

Please note: These practice sets align with TOEFL iBT tests administered on or after July 26, 2023.

TOEFL iBT® Writing Practice Questions

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Writing Practice Set 1: (Integrated) -- Passage, Lecture, and Question

Directions: Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.

Reading Time: 3 minutes

In an effort to encourage ecologically sustainable forestry practices, an international organization started issuing certifications to wood companies that meet high ecological standards by conserving resources and recycling materials. Companies that receive this certification can attract customers by advertising their products as “ecocertified.” Around the world, many wood companies have adopted new, ecologically friendly practices in order to receive ecocertification. However, it is unlikely that wood companies in the United States will do the same, for several reasons.

First, American consumers are exposed to so much advertising that they would not value or even pay attention to the ecocertification label. Because so many mediocre products are labeled “new” or “improved,” American consumers do not place much trust in advertising claims in general.

Second, ecocertified wood will be more expensive than uncertified wood because in order to earn ecocertification, a wood company must pay to have its business examined by a certification agency. This additional cost gets passed on to consumers. American consumers tend to be strongly motivated by price, and therefore they are likely to choose cheaper uncertified wood products. Accordingly, American wood companies will prefer to keep their prices low rather than obtain ecocertification.

Third, although some people claim that it always makes good business sense for American companies to keep up with the developments in the rest of the world, this argument is not convincing. Pursuing certification would make sense for American wood companies only if they marketed most of their products abroad. But that is not the case—American wood businesses sell most of their products in the United States, catering to a very large customer base that is satisfied with the merchandise.



Directions: Read the transcript

Narrator Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

Professor Well, despite what many people say, there's good reason to think that many American wood companies will eventually seek ecocertification for their wood products. First off, consumers in the United States don't treat all advertising the same. They distinguish between advertising claims that companies make about their own products and claims made by independent certification agencies. Americans have a lot of confidence in independent consumer agencies. Thus, ecologically minded Americans are likely to react very favorably to wood products ecologically certified by an independent organization with an international reputation for trustworthiness.

Second point—of course it's true that American consumers care a lot about price—who doesn't? But studies of how consumers make decisions show that price alone determines consumers' decisions only when the price of one competing product is much higher or lower than another. When the price difference between two products is small—say, less than five percent, as is the case with certified wood—Americans often do choose on factors other than price. And Americans are becoming increasingly convinced of the value of preserving and protecting the environment.

And third, U.S. wood companies should definitely pay attention to what's going on in the wood business internationally, not because of foreign consumers, but because of foreign competition. As I just told you, there's a good chance that many American consumers will be interested in ecocertified products. And guess what, if American companies are slow capturing those customers, you can be sure that foreign companies will soon start crowding into the American market, offering ecocertified wood that domestic companies don't.

Directions: Give yourself 20 minutes to plan and write your response. Your response is judged on the quality of the writing and on how well it presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage. Typically, an effective response will be 150 to 225 words. You may view the reading passage while you respond.

Response time: 20 minutes

Question: Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

Writing Practice Set 1: (Integrated) – Response Tips

What is important to understand from the lecture is that the professor disagrees with the points made in the reading, namely that American consumers mistrust advertising, that they are unwilling to pay extra for ecocertified products, and that American companies do not need to compete in parts of the world where ecocertification is valued.

In your response, you should convey the reasons presented by the professor for why ecocertification of wood should be adopted by U.S. companies. A high-scoring response will include the following points made by the professor that cast doubt on the points made in the reading:

Point made in the reading	Counterpoint made in the lecture
Because American consumers have come to distrust frequently used advertising claims such as ‘new’ or ‘improved,’ they won’t pay attention to or trust the ecocertified label.	American consumers do pay attention to claims about products when those claims are made by independent consumer agencies.
Since ecocertification adds to the cost of a product, Americans would be unlikely to buy ecocertified products and would choose cheaper, uncertified products.	This is true only if there is a big price difference between two similar products; if an ecocertified product costs only about five percent more, American consumers would accept this in order to buy the product that is better for the environment.
Because American companies sell their products mainly in the U.S., they do not need to compete in the rest of the world where ecocertification is desired by consumers.	American companies must be ready to compete with foreign companies that will soon be selling ecocertified products in the U.S. market.

