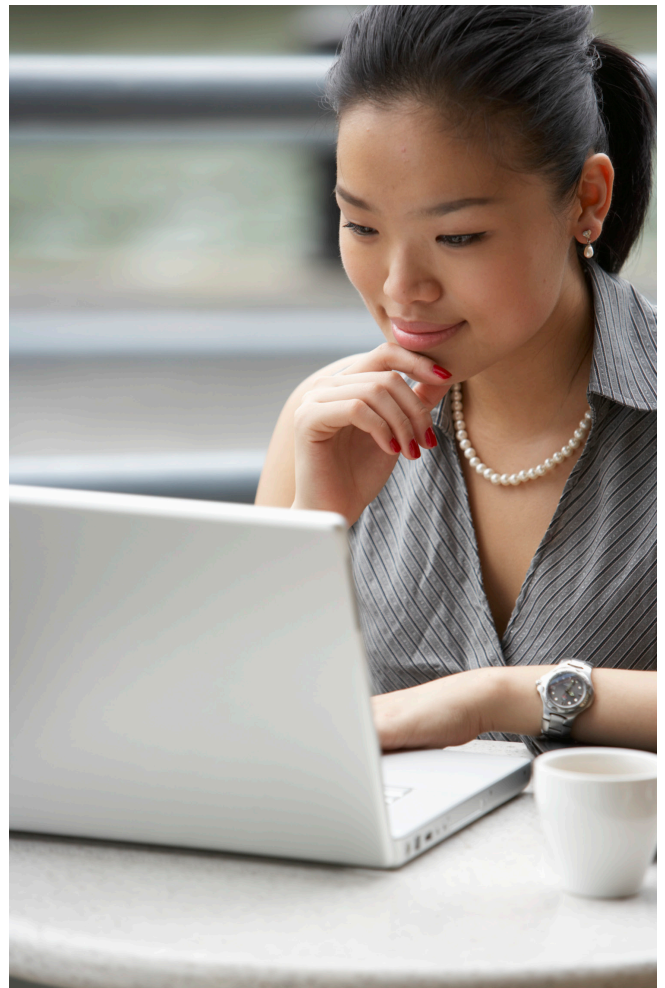
Often, the listening exercises and conversations you hear in English courses are not authentic enough. You need to be prepared to hear a lot of filler words like “um” and to grasp the meaning behind colloquial expressions.

**Watch movies and television shows.** This is the easiest way to get comfortable with informal, colloquial language. And this will help you relax from all of the stressful TOEFL studying!

## Fluency: Online Resources

**YouTube** is the place to watch online videos. Scroll to the bottom of the page and make sure your “Current language” is American English.

<http://youtube.com>





The writing section is made up of two tasks, **Writing Independent** and **Writing Integrated**.

The Writing Independent task is very similar to the Speaking Independent task. You will be given a short prompt and asked to write an essay based on that prompt. You will have thirty minutes to write the essay.

The Writing Integrated task is very similar to the Speaking Integrated task. You will read a short passage and then listen to a brief lecture on the same subject. You will have twenty minutes to write.

The writing section is scored on a scale of 0 to 5. For an essay to score a 5 it must have the following characteristics:

- 1. It clearly addresses the topic and the task.**
- 2. It is well organized and developed.**
- 3. It displays a strong understanding of the English language, including grammar, syntax, and fluency.**

As you may have noticed the basic skills that we studied in the Speaking section also apply to the Writing section (and vice versa). This is good news! Since we have already studied the basics you will be able to spend more time just focusing on practice.

In the Tips and Strategies section we will quickly examine the basic skills we need, but this will mainly be a review of the Tips and Strategies section of the Speaking chapter. We'll spend most of our time examining the specific Writing tasks and focusing on how you can improve your score on each.

Let's get started...

## Tips and Strategies

The Writing section of the TOEFL is very similar to the Speaking section in that organization is the most important factor. Of course, you should have clear ideas and good grammar and vocabulary. But most importantly, your writing should be very well organized. If your ideas are not well organized, you will not get a 3 even if you have excellent grammar and vocabulary.

