

WHAT IS TOEFL AND TEST TAKING STRATEGIES

This article gives the explanation of what the TOEFL test is, the description of the test itself, steps in each part of the TOEFL IBT test, and tips for preparation for every section of TOEFL IBT.

*All four parts of TOEFL IBT : **Reading***

Listening

Speaking

Writing

are described very clearly. Everyone who are interested in taking TOEFL IBT test can refer to this article and follow the advices given here.

General information about TOEFL and TOEFL IBT test. Nowadays, students, teachers and researchers of Kyrgyzstan have wide range of opportunities to go abroad. Countless foreign programs allow them to study, work and do researches on different fields in developed countries.

But, there are some requirements for candidates. In order to be accepted for the specific program, especially for the programs administrated by the United States Government, the person should pass the special proficiency test. This test defines if the person can comprehend, speak and write academic English, of which he/she is going to be a part. So, this test is a worldwide official examination known as TOEFL-Test of English as a Foreign Language.

The TOEFL examination is currently administered at official test centers around the world in two different formats: the Paper based TOEFL (PBT) and the Internet based TOEFL (IBT).

In Kyrgyzstan, only the Internet based TOEFL (IBT) is available. If you want to take the Internet based TOEFL (IBT) test, you should register online beforehand and choose the test center in your country and the date for taking the test. You will be allowed to the testing center on the test day with your ID card and Ticket Confirmation. The TOEFL website is www.ets.org

Here you can register for the test, download sample IBT tests or practice online. The fee for the test is \$ 160.

The Internet based TOEFL (IBT) has four parts: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

The first component you will have to do when you sit for the Internet based TOEFL (IBT) exam is the **Reading**. The Reading section measures your ability to read and understand academic texts (passages) in English. Reading is critical skill in academic environment. Students have to read a lot and comprehend in their textbooks or other reading materials. The main purposes for academic reading in the Internet based TOEFL (IBT) are:

- 1) Reading to find information,
- 2) Basic comprehension,
- 3) Reading to learn,

This section consists of 3-5 texts; each text is about 700-800 words long. Each reading text is followed by 12-14 questions related to the text. The first passage stands alone for a time of 20 minutes and the second and third passages share a total time of 40 minutes for reading and answering the questions. The system will cut you off right after the time ends. Therefore, you must be not only good at reading but also very fast. Most of the questions are multiple-choice, but some of the questions have two or more answers. You may take notes while you read. You can return to previous questions, change answers and answer questions you have left blank, but you can not return to passages in a previous part.

TOEFL IBT Listening section is delivered immediately after the Reading section. The Listening section of TOEFL IBT measures your ability to understand spoken English in academic setting. Listening is done for 3 major purposes:

- 1) Listening for basic comprehension.
- 2) Listening for pragmatic understanding.
- 3) To connect and combine ideas presented in multiple information sources.

Each part of the Listening section (2 or 3 parts) consists of one long conversation and two lectures. The test takers hear each lecture or conversation only once.

Lectures and conversations are 3-5 minutes long. During the listening the time is not running. The allotted time of 10 minutes for each part is only for answering the questions.

Each conversation and lecture begins with a picture to provide orientation. There are several pictures and visual cues with lectures. The questions are written out on the computer screen for you to read while you hear them.

As we mentioned above the section is timed. A clock on the screen shows the time remaining for you to complete the section. Most of the questions are multiple-choice, but some of the questions have two or more answers. You can return to previous questions, but you can change your answers before you click on OK. After you click on OK, you cannot go back. You may take notes while you listen to the conversations and lectures.

The **Speaking** section is right after the 10-minute break. It measures the test takers ability to communicate in English orally. The six tasks in the Speaking section are divided into two types-independent speaking tasks (2 tasks) and integrated speaking tasks (4 tasks).

Students must prove that they are able to speak under the following requirements:

1. Deliver adequate oral responses to the questions.
2. Participate actively in academic discussions.
3. Participate in everyday conversations.
4. State a clear opinion about the discussed subjects.
5. Summarize and orally reproduce the information read in the textbooks or heard in the classroom.
6. Communicate with university officials in libraries, sport centers, housing offices, bookstores, etc.

Three types of questions are presented in six sets. The first two sets have a general question, other sets have questions about campus and academic topics. After you see and hear the general question, you will have 15 seconds to prepare your answer and 45 seconds to record them.

After you hear the campus and academic questions, you will have 20-30 seconds to prepare each answer and 60 seconds to record it. You should follow the direction on the screen.

All of your answers will be saved in the computer. You will listen to the directions and speak into the microphone. Before you start, make sure your headphone and microphone are OK.

The last component in TOEFL iBT is the **Writing section**. It measures your ability to write in standard academic English. There are two tasks in TOEFL iBT Writing section- Independent Writing task and Integrated Writing task.

Within the Independent Writing task students are asked to write an essay on a given general question. The purpose of this Writing task is to measure the students' ability to state their opinions or express their comments on topics which are based on their personal knowledge and experience. The students should also support their ideas and opinions with examples or details.

Students are given 30 minutes to write their essays. The essay should be approximately 300 words.

Within the Integrated Writing task the students are asked to demonstrate that they have understood material coming from different sources (reading and listening), that they can combine the information from those sources in a coherent, well organized, summarized written form, and that they can compare the information from those sources and draw conclusions from them.