This task is scored using the Integrated Writing Rubrics. A response that receives a score of 5 clearly conveys all three of the main points in the table using accurate sentence structure and vocabulary.

<https://www.ets.org/pdfs/toefl/toefl-ibt-writing-rubrics-enhanced.pdf>

Writing Practice Set 2: (Academic Discussion) -- Instructions, Question, and Discussion

Your professor is teaching a class on political science. Write a post responding to the professor's question.

In your response you should:

- express and support your opinion
- make a contribution to the discussion

An effective response will contain at least 100 words. You will have 10 minutes to write it.

Dr. Gupta

As I mentioned in class, governments make public policies to describe their responses to various problems that affect a community. Part of this process involves setting and defending priorities about which issues deserve the most attention and resources. For example, governments need to decide whether they should spend more money on education or on environmental protections. If you were a policy maker, which issue would you argue is more important—education or environmental protections? Why?

Kelly

We all live on planet Earth, and it is the only planet we have. Therefore, we must take care of it. Clearly, protecting the environment should be the government's priority over education. I think the REAL question is, which approach to protecting the environment—restricting pollution, regulating population, promoting clean energy, or something else—should be the government's priority.

Andrew

I disagree with Kelly that that the environment is more important than education. Education is actually the best way to protect the environment. Educated people can see how their decisions affect the world around them. Also, with better science and technology education, we can develop solutions to environmental problems. Therefore, I think the government should spend more money on education.

Writing Practice Set 2: (Academic Discussion) -- Response Tips

To earn a top score, you should state and support your opinion about whether education or environmental protections should be the priority for governments to spend money on. Your response is a contribution to the other two students' posts in an online discussion for the class. Be sure to add your own perspective to the discussion, not merely repeat ideas that have already been stated. Typically, an effective response will contain a minimum of 100 words.

You might agree with Kelly that environmental protections should be the priority. You will need to add your own support for this viewpoint. For example, you could argue that environmental protections are a more important investment to sustain our economies. You could point out that governments currently spend a great deal of money compensating for climate change catastrophes such as increased flooding, wind damage, or ruined crops. Investing more in environmental protections now could actually save governments money later on—which could then be used for more education funding. This would differ from the support Kelly gave for her opinion.

If you agree with Andrew that education should be the bigger priority, you could add to his argument by pointing out the amount of research that universities conduct—not only on solving environmental problems, which Andrew alluded to, but also on treating diseases, creating useful technology, and developing sustainable agriculture. Therefore, education funding has a bigger overall impact on improving human lives than investment in environmental protections only. This would be a meaningful addition to the support Andrew provided for his opinion.

You may find you agree with a point Kelly made about the environment even though you think education is more important. Or you might even find that your opinion about government priorities depends on certain factors—that education should be a priority in some circumstances, environmental protections in others. This is perfectly acceptable as long as you explain and support your reasoning. There is no “correct” answer to the question. The important part of this task is to make sure that you state your opinion and provide reasonable, relevant support for it in a way that makes a meaningful contribution to the online discussion. Try to develop your opinion as well as you can within the time limit. A well-developed response will contain clearly appropriate reasons, examples, and details—ones that do a good job supporting or illustrating your own viewpoint.

The quality and accuracy of the sentence structure and vocabulary you use to express your ideas is also very important and part of what is considered when your response is scored. The task context—a post to an online discussion group—is not quite as informal as you might think. While the task asks you to contribute to a discussion with fellow students, imagine that the professor would also be reading your post. It is true that your tone might be more casual than what you would use in an academic paper, but you should still follow standard grammar rules. Also, if disagreeing with another student post, be sure to express your disagreement in a respectful way as you would in a real online discussion.

