

Test of English as a Foreign Language

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Acronym	TOEFL
Type	Internet-based or paper-based standardized test.
Developer / administrator	Educational Testing Service
Knowledge / skills tested	Reading, listening, speaking and writing of the English language .
Purpose	Testing the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers for academic and other purposes.
Year started	1964
Duration	Internet-based test (iBT): 3 hours 10 minutes to 4 hours 20 minutes (excluding 10-minute break in-between). Paper-based test (PBT): 2 hours 20 minutes to 2 hours 30 minutes.
Score / grade range	iBT: 0 to 30 (in 1 point increments) on each

	of the 4 sections. So total of 0 to 120. PBT: Listening: 31 to 68, Structure: 31 to 69, Reading: 31 to 67. Total of 310 to 677. Writing (separate): 0 to 6. (All in 1 point increments.)
Score / grade validity	2 years
Offered	iBT: More than 50 times a year.
Restrictions on attempts	iBT: Can be taken only once in any 12-day period.
Countries / regions	4500 test centers in 165 countries.
Languages	English
Prerequisites / eligibility criteria	No official prerequisite. Intended for non-native English speakers.
Fee	iBT: US\$ 160 to US\$ 250, depending on the country. PBT: US\$ 160.
Scores / grades used by	Over 9000 universities, agencies and other institutions in over 130 countries.
Website	www.ets.org/toefl

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL, /'toʊfəl/, ˌtoʊ-ˈfəl) is a [standardized test](#) to measure the [English language](#) ability of non-native speakers wishing to enroll in English-



speaking universities. The test is accepted by many English-speaking [academic](#) and professional institutions. TOEFL is one of the two major English-language tests in the world, the other being the [IELTS](#).

TOEFL is a trademark of the [Educational Testing Service](#) (ETS), a private non-profit organization, which designs and administers the tests. ETS issues official score reports, sent independently to institutions, for two years following the test.

History

In 1962, a national council made up of representatives of thirty government and private organizations was formed to address the problem of ensuring English language proficiency for non-native speakers wishing to study at U.S. universities. This council recommended the development and administration of the TOEFL exam for the 1963-1964 time frame.

The test was originally developed at the [Center for Applied Linguistics](#) under the direction of [Stanford University](#) applied linguistics professor Dr. [Charles A. Ferguson](#).

The TOEFL test was first administered in 1964 by the [Modern Language Association](#) financed by grants from the [Ford Foundation](#) and [Danforth Foundation](#).

In 1965, [The College Board](#) and ETS jointly assumed responsibility for the continuation of the TOEFL testing program.

In 1973, a cooperative arrangement was made between ETS, The College Board, and the [Graduate Record Examinations](#) board of advisers to oversee and run the program. ETS was to administer the exam with the guidance of the TOEFL board.

To the present day, college admission criteria for international students who are nationals of some of the [Commonwealth nations](#) exempt them from taking the TOEFL exam. Nations which are part of the Anglosphere (from most Commonwealth realms to former British colonies e.g., Hong Kong SAR or former protectorates of the United States) where English is the de facto official language automatically grants a TOEFL exemption with some restrictions (e.g., residents of Quebec are required to take TOEFL while the rest of Canada is exempt - also inclusive of Commonwealth nations where English is not an official language e.g., Mozambique or Namibia (English is co-official but spoken by 3% of the population)). However, this does not apply to some Commonwealth nations outside the Anglosphere, such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh etc, even though they may have English as the de facto official language.

Internet-based test

Since its introduction in late 2005, the TOEFL Internet-based Test (iBT) format has progressively replaced the computer-based tests (CBT) and paper-based tests (PBT), although paper-based testing is still used in select areas. The TOEFL iBT test has been introduced in phases, with the [United States](#), [Canada](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), and [Italy](#) in 2005 and the rest of the world in 2006, with test centers added regularly. The CBT was discontinued in September 2006 and these scores are no longer valid.

Initially, the demand for test seats was higher than availability, and candidates had to wait for months. It is now possible to take the test within one to four weeks in most countries. The four-hour test consists of four sections, each measuring one of the basic language skills (while some tasks require integrating multiple skills), and all tasks focus on language used in an academic, higher-education environment. Note-taking is allowed during the TOEFL iBT test. The test cannot be taken more than once every 12 days.

Reading

The Reading section consists of questions on 3-5 passages, each approximately 700 words in length. The passages are on academic topics; they are the kind of material that might be found in an undergraduate university textbook. Passages require understanding of rhetorical functions such as cause-effect, compare-contrast and argumentation. Students answer questions about main ideas, details, inferences, essential information, sentence insertion, vocabulary, rhetorical purpose and overall ideas. New types of questions in the TOEFL iBT test require filling out tables or completing summaries. Prior knowledge of the subject under discussion is not necessary to come to the correct answer.

