



**TST PREP**

TOEFL SOLUTIONS  
for OPEN MINDS

# TOEFL Quick Guide

A SIMPLE INTRODUCTION TO THE TOEFL





# The TOEFL Quick Guide

## A Simple Introduction to the TOEFL

*\*Updated for the new TOEFL Format*



## The Reading Section

The TOEFL test was originally designed to determine whether you are prepared to enter an American college classroom. The passages and questions in each section are a reflection of the type of material you would encounter in your first year of university, and this includes the reading section.

The very first part of the TOEFL exam is the reading section. In the reading, you will find three academic passages, each followed by a series of questions. Each passage is approximately 700 words long. The subjects are unpredictable. Each TOEFL test is different, so there is no way for you to anticipate what kind of topic you will encounter on test day. However, when you register for the TOEFL, you will be asked about your field of study. Expect to have topics that are somewhat related to your major. Possible academic topics include, *architecture, biology, astronomy, physics, anthropology, American history, meteorology, etc.*

As of 2019, the updated TOEFL exam will provide you with 54 minutes to complete the reading section. After each reading passage, you will find 10 questions about the text. In other words, you have 54 minutes to read approximately 2100 words (700 words per passage) and answer 30 questions (10 questions per passage). **Reading 2100 words and answering 30 questions in 54 minutes is tough.** You probably will not have enough time to read the passage and then answer the questions. The questions are arranged in the same order as the reading passage, so most TOEFL takers read and answer questions at the same time. For example, if question two is in paragraph two, 95% of the time you can find the answer to question three later in the same paragraph or in the next paragraph, paragraph three. The answer for question three would not be in paragraph one because that would put it out of sequential order. In other words, each question is placed in relation to where the answer is in the reading.

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



TOEFL iBT  
Complete Practice Test TPO 52

Question 1 of 42

REVIEW ↑ HELP ? BACK ← NEXT →

59:22 Hide Time

The word **curious** in the passage is closest in meaning to

- ☐ strange
- ☐ rapid
- ☐ seasonal
- ☐ essential

This will indicate how many questions you have left in a particular passage.

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

►A large, swift stream **curious** river can carry all sizes of particles, from clay to boulders. When the current slows down, its competence (how much it can carry) decreases and the stream deposits the largest particles in the streambed. If current velocity continues to decrease - as a flood wanes, for example - finer particles settle out on top of the large ones. Thus, a stream sorts its sediment according to size. A waning flood might deposit a layer of gravel, overlain by sand and finally topped by silt and clay. Streams also sort sediment in the downstream direction. Many mountain streams are choked with boulders and cobbles, but far downstream, their deltas are composed mainly of fine silt and clay. This downstream sorting is **curious** because stream velocity generally increases in the downstream direction. Competence increases with velocity, so a river should be able to transport larger particles than its tributaries carry. One explanation for downstream sorting is that abrasion wears away the boulders and cobbles to sand and silt as the sediment moves downstream over the years. Thus, only the fine sediment reaches the lower parts of most rivers.

A stream deposits its sediment in three environments: Alluvial fans and deltas form where stream gradient (angle of incline) suddenly decreases as a stream enters a flat plain, a lake, or the sea; floodplain deposits accumulate on a floodplain adjacent to the stream channel; and channel deposits form in the stream channel itself. Bars, which are elongated mounds of sediment, are transient features that form in the stream channel and on the banks. They commonly form in one year and erode the next. Rivers used for commercial navigation must be recharged frequently because bars shift from year to year. Imagine a winding stream. The water on the outside of the curve moves faster than the water on the inside. The stream erodes its outside bank because the current's inertia drives it into the outside bank. At the same time, the slower water on the inside point of the bend deposits sediment, forming a point bar. A mid-channel bar is a sandy and gravelly deposit that forms in the middle of a stream channel.

Be sure to answer every question, even if you are not sure of the answer. Each question counts, so try not to leave anything blank. Give yourself a minute or two at the end of the reading section to look back and check that you answered each question.