This task is scored using the Academic Discussion Rubric.

<https://www.ets.org/pdf/toefl/toefl-ibt-writing-rubrics-enhanced.pdf>

Writing Practice Set 3: (Integrated) -- Passage, Lecture, and Question

Directions: Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.

Reading Time: 3 minutes

Critics say that current voting systems used in the United States are inefficient and often lead to the inaccurate counting of votes. Miscounts can be especially damaging if an election is closely contested. Those critics would like the traditional systems to be replaced with far more efficient and trustworthy computerized voting systems.

In traditional voting, one major source of inaccuracy is that people accidentally vote for the wrong candidate. Voters usually have to find the name of their candidate on a large sheet of paper containing many names—the ballot—and make a small mark next to that name. People with poor eyesight can easily mark the wrong name. The computerized voting machines have an easy-to-use touch-screen technology: to cast a vote, a voter needs only to touch the candidate's name on the screen to record a vote for that candidate; voters can even have the computer magnify the name for easier viewing.

Another major problem with old voting systems is that they rely heavily on people to count the votes. Officials must often count up the votes one by one, going through every ballot and recording the vote. Since they have to deal with thousands of ballots, it is almost inevitable that they will make mistakes. If an error is detected, a long and expensive recount has to take place. In contrast, computerized systems remove the possibility of human error, since all the vote counting is done quickly and automatically by the computers.

Finally some people say it is too risky to implement complicated voting technology nationwide. But without giving it a thought, governments and individuals alike trust other complex computer technology every day to be perfectly accurate in banking transactions as well as in the communication of highly sensitive information.

Directions: Read the transcript.

Narrator Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

Professor While traditional voting systems have some problems, it's doubtful that computerized voting will make the situation any better. Computerized voting may seem easy for people who are used to computers. But what about people who aren't? People who can't afford computers, people who don't use them on a regular basis—these people will have trouble using computerized voting machines. These voters can easily cast the wrong vote or be discouraged from voting altogether because of fear of technology. Furthermore, it's true that humans make mistakes when they count up ballots by hand. But are we sure that computers will do a better job? After all, computers are programmed by humans, so “human error” can show up in mistakes in their programs. And the errors caused by these defective programs may be far more serious. The worst a human official can do is miss a few ballots. But an error in a computer program can result in thousands of votes being miscounted or even permanently removed from the record. And in many voting systems, there is no physical record of the votes, so a computer recount in the case of a suspected error is impossible! As for our trust of computer technology for banking and communications, remember one thing: these systems are used daily and they are used heavily. They didn't work flawlessly when they were first introduced. They had to be improved on and improved on until they got as reliable as they are today. But voting happens only once every two years nationally in the United States and not much more than twice a year in many local areas. This is hardly sufficient for us to develop confidence that computerized voting can be fully trusted.

Directions: Give yourself 20 minutes to plan and write your response. Your response is judged on the quality of the writing and on how well it presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage. Typically, an effective response will be 150 to 225 words. You may view the reading passage while you respond.

Response time: 20 minutes

Question: Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

Writing Practice Set 3: (Integrated) -- Sample Responses

Response A, Score of 5

The lecture explained why the computerized voting system can not replace the traditional voting system. Here are the following three reasons.

First of all, not everyone can use computers correctly. Some people do not have access to computers, some people are not used to computers, and some people are even scared of this new technology. If the voters do not know how to use a computer, how do you expect them to finish the voting process through computers? This directly refutes the reading passage which states that computerized voting is easier by just touching the screen.

Secondly, computers may make mistakes as the people do. As computers are programmed by the human beings, thus errors are inevitable in the computer system. Problems caused by computer voting systems may be more serious than those caused by people. A larger number of votes might be miscounted or even removed from the system. Furthermore, it would take more energy to recount the votes. Again this contradicts what is stated in the reading which stated that only people will make mistakes in counting.

