



## Speaking and Writing Grading Rubric

### Tools for Self-study

*\*Updated for the new TOEFL Format*



## Introduction

The hardest part of preparing for the speaking and writing section of the TOEFL is analyzing your own responses. We at TST Prep do strongly suggest that you [get your speaking and writing evaluated by a professional TOEFL teacher](#), but do understand that some students would rather not seek out the advice of an expert. This document is designed to help students who have no choice but to study on their own.

Again, let me reiterate that this is not the best way to maximize your score. When you have a toothache, you visit the dentist, you do not try to pull out your own tooth, or even ask a friend to do it. There are specific skills that the TOEFL graders are looking for, so please consider hiring a professional teacher to provide you with [some feedback](#).

## The Speaking Section

There are four different questions in the TOEFL Speaking section. Each is unique in its own way, but according to [ETS' grading criteria](#), these four questions are separated into two types: independent questions and integrated questions. Question one is an independent question, and questions two to four are integrated questions.

In the table below you will find three columns. The first column indicates the four grading criteria designated by ETS. The second column is text from [ETS' own grading rubric](#) for a perfect score. The last column is my own simplified version of ETS' language so you understand their expectations.



Independent Speaking

Criteria	ETS	Simplified Translation
1. General Description	"The response fulfills the demands of the task, with at most minor lapses in completeness. It's highly intelligible and exhibits sustained, coherent discourse."	You answered the question in a logical and coherent way. You never went off topic and you were easy for the listener to follow.
2. Delivery	"Generally well-paced flow (fluid expression) Speech is clear. It may include minor difficulties with pronunciation or intonation patterns, which do not affect overall intelligibility."	You spoke in a calm, cool, and natural manner. The listener could understand almost everything you said.
3. Language Use	"The response demonstrates effective use of grammar and vocabulary. It exhibits a fairly high degree of automaticity with good control of basic and complex structures (as appropriate). Some minor (or systematic) errors are noticeable but do not obscure meaning."	You were able to speak in a natural way while also varying your sentence structure. You didn't sound nervous and you didn't rely on simple vocabulary.
4. Topic Development	"Response is sustained and sufficient to the task. It is generally well developed and coherent; relationships between ideas are clear (or clear progression of ideas)."	You followed a structure and showed how one idea led to another. You used at least three transition words as well.

Even though you may find some of this information helpful, it will still be a challenge for you to use it to actually self-assess your own responses. Below is a checklist of eight different questions. When you respond to an independent speaking question, use this checklist to help assess your performance.



Independent Speaking Checklist	
Questions	Notes
1. Did I speak for 42-45 seconds?	
2. Was my introduction 12 seconds or less?	
3. Did I have enough time to include a short conclusion (7 seconds or less)?	
4. Did I look at the clock to monitor my time at least twice?	
5. Did I include at least two transitional words or phrases?	
6. Did I speak at a smooth and even pace for the majority of my response?	
7. Did I speak in a natural and conversational tone (no robot voice)?	
8. Did I elaborate on the topic with a well developed personal example or anecdote?	

Note that there are no numerical score values. The point of this exercise is not for you to assess yourself with a TOEFL-like score, but instead, to identify strengths and weaknesses so you have a better idea of what you need to improve.

**The grading criteria is similar for both the independent and integrated speaking responses, with just a few small changes.**



Integrated Speaking

Criteria	ETS	Simplified Translation
1. General Description	"The response fulfills the demands of the task, with at most minor lapses in completeness. It's highly intelligible and exhibits sustained, coherent discourse."	You answered the question in a logical and coherent way. You never went off topic and you were easy for the listener to follow.
2. Delivery	"Speech is generally clear, fluid, and sustained. It may include minor lapses or minor difficulties with pronunciation or intonation. Pace may vary at times as the speaker attempts to recall information. Overall intelligibility remains high."	You spoke in a calm, cool and natural manner most of the time. It's okay if you paused a couple of times to remember content from the listening, as long as your overall performance was smooth.
3. Language Use	"The response demonstrates good control of basic and complex grammatical structures that allow for coherent, efficient (automatic) expression of relevant ideas. Contains generally effective word choice. Though some minor (or systematic) errors or imprecise use may be noticeable, they do not require listener effort (or obscure meaning)."	You were able to speak in a natural way while also varying your sentence structure. The grader understood almost everything you said.
4. Topic Development	"The response presents a clear progression of ideas and conveys the relevant information required by the task. It includes appropriate detail, though it may have minor errors or minor omissions."	You followed a structure, included important details, and showed how one idea led to another. Also, you used at least three transition words and phrases.

Even though you may find some of this information helpful, it will still be a challenge for you to use it to actually self-assess your own responses. Below is a checklist of eight different questions. When you respond to an integrated speaking question, use this checklist to help assess your performance.



Integrated Speaking Checklist	
Questions	Notes
1. Did I speak for 57-60 seconds?	
2. Was my introduction 15 seconds or less?	
3. Did I have enough time to include a short conclusion (7 seconds or less)?	
4. Did I look at the clock to monitor my time at least twice?	
5. Did I include at least two transitional words or phrases?	
6. Did I speak at a smooth and even pace for the majority of my response?	
7. Did I speak in a natural and conversational tone (no robot voice)?	
8. Did I include all of the essential information from the reading and listening?	