In both the Reading and Listening chapters we looked at 3 key concepts that we wanted to identify in each reading passage/listening activity. They are: **Main Idea**, **Purpose**, and **Structure**.

We learned that the **Main Idea** is what the passage is about, the **Purpose** is why the passage is being written, and the **Structure** is how the passage is organized.

### **Main Idea -> Reasons/Details/Examples (Purpose) -> Conclusion**

In the last chapter, Speaking, we looked at several examples where we used these three key concepts to develop our own responses. In this chapter we will follow this same pattern of using these three key concepts to formulate our own responses to the writing prompts.

There are three ways that you can ensure you will get a good score on the Writing section.

**1. Organize your essay before you start writing.** Plan what you are going to say and make an outline before you start writing. This develops the basic Structure of your response which will help you clearly state your Main Idea and Purpose.

**2. Remember to include certain words and grammatical structures that the TOEFL graders are looking for.** These are the transition words that we covered in the Speaking section, as well as the clear presentation of your Main Idea and detailed examples.



**3. PRACTICE!** You only have 20 or 30 minutes to write a great essay. Practicing will help you efficiently use your time. To develop our strategy even further let's take an indepth look at the tasks that you will be asked to complete in the Writing section.



Tip: Since the strategies that we learned in the Speaking section also apply to the Writing section you can practice speaking and writing about the same prompts. Choose a prompt and write a response. Then practice speaking aloud the answer that you've just written.

## Writing Independent

The Writing Independent task is meant to show your individual, independent thought, so make sure you take a clear stance on the issue presented in the prompt.

The most important things to remember are:

1. Have clear organization (Structure)
2. Have an original idea and support it with strong points, examples and details (Main Idea and Purpose)

Here are some sample prompts:

*Some people think that books are more educational than movies. Other people think that movies are more educational than books. What do you think?*

*"A friend is more valuable than a boyfriend or girlfriend." Do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

*Your school has announced plans to spend a lot of money on a large sports center. Do you think this is a good or a bad idea, and why?*

*What are the qualities of a good student?*

Your essay should follow a very simple and direct five-paragraph format.  
Introduction > 3 Paragraph Body > Conclusion

**Introduction:** Present thesis and an overview of main ideas

**Body paragraph:** Topic sentence + supporting details

**Body paragraph:** Topic sentence + supporting details

**Body paragraph:** Topic sentence + supporting details

**Conclusion:** Summarize thesis and main ideas

You should make a very quick outline at the top of your paper before you begin writing your essay. This brief outline will help you to get your thoughts clearly organized before you begin writing. This way, you won't get confused as you write, and your essay won't become disorganized.



**Tip:** Remember that the most important thing is to have a well-organized essay.

Let's make an outline for this prompt:

*A friend is more valuable than a boyfriend or girlfriend. Do you agree or disagree with this statement?*

**Introduction** - I believe that a friend is more valuable than a boyfriend or girlfriend because friends will stay with you forever, friends can help you when you have problems with your boyfriend or girlfriend, and friends understand you more than a boyfriend or girlfriend.

**Detail** - Friends stay with you forever - you will break up with boyfriend/girlfriend

**Detail** - Friends help you - if fight with boyfriend/girlfriend they listen

**Detail** - Friends understand you - know you longer, know everything about you

**Conclusion** - For these reasons friends are better than a boyfriend or girlfriend.

Remember that when you write your essay:

1. Your introduction should have a thesis with your personal opinion and two or three points that support it.
2. Each body paragraph should have a topic sentence (the details from your introduction) with the main idea, and two or three more sentences with

details supporting that idea.

3. The conclusion should summarize your thesis and your main points.

To get a 4 or 5 on your essay, you should also use transition words such as: first, second, third, also, in conclusion, in summary," etc. Lists of these words are found in the Speaking chapter. Study them carefully and write practice essays and sentences using them. Make sure you use them correctly! They will not help you if you use them in the wrong places.