Listening

The Listening section consists of questions on six passages, each 3–5 minutes in length. These passages include two student conversations and four academic lectures or discussions. The conversations involve a student and either a professor or a campus service provider. The lectures are a self-contained portion of an academic lecture, which may involve student participation and does not assume specialized background knowledge in the subject area. Each conversation and lecture passage is heard only once. Test-takers may take notes while they listen and they may refer to their notes when they answer the questions. Each conversation is associated with five questions and each lecture with six. The questions are meant to measure the ability to understand main ideas, important details, implications, relationships between ideas, organization of information, speaker purpose and speaker attitude.

Speaking

The Speaking section consists of six tasks: two independent and four integrated. In the two independent tasks, test-takers answer opinion questions on familiar topics. They are evaluated on their ability to speak spontaneously and convey their ideas clearly and coherently. In two of the integrated tasks, test-takers read a short passage, listen to an academic course lecture or a conversation about campus life and answer a question by combining appropriate information from the text and the talk. In the two remaining integrated tasks, test-takers listen to an academic course lecture or a conversation about campus life and then respond to a question about what they heard. In the integrated tasks, test-takers are evaluated on their ability to appropriately synthesize and effectively convey information from the reading and listening material. Test-takers may take notes as they read and listen and may use their notes to help prepare their responses. Test-takers are given a short preparation time before they have to begin speaking. The responses are digitally recorded, sent to ETS's Online Scoring Network (OSN), and evaluated by three to six raters.

Writing

The Writing section measures a test taker's ability to write in an academic setting and consists of two tasks: one integrated and one independent. In the integrated task, test-takers read a passage on an academic topic and then listen to a speaker discuss it. The test-taker then writes a summary about the important points in the listening passage and explains how these relate to the key points of the reading passage. In the independent task, the test-taker must write an essay that states their opinion or choice, and then explain it, rather than simply listing personal preferences or choices. Responses are sent to the ETS OSN and evaluated by at least 3 different raters.

Task	Description	Approximate time
Reading	3–5 passages, each containing 12–14 questions	60–80 minutes
Listening	6–9 passages, each containing 5–6 questions	60–90 minutes
Break	Mandatory break	10 minutes
Speaking	6 tasks	20 minutes
Writing	2 tasks	50 minutes

One of the sections of the test will include extra, uncounted material. [Educational Testing Service](#) includes extra material to pilot test questions for future test forms. When test-takers are given a longer section, they should give equal effort to all of the questions because they do not know which question will count and which will be considered extra. For example, if there are four reading passages instead of three, then one of the passages will not be counted. Any of the four could be the uncounted one.

Paper-based Test

The TOEFL® paper-based Test (PBT) is available in limited areas. Scores are valid for two years after the test date, and test takers can have their scores sent to institutions or face time.

Listening (30 – 40 minutes)

The Listening section consists of 3 parts. The first one contains 30 questions about short conversations. The second part has 8 questions about longer conversations. The last part asks 12 questions about lectures or talks.

Structure and Written Expression (25 minutes)

The Structure and Written Expression section has 15 exercises of completing sentences correctly and 25 exercises of identifying errors.

Reading Comprehension (55 minutes)

The Reading Comprehension sections has 50 questions about reading passages.

Writing (30 minutes)

The TOEFL PBT administrations include a writing test called the Test of Written English (TWE). This is one essay question with 250–300 words in average.

Test scores

TOEFL iBT Test

The TOEFL iBT test is scored on a scale of 0 to 120 points.

Each of the four sections (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing) receives a scaled score from 0 to 30. The scaled scores from the four sections are added together to determine the total score.

Each speaking question is initially given a score of 0 to 4, and each writing question is initially given a score of 0 to 5. These scores are converted to scaled scores of 0 to 30.

Paper-based Test

The final PBT score ranges between 310 and 677 and is based on three subscores: Listening (31–68), Structure (31–68), and Reading (31–67). Unlike the CBT, the score of the Writing component (referred to as the Test of Written English, TWE) is not part of the final score; instead, it is reported separately on a scale of 0–6.

The score test takers receive on the Listening, Structure and Reading parts of the TOEFL test is not the percentage of correct answers. The score is converted to take into account the fact that some tests are more difficult than others. The converted scores correct these differences. Therefore, the converted score is a more accurate reflection of the ability than the raw score is.

Linking TOEFL iBT Score Ranges to IELTS Scores

IELTS Score	TOEFL Score	IELTS Description
9	118-120	Expert User
8.5	115-117	Very Good User
8	110-114	
7.5	102-109	Good User
7	94-101	
6.5	79-93	Competent User
6	60-78	
5.5	42-59	Modest User

5	35-41	
4.5	32-34	Limited User
0-4	0-31	Extremely Limited/Intermittent/Non User