Thirdly, computerized voting system is not reliable because it has not reached a stable status. People trust computers to conduct banking transactions because the computerized banking system is being used daily and frequently and has been stable. However, the voting does not happen as often as banking thus the computerized voting system has not been proved to be totally reliable.

All in all, not everyone can use a computer properly, computers cause mistakes and computerized voting system is not reliable are the main reasons why computerized voting system can not replace the traditional voting system.

Score explanation

This response is well organized, selects the important information from all three points made in the lecture, and explains its relationship to the claims made in the reading passage about the advantages of computerized voting over traditional voting methods.

First, it counters the argument that computerized voting is more user-friendly and prevents distortion of the vote by saying that many voters find computers unfamiliar, and some voters may end up not voting at all.

Second, it challenges the argument that computerized voting will result in fewer miscounts by pointing out that programming errors may result in large-scale miscounts and that some errors may result in the loss of voting records.

Third, it rejects the comparison of computerized voting with computerized banking by pointing out that the reliability of computerized banking (“reached a stable status”) has been achieved through frequent use, which does not apply to voting.

There are occasional minor language errors: for example, “people not used of computers”; “miss counted”; “computer cause mistakes”; and the poor syntax of the last sentence (“All in all . . .”). Some spelling errors are obviously typos: “everyoen.” The errors, however, are not at all frequent and do not result in unclear or inaccurate representation of the content.

The response meets all the criteria for the score of 5.

Response B, Score of 4

The lecture disagreed with the article's opinions. It's not a better solution to use the computerized voting systems.

Firstly, it might be hard for the voters who don't use the computer so often, or the users who is fear of the technology, even some of voters can not afford a computer. Touch screen may also be hard to use for people who is not familiar with computers. Secondly, computer is programmed by human beings, which means it can also have errors. Instead of human being's counting error, which only results one or two counting error in number, an error in the program code could cause tremendous error in number. In case of the computer crash or disaster, it may lost all the voting information. We can not even to make a re-count. Lastly, our daily banking or other highly sensitive information system, is actually improved as time goes by. They were also problematic at the beginning. As we use them so often, we have more chances to find problems, and furthermore, to fix and improve them. However, for the voting system, we only use them every 2 years nationally and some other rare events. We just don't use it often enough to find a bug or test it thoroughly.

Score explanation

The response selects most of the important information from the lecture and indicates that it challenges the main argument in the reading passage about the advantages of computerized voting systems (“it’s not a better solution”).

First, the response explains that some people will not find computers to be user-friendly; however, it fails to relate this clearly to the point made in the passage that computerized voting will prevent distortion of the vote. That is clearly an omission, but it is minor.

Second, the response does a good job of pointing out how programming and errors can cause greater problems than miscounts cause in the traditional voting system.

Third, the response provides a nice explanation of how the frequent use of systems like the banking system has contributed to such systems’ reliability, and then it contrasts that with the computerized voting system.

There are more frequent language errors throughout the response—for example, “users who is fear”; “some of voters can not afford”; “people who is not familiar”; “it may lost”; and “can not even to make.” Expressions chosen by the writer occasionally affect the clarity of the content that is being conveyed: “results one or two counting error in number . . . an error in the program code could cause tramendous error in number” and “use them every 2 years nationally and some other rare events.” However, it should be noted that in these cases, a reader can derive the intended meaning from the context.

Due to the more frequent language errors that on occasion result in minor lapses of clarity and due to minor content omission, especially in the coverage of the first lecture point, the response cannot earn the score of 5. At the same time, since the language errors are generally minor and mostly do not interfere with the clarity of the content and since most of the important information from the lecture is covered by the writer, the response deserves a higher score than

3. It meets the criteria for the score of 4.

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Writing Practice Set 4: (Academic Discussion) -- Instructions, Question and Discussion

Your professor is teaching a class on economics. Write a post responding to the professor's question.

In your response you should:

- express and support your opinion
- make a contribution to the discussion

An effective response will contain at least 100 words. You will have 10 minutes to write it.