## The best essays will have these characteristics:

1. Clear organization - Make your essay as clear and direct as possible.

2. Good flow (transition words and connections between ideas)

3. Clear grammar and ideas - Do not try to make your essay too complicated! Do not try and use complex grammar and vocabulary. Make your essay as clear and direct as possible.

## Writing Integrated Task

The Writing Integrated task is very similar to the Speaking Integrated task. It will ask you to contrast a reading passage and a listening lecture.

**The most important thing to remember here is that the listening will always contradict the reading!** Always, always, always!! I've seen in other TOEFL guides that you may be asked to "explain how the lecture supports the reading" but I've never graded a TOEFL test or heard from someone who was asked it this way.

Even if you do not understand anything you hear in the lecture, you should at least make it clear that you understand that the lecture contradicts the reading. Some students make the mistake of comparing the two, thinking they make similar points: don't make this mistake! The lecture will always contradict the points made in the reading.

You will have three minutes to read and twenty minutes to write. Again, you will want to make an outline before you begin writing. Here are some examples of key details found in sample prompts:

**Reading passage:** *Discusses why the organic movement has been successful in creating a healthier food system.*

- no pesticides
- greater public interest in organics
- healthier life for animals

**Lecture:** *Discusses why the organic movement has NOT been successful in creating a healthier food system.*

- no pesticides, but still a lot of energy (fossil fuels, water, gas) used in industrial agriculture
- not affordable for most of the public
- not effective - animals still raised on a mass scale
- not much healthier

**Reading passage:** *Discusses why study abroad is a necessary program that should be funded by all universities.*

- gives students broader perspective on the world
- helps students learn other languages
- enhances students' studies

**Listening passage:** *Discusses why study abroad should NOT be funded by all universities.*

- many students think of study abroad as a long vacation
- students hang out with American friends and don't practice other languages
- distracts students from their studies; many study unrelated subjects

The prompt will always ask you to show how the listening passage "casts doubt" on the reading passage.



**Tip:** Make sure you know the meaning of "cast doubt" before you take the exam: it means to contradict, question, or debunk.

Again, **make sure you do NOT attempt to show that the listening passage supports the same points as the reading passage.** This will never happen, and if you attempt to show that the two make the same arguments you will automatically get a score of 1 or 2.

There are two ways you can structure your essay. Both types of essays will have a similar introduction and conclusion, but the body of the essay will be different.

Let's make two outlines of an essay in which you contrast two sides of an argument. We'll use the above example about study abroad programs.

## First Essay Structure: One side/Other side

You can present one side of the argument in two paragraphs, and then the other side of the argument in the next two paragraphs. An outline for this essay will look like this:

**Introduction:** *The reading passage believes that study abroad should be funded by all universities, whereas the listening passage disagrees with this. The reading passage thinks study abroad programs give students wider perspectives, help them learn languages and help their studies. The listening passage, however, thinks study abroad doesn't help their studies and does not give them a wider perspective.*

**Paragraph One:** Reading passage's point that study abroad gives broader perspective : explain supporting arguments about this point.

**Paragraph Two:** Reading passage's point that study abroad helps students learn other languages/enhances studies: explain supporting arguments about this point.

**Paragraph Three:** Listening passage's point that study abroad does not give wider perspective: explain supporting arguments about this point.

**Paragraph Four:** Listening passage's point that study abroad distracts students from studies/doesn't help them learn languages: explain supporting arguments about this point.

**Conclusion:** Summarize differences between reading/lecture.

As you can see, this essay puts all of the points from the reading in the first half of the essay, and all of the points from the lecture in the second half. This is called a one side/other side essay since it presents all the points for one side and then all the points for the other.