The highest score you can earn on the TOEFL exam is 120. Each section is worth 30 points. The reading section of the exam is scored based on your answers to the questions. Most questions are worth one point. During the exam, you will have three questions that are worth either two or three points. There are ten different question types: *vocabulary questions*, *detail questions*, *negative detail questions*, *author's purpose questions*, *inference questions*, *paraphrasing questions*, *sentence insertion questions*, *pronoun referent questions*, *organization questions* and *summary questions*. These sometimes go by different names, but check the chart on the following page for ways to identify each question.

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





## The Reading Section Question Types

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



## The Listening Section

The reading section of the exam is followed by the listening. In the TOEFL Listening section, you will be given approximately 41 minutes to complete it. The listening consists of two parts, and each part includes one conversation and **at least one** academic lecture. One part will consist of one campus conversation and **one academic lecture**, while the other will include three passages, one campus conversation and **two academic lectures**.

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

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

If you are going to succeed on the TOEFL, you must take notes. Some students feel more comfortable relying on their memory to answer questions, and it is for you to decide how you want to approach these passages. Still, notetaking is an invaluable skill to utilize during the entire test, and it is particularly important for the listening section. If you listen to a five-minute lecture without taking a single note, you will struggle to answer detail questions, and they are the most common question type in the listening. If you have trouble following the lecture and taking notes at the same time, then practice. Keep practicing until you feel comfortable doing both.

In the listening section, you will not be able to jump around and skip questions like in the reading. You must answer every listening question in order. You can not go back to answer a question you skipped. The only thing you need to pay attention to on the screen is the clock and the next button (refer to the image on page two). A good rule of thumb is that it should not take you longer than 45 seconds to answer a question. If you are really struggling with a question and can not figure out the answer, it is best to take a guess and move on so you do not run out of time. However, in the listening section, time management usually is not an issue.



The reading and listening section of the TOEFL exam follow a very similar format. Each section presents a passage and then asks multiple choice questions about the passage. The question types are slightly different in the listening section. In this section, you will be asked *gist-content questions*, *gist-purpose questions*, *detail questions*, *attitude questions*, *function questions*, *inference questions*, and *organization questions*. These sometimes go by different names in different books, but check the chart below for ways to identify each question.

\*\*\* Note that you will sometimes be given an extra part of the listening section. In these instances, you will have three parts, eight passages - three conversations and five lectures - and 57 minutes to complete the entire section.

## The Listening Section Question Types

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



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

Stand up, leave the room, use the bathroom, stretch your arms, and eat something. You need to re-energize. You have been sitting in a chair and looking at a computer screen for two hours.

## The Speaking Section

When you return to your computer, you will begin the speaking section. The structure of this section is different from the reading and listening. In the speaking section, you will encounter four questions. The first is an independent question, and the next three are integrated questions. Let's take a closer look at each since they all follow a different structure.

The first question is usually a paired-choice question, which means you must decide between two choices. For example, *"Do you agree or disagree: all high school students should wear school uniforms?"* The questions range in subject matter, so there is no way to prepare a specific answer before the exam. You might get asked a question about business, travel, education, family, friendship, and so on. After the question is asked, you will be given 15 seconds to prepare a response and 45 seconds to speak.

Question two is the first of three integrated speaking questions. This is probably the easiest of all the integrated speaking questions. At first, you will read a short announcement about a new rule or policy on campus. You will have 50 seconds to read and take notes on the passage. Be sure to write some notes because the reading will never return. After that, you will listen to a conversation between two students, a man and a woman. The conversation will last between 60-120 seconds, and they will discuss the announcement from the reading. Finally, you will be given 30 seconds to prepare and 60 seconds to speak. In your response, you are expected to report on the information given in both the reading and listening.

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





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

## The Speaking Section Question Types

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

**You are almost finished.  
Just one more section to go...**



## The Writing Section

The last section of the TOEFL is the writing section. In this final portion of the exam, you will be expected to write two essays: an integrated and independent essay. The integrated essay is almost identical to speaking task three, except you have to write your response. The independent essay question is similar to the independent question in the speaking, except of course you will have to write your response.

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

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

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

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



## The Writing Section Question Types

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

Congratulations!

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

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

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

Thanks for reading. Send an email to [contact@tstprep.com](mailto:contact@tstprep.com) anytime you want to talk TOEFL.

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