Dr. Achebe

When people are asked about the most important discoveries or inventions made in the last two hundred years, they usually mention something very obvious, like the computer or the cell phone. But there are thousands of other discoveries or inventions that have had a huge impact on how we live today. What scientific discovery or technological invention from the last two hundred years—other than computers and cell phones—would you choose as being important? Why?

Paul

I mean, we're so used to science and technology that we are not even aware of all the things we use in our daily lives. I would probably choose space satellites. This technology happened in the last hundred years, and it has become important for so many things. Just think about navigation, or telecommunications, or even the military.

Claire

I am thinking about medical progress. Like, for example, when scientists discovered things about healthy nutrition. I am thinking of identifying all the vitamins we need to stay healthy. I am not sure exactly when the vitamin discoveries happened, but I know they are very important. Our health is much better than it was 200 years ago.

Writing Practice Set 4: (Academic Discussion) -- Sample Responses

Response A, Score of 5

In the past 200 years, tons of scientific discoveries or technological inventions have been shown to the world. If I had to choose one in particular it will probably be vaccine or antibiotics. With Pasteur's work and discoveries, the world changed in a way people couldn't imagine. So many people were dying really young because at that time life's conditions were not as good as the one we have now. With vaccine, we could now irradiate diseases that were killing millions of people, we learn so much about the immune system and ways our body was reacting to pathogens and the answers he could produce to defend us against it. Medicine evolved so much and keeps evolving every day because scientists are curious to understand how our body is working and how he is able to communicate with our environment. People aged 40 are now not that old and still have a really long life to live and enjoy when 2 centuries ago it was synonymous of 80% chance of dying.

Score explanation

This is a fully successful response. The writer chooses vaccines/antibiotics as the most important invention of the past 200 years. The author then provides a description, for contrast, of what life was like before Pasteur's work (people dying young) and after the vaccine was created (millions of lives saved, more understanding of the immune system). The writer continues on to point out that medicine continues to evolve because of Pasteur's work and how human lifespans have been extended. Overall, the response provides well-elaborated explanations and details to support the main opinion and provides a relevant contribution to the discussion.

While there are almost no errors in grammar and word choice, there are a few minor ones that have little impact on meaning (such as "life's conditions were not as good as the one we have" rather than "were not as good as they are now," and "how our body is working and how he is able to communicate" rather than "how it is able to communicate"). However, these errors are fairly minor and such errors might be expected when writing under timed conditions. The writer is able to use some complex sentences and relatively precise vocabulary, which is expected in a 5-level response.

Response B, Score of 4

From my personal point of view, I think the most important invention is the light bulb. Before it was invented, people had have to use candles for illumination in the evening. It's performance is not very stable, and it is produce really high temperture which would probably lead to a fire accident. Light bulbs, however, produce constant and bright lighting at nights. One light bulb could use for several years, which is quite convenient-people don't need to storage many bulbs. What's more, it is safer than past candles. This is a huge progress in technology, and I consider it as the most vital invention from the last 200 years.

Score explanation

This is a generally successful response. The writer chooses the light bulb as the most important invention and contrasts it with the disadvantages of using candles (their unstable performance, high temperature, and possibility of fire). The writer then names several advantages of the light bulb (a stable, long-lasting performance; brightness; and safety). Notice these points are in direct contrast to the mentioned drawbacks of candles, which is an effective way to support the choice. However, the argument might have been a little stronger if the writer had discussed not only why light bulbs are better than candles, but also why light bulbs are the most important invention of the past 200 years (other than computers and cell phones, perhaps by mentioning at least one way in which they have helped societies progress).

While the writer uses a nice variety of grammatical constructions and fairly precise vocabulary, the number and type of errors in grammar and vocabulary prevent it from reaching the highest score level. Multiple small errors such as “had have to use”, “it is produce”, “one light bulb could use for years”, and “don’t need to storage” are distracting for the reader even though the intended meaning is still usually clear.

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