## Second Essay Structure: Point by Point

You can also structure your essay point by point. This means that instead of listing all the points for one side, you will list one point (for example, “study abroad gives students wider perspectives”) and then show the reading and the listening passages’ perspectives on that point. An outline for that essay will look like this:

**Introduction:** *The reading passage believes that study abroad should be funded by all universities, whereas the listening passage disagrees with this. The reading passage thinks study abroad programs give students wider perspectives, help them learn languages and help their studies. The listening passage, however, thinks study abroad doesn’t help their studies and does not give them a wider perspective.*

**Paragraph One:** The reading passage says that study abroad gives students broader perspective; however, the listening passage says study abroad students treat study abroad like a vacation, not a learning experience. Explain supporting arguments from reading passage and then show how supporting arguments from listening passage contradict them.

**Paragraph Two:** The reading passage says that study abroad helps students learn languages whereas the listening passage says that study abroad students mostly spend time with other American students. Explain supporting arguments from reading passage and then show how supporting arguments from listening passage contradict them.

**Paragraph Three:** The reading passage says that study abroad enhances students’ studies, but the listening passage says that study abroad distracts them from their studies. Explain supporting arguments from reading passage and then show how supporting arguments from listening passage contradict them.

**Conclusion:** Summarize differences between reading/lecture.

As you can see, this type of essay focuses on one particular point in each

paragraph and shows both sides of the argument for that point. This essay will probably have three paragraphs whereas the other type of essay might have more, since it needs to present at least two points from the reading and two points from the lecture.

## Contrasting Essay Vocabulary

Another important thing to remember is that since these essays are contrasting two sides of an argument, you need to know many different linking words that demonstrate contrast. See the word lists below for key linking words that you should know.

### Progression Words:

First  
Second  
Third  
Then  
Next  
Before  
After  
Finally

### Connection Words:

Because  
And  
So  
Also  
Additionally  
Therefore  
Thus

## Contradiction Words:

But

Despite

However

Although

Rather

## How to grade you independent essay

### Score a 5

Has clear thesis, body paragraphs containing separate ideas, introduction and conclusion.

Has clear transitions between paragraphs and a good flow.

Strong vocabulary and grammar, with few errors (no essay will be absolutely perfect! A 5 essay can still have some grammar and spelling errors).

Interesting, creative opinions and specific supporting details.

### Score a 4

Has clear thesis, body paragraphs containing separate ideas, introduction and conclusion.

Has transitions and a good flow.

Good command of vocabulary and grammar, with small errors that don't hurt comprehension.

Tends to be slightly general in places; could use more detail.

### Score a 3

Has clear thesis and body paragraphs which may be slightly confusing; may lack a good introduction or conclusion.

Has some transitions, but flow might be a bit choppy (essay jumps from one idea to the next abruptly).

OK command of grammar; some grammar errors which don't hurt comprehension.

Lacks supporting details for main ideas.

## Score a 2

Lacks clear thesis and is poorly organized. Main idea is unclear and lacks introduction and/or conclusion. Body paragraphs are jumbled without clear main ideas.

No transitions.

Poor command of grammar and vocabulary; errors hurt comprehension.

Lacks supporting details for main ideas.

## Score a 1

No clear thesis or organization.

Very poor command of grammar and vocabulary which makes essay difficult to comprehend.

No supporting details.

## Score a 0

1-2 sentences, or completely incoherent grammar, vocabulary and organization.

## How to grade your integrated essay

### Score a 5

Has strong thesis, introduction and conclusion.

Clearly contrasts the reading and the lecture.

Identifies the most important points in the lecture, shows how they contrast with the points in the reading, and gives detail and explanation.

Strong, coherent organization. Does not copy any content directly from the reading or lecture.

Has strong command of grammar and vocabulary.

### Score a 4

Has strong thesis, introduction, and conclusion.

Discusses the most important points from the reading and the lecture and shows how they differ. May lack detail in places.

Strong, coherent organization.

Does not copy any content directly from the reading or lecture.

Has good command of grammar and vocabulary; may have minor errors in places.

### Score a 3

Has clear thesis. Discusses the main points from the reading and lecture and shows how they differ, but may lack detail and be slightly inaccurate in places.

Clear organization, but lacks transition words and a smooth flow. Does not copy any content directly from the reading or lecture.