\*\*\*Note that this criteria is the same for all integrated speaking questions (2, 3, and 4).



## The Writing Section

There are two different questions in the TOEFL Writing section: the integrated question and the independent question. The integrated question is the first essay, and the independent second.

In the table below you will find three columns. The first column indicates the [four grading criteria designated by ETS](#). The second column is the text from [ETS' own grading rubric](#) for a perfect score in each of the four grading criteria. The last column is my own version of ETS' language. I have taken the liberty of interpreting their vague grading criteria to help you gain a better understanding of their expectations.

### Integrated Writing

Criteria	ETS	Simplified Translation
1. Reading and Listening Comprehension	"...successfully selects the important information from the lecture and coherently and accurately presents this information in relation to the relevant information presented in the reading.."	Major points and important details were included from the listening passage. The essay accurately and coherently showed how the information in the listening passage is related to the reading.
2. Academic Structure	"The response is well organized..."	Well organized and well-developed. Each paragraph follows a coherent academic structure. Sentences flow from one to the next in a clear and concise manner.
3. Grammar and Vocabulary	"...and occasional language errors that are present do not result in inaccurate or imprecise presentation of content or connections..."	Academic and advanced lexical knowledge displayed. Student exhibited native-like word choice while varying sentence structure, proving advanced grammatical understanding.
4. General Description	N/A	The essay included at least four paragraphs and over 225 words. All information included in the essay was accurate and relevant information from the listening and reading passages.

[ETS' grading rubric for the Writing section](#) differs from the speaking. Instead of separating each into distinct categories, there is simply a general description of what constitutes a perfect scoring essay. I have interpreted this information and divided it into four criteria, modeled from the speaking section. Please be aware that this is only my own interpretation, and not an official declaration from ETS.

Even though you may find some of this information helpful, it will still be a challenge for you to use it to actually self-assess your own writing. Below is a checklist of eight different questions about various aspects of your writing. When you respond to an integrated writing question, use this checklist to help assess your performance.



Integrated Writing Checklist	
Questions	Notes
1. Did I take notes on the main idea and the three most important supporting reasons from both the reading and listening passages?	
2. Did I finish my essay on time? Did I have at least two minutes at the end to edit?	
3. Did I follow the template word-for-word? Does it still sound natural?	
4. Did I include at least one sentence from the reading and two sentences from the listening in each body paragraph?	
5. Did I include enough information from the listening to prove that I understood the passage?	
6. Did I have at least three sentences that included a comma?	
7. Did I use at least three transitional phrases like "in the listening" or "according to the passage"?	
8. In general, what is something I did well? What didn't I do well? How can I improve?	

\*\*\*Note that while in the TOEFL Speaking section, the first question is independent, in the writing, an integrated-style question goes first.

On the following page you will find the grading criteria for the independent writing task, which is slightly different from the integrated. Read carefully and consider these points when you write.





Independent Writing

Criteria	ETS	Simplified Translation
1. Topic Development	"Effectively addresses the topic and task."	Fully discusses the topic with reasons and examples that are clearly connected to it.
2. Organization	"Is well organized and well developed, using clearly appropriate explanations, exemplifications and/or details."	Well-organized. The sentences are arranged in a clear and coherent order. It is easy to see how one idea leads to another. All examples and explanations are connected to the topic.
3. Grammar and Vocabulary	"Displays consistent facility in the use of language, demonstrating syntactic variety, appropriate word choice and idiomaticity, though it may have minor lexical or grammatical errors."	Student exhibited native-like word choice while varying sentence structure, proving advanced grammatical understanding.
4. General Description	"Displays unity, progression and coherence."	The essay included well-developed personal examples and/or stories to support opinions and reasons. The essay word count was over 350 words. The details and examples were clearly connected to the topic.

Even though you may find some of this information helpful, it will still be a challenge to use it to actually self-assess your own writing. Below is a checklist of eight different questions. When you respond to an independent writing question, use this checklist to help assess your performance.



Independent Writing Checklist	
Questions	Notes
1. Did I outline for at least two minutes?	
2. Did I finish my essay on time? Did I have three minutes at the end to edit?	
3. Did I follow the template word-for-word? Does it still sound natural?	
4. Did I include two personal examples or anecdotes? Did I write at least three sentences about each?	
5. Did I add a conclusion sentence in each body paragraph to connect my example back to the topic?	
6. Did I write one sentence using a conditional? Or did I have at least three sentences that included a comma?	
7. Did I use at least three transitional phrases like "in other words" or "to sum up"?	
8. In general, what is something I did well? What didn't I do well? How can I improve?	

If you ever feel like you need your speaking and/or writing evaluated by a professional TOEFL teacher (and we strongly recommend you do), you can learn more on [our website TST Prep](#).

[Here is the link to our writing evaluations.](#)

[Here is the link to our speaking evaluations.](#)

And if you have any questions, get in touch at [contact@tstprep.com](mailto:contact@tstprep.com)

