

BE A SMART TEST TAKER

In this chapter, we will cover techniques for getting the best scores in each section. However, let's first go over some general advice.

Things to be aware of:

Basic Computer Skills are a must. This test is Internet-based, both parts of the Writing section will require you to type your responses on an American style (QWERTY) keyboard, and because the Speaking section requires voice recording.

Note-Taking is an invaluable asset you can use to your advantage on every section of the test. You will be given scratch paper and pencil to use during the test.

No Pre-Reading Answer Choices in the Listening section: While some other tests allow you to read answer choices before hearing the question, on the TOEFL iBT you will only see the question and answer choices after both the lecture and the question have been given. This means there will be few ways of determining what kinds of questions will follow the lecture or conversation. On the bright side, you are only timed after these answer choices appear.

One-Time Listening Only to lectures, dialogues, and questions.

Your Pronunciation Will Be Scored. Since you will be graded on the clarity of your skills, correct pronunciation will also factor into the Speaking score. Rest assured: TOEFL graders do not expect you to have a perfect American or British accent; they are just looking for pronunciation errors that cloud meaning and obscure rationale.

Sitting in Front of the Computer Screen for Four Hours is a challenge you must be prepared to meet.

Get Used to Wearing Headphones: With the iBT TOEFL, the only section of the test that does not require headphones is the Reading section. That leaves 3 hours of keeping the headphones on your head. Make sure the headphones fit comfortably before you begin!

SMART READING

Breakdown

Time	Tasks	The Challenges
• 60-100 minutes	• 3-5 passages each followed by 12-14 questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrating on the questions • Staying within the section time limit • Mental fatigue from section length

The Reading Section is usually a 60- to 100-minute section, composed of three to five passages with 12 to 14 questions each. The passages vary in length, and are usually between 600 and 750 words long. The subject matter most commonly found in the Reading passages fits into three categories: Science, Humanities, and Social Sciences. It might not surprise you to discover that the average test taker improves the most on the Reading Section after preparing for it with classroom instruction and practice.

Timing and fatigue make the Reading section difficult. Many test takers are unable to complete this section in the allotted time. They spend so much time trying to understand every aspect of the passage when they read it the first time that they are left with insufficient time to complete all the questions. Mental fatigue can decrease your concentration, making it difficult to understand the passages and answer the questions. Focusing on the computer for the entire hour-long section (and sometimes even longer!) tends to tire both the eyes and the brain.

Smart tips:

- Look for the general ideas in the text when you read through the first time; ignore the details. It is impossible to remember everything during the first read-through. Also, the questions will allow you to go back and read in more detail. Just skim through the text, but read the introduction very carefully.
- Read for location and follow the flow of ideas. When you do read through, try and remember the main points in each paragraph. Take down quick notes on your scratch paper and identify the arguments and examples.
- Anticipate the questions. There are four main types of questions: general, specific information, inference, and interactive questions.
- Use the process of error identification. Some answers are traps and have been included to attract you on purpose.
- If you are unable to find the right answer, use your common sense and guess. This can only increase your odds.

SMART LISTENING

Breakdown

Time	Tasks	The Challenges
• 60-90 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-6 lectures each followed by 6 questions; • 2-3 dialogues each followed by 5 questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentrating on the lectures • Recognizing technical words and processes • Mental fatigue from section length

The Listening section is the second multiple-choice section of the TOEFL. It accounts for one-fourth of your total TOEFL score and is designed to give you "an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to understand spoken English". The type of spoken English tested in this section is quite specific. You will hear material based on typical subjects you would encounter if you were a student at a North American college or university. The particular expressions, grammatical constructions, and "university vocabulary" which are tested in this section may seem very different from the Queen's English! Don't be discouraged if you have not had much experience communicating with North American college students. Remember, the TOEFL is a standardized test with a limited number of testing points. While you cannot be sure of the specific topics you will be given the day of your TOEFL exam, you can be sure that you will be tested on those that pertain to an American university.

Smart tips:

- Listen for information: The narrator at the beginning of the lecture or conversation sets the scene. It will help you understand better.
- Anticipate the questions. Whilst listening, you should write down key words and ideas that you think you might get asked about. The questions will be about general information, specific information, or inference.
- Anticipate the answers. You will only see the answers after you have heard the question, so try to develop a general idea of the answer as you hear the question.
- Use the process of error identification. Answers are designed to be tempting, so make sure you pick the right answer for the right reason and not because it is obvious.
- If you cannot find the right answer, guess.

SMART SPEAKING

Breakdown

Time	Tasks	The Challenges
• 20 minutes	• 2 Independent Tasks • 4 Integrated Tasks	• Rapidly constructing precise responses • Identifying and conveying key information • Developing ideas and supporting arguments • Speaking into a microphone on a computer

The Speaking section is designed to measure your ability to speak in an academic environment. You will record your oral answers by speaking into a microphone attached to the headset provided by the test center. The speaking section is composed of six tasks, of two sorts: independent and integrated.

Independent Speaking tasks: You will receive two of these tasks on the exam. These tasks ask you to answer a question on some familiar topic, supporting your response with examples from your personal experience. No outside knowledge is required for these tasks. However, timing restrictions and the lack of specific subject matter can make these tasks difficult to prepare for.

Integrated Speaking tasks: There are four Integrated Speaking tasks on the iBT TOEFL. These tasks will require you to read a passage and/or listen to a lecture or conversation and answer a question on a related topic. One of the tasks will involve a campus-related situation to which you will be required to react, and the other will treat an academic subject you will be asked to analyze.

The entire Speaking section lasts approximately 20 minutes. You will be scored based on the clarity and precision of your response.

Smart tips:

- Take detailed notes, especially for the integrated tasks. These will help you construct a good answer in a short time.
- Analyze the question. You must show that you have understood the question properly. On integrated tasks there are two parts to the response. Make sure you answer both.
- Carefully plan your response. You have 15 seconds to do this, so practice prior to the test will help you.

- Give a confident response. Do not be too hesitant, as this will count against you. Practice recording at home into the computer and listen to yourself. This is an excellent way to improve.

SMART WRITING

Breakdown

Time	Tasks	The Challenges
• 50 minutes	• 1 Independent Task • 1 Integrated Task	• Using an easy-to-follow structure • Constructing clear sentences, paragraphs, etc. • Developing ideas and supporting arguments

The Writing section is included in the exam to test your general writing skills, your ability to develop an argument, and overall presentation. The section itself consists of two tasks:

Independent Writing task: For this task, you will be asked to write a 200- to 300-word essay based on your experience; no special knowledge or information will be necessary. You will be given 30 minutes to plan and write your essay.

Integrated Writing task: This type of task is one of the sections introduced by the iBT TOEFL. For the Integrated Writing Task, you will be given three minutes to read a passage of 250-275 words on an academic subject, then you will listen to a lecture lasting around two minutes, and finally you will be asked a question based on what you have read and heard. You will be given 20 minutes to formulate and write your response.

Smart tips:

- Make sure you understand the question.
- Brainstorm and come up with as many ideas as possible.
- Make a plan for the introduction, the body, and the conclusion.
- Write the introduction and make the purpose of your essay clear. State the topic in the introduction.
- In each section use as many examples as possible to illustrate your essay and make it lively. Do not be afraid of using personal examples.
- In the integrated task, take notes while listening to the lecture. You won't be able to listen again. But you will be able to go back and read the information on the screen. Make sure you answer each part of the question.

Now all that you have to do is to start practicing. Remember, it is not just about taking a test; it is about preparing yourself for a wonderful time in an American university and getting the most out of it. Good luck!