May have errors in grammar which do not hurt comprehension. Basic vocabulary.

## Score a 2

Lacks clear thesis. Demonstrates poor comprehension of the reading and/or lecture. Identifies only a few main points from the reading and/or lecture and does not clearly show how they contrast.

May copy some words, phrases or sentences from the reading and/or lecture.

Has errors in grammar and vocabulary which hurt comprehension.

## Score a 1

No clear thesis or organization. Little to no comprehension of the reading and/or lecture.

One or two main points identified, but no idea of the relationship between the reading and the lecture.

Text copied directly from reading and/or lecture.

Many errors in grammar and vocabulary which hurt comprehension.



## Score a 0

1-2 sentences, or completely incoherent grammar, vocabulary and organization.

## Writing: How to Practice

The most important thing to do to prepare for the writing section is, of course, to write. You will need to be able to write quickly and with very clear organization.

Practice, practice, practice. Practice writing an essay on a new topic every day. To practice for the writing integrated essay, choose a topic and find two contrasting opinions on that topic (just like you would do to practice the speaking integrated).

Make an outline of the contrasting opinions, like the one given as an example in the tips and strategies above, and then write an essay based on the outline.

## Writing: Online Resources

ETS has an excellent PDF file of sample writing responses for both the writing independent and writing integrated tasks. This file will show you an example of each possible response from 1-5.

[http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/ibt\\_writing\\_sample\\_responses.pdf](http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/ibt_writing_sample_responses.pdf)

This TOEFL writing practice site will help you to understand paragraph coherence and unity, which will make your essay smoother and more polished.

<http://lrs.ed.uiuc.edu/Students/fwalters/toeflwrite.html>

Reading good essays is very important in order to learn how to write good essays. Test Magic offers many samples of high-scoring essays on various TOEFL topics.

<http://www.testmagic.com/test/ViewTopicsOfEssays6.asp>

TOEFL NOW has a great essay writing program. New topics are posted regularly and you will get feedback from other members of the community and teachers when you post your essays to the website.

<http://toeflnow.com/writing>

## Fast-forward to Fluency - Tip 5

**Increase your vocabulary and practice inferring the meaning of words from context.**

The vocabulary on the TOEFL is complex. Start making a list of vocabulary words and add five or ten words to it each week. Practice using these words in sentences and make flashcards with them.

Practice inferring meaning from context. Anytime you are reading anything in English - an article, a reading passage, an email - underline any word you do not know. Do not look the word up in the dictionary! First, look at it in context and try and write a definition for it based on that context. Then, try and think of synonyms for the word in that context. Finally, look the word up in the dictionary and check your answers. This will help you infer the meaning of words without having to look them up in the dictionary.

## Fluency: Online Resources

**Vocab Sushi** offers real-world, contextual examples of difficult vocabulary, found in the daily news. You can also hear how the words are pronounced. Remember - this kind of studying is important to good to increase your vocabulary. But more important is the skill to infer the meaning from the context the word is used in.

<http://www.vocabsushi.com>

## TOEFL Tips and Strategies: QUIZ

1. List three ways you can improve your English fluency.
2. Describe a reading summary question and what you should do to answer it.
3. There are two types of listening passages in the listening section. What are they?
4. Name three types of questions you will find in the listening section.
5. Should you listen carefully to every word in the listening section? Why or why not?
6. How long do you have to prepare for and respond to speaking independent tasks?
7. How long do you have to prepare for and respond to speaking integrated tasks?
8. What is the first thing you should state in any speaking response?
9. What are the four different speaking integrated tasks?

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10. List three ways you can practice speaking.
11. What should you do before you begin writing your essay?
12. What is the difference between the writing independent and the writing integrated tasks?
13. What mistake do many students make on the writing integrated task?
14. What kind of words do you need to know to improve your essay for the writing integrated task?
15. What are the characteristics of a writing integrated essay with a score of 4?
16. Without looking at the book, list 10 different things you have learned. Go!