The time in the integrated task is as follows: You will have 3 minutes to read a passage of 230-300 words. The reading passage is hidden and then you will listen to a two-minute lecture that is related to the reading passage. The listening may add new information or present a different point of view. You may take notes during both reading and listening part.

Then the reading passage is shown again on the screen and you are given 20 minutes to write a response to a question. The response should be between 150-225 words. You can see the time and the number of your typed words on the screen.

Test Taking strategies

TOEFL iBT Reading Section

Study Strategies:

■ Read, read, and read. Read in English everyday. Try to read academic texts with more advanced topics. Read from many different subject- science, social science, business, art, geography, history, and economics.

■ Find the purpose of the passage. When you know the purpose of the passage, it's easier to understand what the writer is trying to achieve in their writing. Usually, the purpose of the passage is in the introductory paragraph. Most of the passages in the TOEFL iBT will try to do the following:

1. To Explain- to present facts on a specific topic.
2. To Resolve- to find a solution to some sort of problem.
3. To Convince- to persuade the reader of a viewpoint or idea

■ Increase your vocabulary. While reading, keep a list of new words and use words in writing and speaking.

- Take notes. Note taking is allowed during the IBT and is important for success. When reading the text, write down all the important information in order to find them fast.
- Learn how to skim the text. Skimming means to read the text very quickly to get the main idea.
- Try to guess unfamiliar words in the text, try using other words in the sentence to make an educated guess. Look up the words in the dictionary to check your answers.
- Practice making general inferences and conclusions based on what is implied in the text.

Exam Strategies:

- Relax.
- Be fast but try not to think about the time.
- Take a guess. There are no penalties for an incorrect answer in TOEFL IBT.
- When you finish the Reading Section, stop thinking about Reading. It's now time for the Listening Section.

TOEFL IBT Listening Section

Study Strategies:

- Listen to English. Listen to English spoken in movies. Listen to English spoken on TV. Listen to English radio. Listen to practice IBT Listening section. The more you practice listening, the better listener you will become.
- Listen for the main idea. Usually, the main idea is at the beginning of the passage. Once you understand the main idea, it will be easier to understand what the conversation is about.
- Build your vocabulary. While listening, try to guess unfamiliar words from the context.
- Listen to conversations and lectures in a variety of accents.
- Practice note-taking. Note taking is accepted in all sections of the TOEFL IBT. Note taking will help you to remember details. You may only hear the passage ONCE. Therefore you must rely on memory and note taking to recall details.
- Familiarize yourself with the types of questions that are asked on the TOEFL Listening Section.

Exam Strategies:

- The clock is only timing you when you are answering questions. When you are listening, only concentrate on listening and taking notes.
- Prepare for note taking. Before the section begins, write down 'main idea', 'major points', "important details". Under which word you will place your notes from the listening passages.
- Focus on the content of the passage, try not to be distracted by accents.
- Pay attention to visual materials. Example blackboards, illustrations, or graphs will give you more information about the text.
- Answering is different. You can not go back to old questions during the Listening Section. Nevertheless, you have to confirm TWICE before you can move forward. First you press the NEXT button, and then press the NEXT button again. To move to the next question, you must press OK.
- Guess. There is no penalty if you answer incorrect.

TOEFL IBT Speaking Section

Study Strategies:

- Speak, speak, and speak. If you do not practice speaking, you will do poorly on the Speaking Section. So start speaking to build fluency. Speak to local English speakers, speak to native English speakers, speak to your reflection in the mirror. Just start talking!
- Build your vocabulary. Develop a word list and use in your every day speech.
- Develop fluency. Listen to a recording of a speaker and repeat, or read out loud. Use idioms appropriately. Using idioms in daily speech shows higher fluency level. Just make sure you use them in the correct form.
- Master appropriate and correct use of English grammar.
- Improve your pronunciation. Pay attention to word stress, intonations, and patterns.
- Practice organizing your speech. You have little time to think of how to organize your ideas and must learn how to do it quickly. After hearing the question, write down the main ideas you would like to address.
- For the independent task, you will be asked to speak on a familiar topic. Make a list of familiar ideas and practice speaking about each one of them.

Test Strategies:

- All test takers will start the Speaking Section at different times. Be prepared for the room to be noisy and ready to ignore it.
- Use preparation time to write an outline of the main ideas you would like to address.
- Be aware of the time. You have a limited amount of time to answer the question and should not answer it too fast or too slow.
- Relax! Try to sound confident. Remember, even native speakers make mistakes with language.

TOEFL IBT Writing Section

Study Strategies:

- Practice writing in English on a computer keyboard. This is the only way to take the Writing Section and knowing how to type will help with time.
- Use a wide variety of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Using rich vocabulary and grammar will help to score higher.
- Learn the essay structure very well: Introduction, Body, and Conclusion.
- Practice organizing your writing. Plan your essay for 5 minutes before writing. The essay outline should include the main ideas of the essay, examples, and supporting details.
- Learn to use transitions to make your text flow. For example: furthermore, in addition, for example, for instance, on the other hand, to sum up, first, second.
- Be time effective. Use all of your time and learn how to pace yourself.
- Monitor your progress. Ask someone to evaluate your writing.

Test Strategies:

- Outline before you start writing. It will save you time and confusion.
- Pay attention to the time. Take time to outline before writing and to correction errors at the end.
- Do not more than 300 words for independent task. 150 to 225 words are appropriate.
- Use transition words to make your text flow.

Sources

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