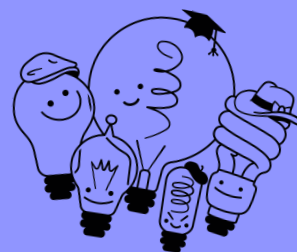




TOEFL® Research INSIGHTS

**Information for TOEFL iBT®
Score Users, Teachers,
and Learners**

VOLUME 5



TOEFL® Research Insight Series, Volume 5: Information for TOEFL iBT® Score Users, Teachers, and Learners

Preface

The TOEFL iBT® test is the world's most widely respected English language assessment, used for admissions purposes in more than 150 countries, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States (see test review in Alderson, 2009). Since its initial launch in 1964, the TOEFL® test has undergone several major revisions motivated by advances in theories of language ability and changes in English teaching practices. The most recent revision, the TOEFL iBT test, was launched in 2005. It contains a number of innovative design features, including integrated tasks that engage multiple skills to simulate language use in academic settings and test materials that reflect the reading, listening, speaking, and writing demands of real-world academic environments.

In addition to the TOEFL iBT test, the TOEFL® Family of Assessments was expanded to provide high-quality, English proficiency assessments for a variety of academic uses and contexts. The TOEFL® Young Students Series (YSS) features the TOEFL Primary® and TOEFL Junior® tests, which are designed to help teachers and learners of English in school settings. In addition, the TOEFL ITP® program offers colleges, universities, and others affordable tests for placement and progress monitoring within English programs as a pathway to eventual degree programs. The TOEFL Essentials test evaluates the four language skills in a friendly test format, with short, engaging tasks that relate to both academic situations and everyday life.

At ETS, we understand that scores from the TOEFL Family of Assessments are used to help make important decisions about students, and we would like to keep score users and test takers up to date about the research results that help assure the quality of these scores. Through the TOEFL® Research Insight Series, we provide institutions and English teachers with information regarding the strong research and development base that underlies the TOEFL Family of Assessments, and demonstrates our continued commitment to research.

Since the 1970s, the TOEFL test has had a rigorous, productive, and far-ranging research program. But why should test score users care about the research base for a test? In short, it is only through a rigorous program of research that a testing company can substantiate claims about what test takers know or can do based on their test scores, as well as provide support for the intended uses of assessments and minimize potential negative consequences of score use. Beyond demonstrating this critical evidence of test quality, research is also important for enabling innovations in test design and addressing the needs of test takers and test score users. This is why ETS has established a strong research base as a fundamental feature underlying the evolution of the TOEFL Family of Assessments.

This TOEFL Family of Assessments is designed, produced, and supported by a world-class team of test developers, educational measurement specialists, statisticians, and researchers in applied linguistics and language testing. Our test developers have advanced degrees in fields such as English, language education, and applied linguistics. They also possess extensive international experience, having taught English on continents around the globe. Our research, measurement, and statistics teams include some of the world's most distinguished scientists and internationally recognized leaders in diverse areas such as test validity, language learning and assessment, and educational measurement.

To date, more than 300 peer-reviewed TOEFL Family of Assessments research reports, technical reports, and monographs have been published by ETS, and many more studies on the TOEFL tests have appeared in academic journals and book volumes. In addition, over 20 TOEFL test-related research projects are conducted by ETS's Research & Development staff each year and the TOEFL Committee of Examiners, comprised of language learning and testing experts from the global academic community, funds an annual program of TOEFL Family research by independent external researchers from all over the world.

The purpose of the *TOEFL Research Insight Series* is to provide a comprehensive yet user-friendly account of the essential concepts, procedures, and research results that help ensure the quality of scores for all members of the TOEFL Family of Assessments. Topics covered in these volumes feature issues of core interest to test users, including how tests were designed; evidence for the reliability, validity and fairness of test scores; and research-based recommendations for best practices.

The close collaboration with TOEFL score users, English language learning and teaching experts, and university scholars in the design of all TOEFL tests has been a cornerstone to their success and worldwide acceptance. Therefore, through this publication, we hope to foster an ever-stronger connection with our test users by sharing the rigorous measurement and research base and solid test development that continues to help ensure the quality of the TOEFL Family of Assessments.

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Information for TOEFL iBT® Score Users, Teachers, and Learners

This volume of the TOEFL Research Insight Series will discuss how TOEFL iBT scores and related services can be used by institutions, organizations, and agencies to help recruit and select applicants with the English language proficiency needed to be successful. It will also discuss resources available to English language teachers who want to help students improve their English language communication skills, as well as English learners who are preparing for the TOEFL iBT test.

The primary use of TOEFL iBT scores is to evaluate the English language proficiency of applicants for graduate and undergraduate programs where English is the language of instruction.

TOEFL iBT scores are reported on a score scale of 0–30 for each of the four language skills—reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The total score is reported on a scale of 0–120, which is the sum of the four section scores. The test taker score report includes scores and performance feedback for each skill available on the TOEFL website. The feedback allows test takers to focus on those skills that need improvement.

Because the TOEFL iBT test focuses on an individual's ability to communicate in English using all four language skills—reading, listening, speaking and writing—it can help score users identify applicants who have the English language skills necessary to be successful in their programs. More than 13,000 institutions, agencies, and organizations in more than 160 countries use TOEFL scores to evaluate English language proficiency. A searchable list of official TOEFL destinations is available on the TOEFL website at www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/where-to-study/destinations-search. This frequently used list is another way students can find their preferred institutions and their TOEFL score requirements.

For Score Users

A valid and reliable assessment of a person's English language proficiency in an academic setting is critical in providing higher-education institutions with the information they need to evaluate an applicant's ability to be successful in their programs. The TOEFL iBT test is the most widely available academic English language assessment in the world. It is offered almost anywhere in the world, with testing available in more than 200 countries and territories. Availability of TOEFL iBT Home Edition and test centers for in-person testing is available on the TOEFL website at www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/where-to-test/country-list. The test development, delivery, scoring, and supporting research help ensure that scores are valid and reliable for all test takers, allowing institutions to evaluate a diverse pool of applicants.

ETS does not set passing or failing scores for the TOEFL iBT test. Instead, individual score users set score requirements that will help them recruit and select applicants whose English language proficiency meets their standards. Some score users will set a total score requirement only, while others may set requirements for one or more of the skill sections in addition to or in place of a total score.

ETS encourages institutions to consider whether, in addition to a total score, a minimum requirement in one or more of the section scores would be appropriate for specific programs. For example, many MBA programs emphasize oral proficiency, as students are required to interact frequently in class, engage in group work, and make presentations. If speaking ability is important for success in a program, setting a minimum score requirement for that skill may be valuable. Two applicants with the same total score may have very different abilities in the four different language skills, which would make one applicant a more suitable candidate than another. Establishing section score requirements helps ensure that individuals have the profile of English language abilities that matches the needs of the institution or program. Therefore, institutions are encouraged to review section scores as part of the admissions process, even if there are no section score requirements. Institutions should also consider other sources of information beyond TOEFL iBT test scores when making admissions decisions, because English proficiency is only one of many factors that play a part in the success of non-native speaking students. Another volume in the TOEFL Research Insight series discusses resources for setting score requirements in greater detail (Educational Testing Service, 2020).

The test development, delivery, scoring, and supporting research ensure that scores are valid and reliable for all test takers, providing a means of evaluating individuals worldwide on the same scale. This allows institutions to evaluate a diverse pool

Guidelines for Appropriate Score Use

ETS encourages institutions to observe the following guidelines for appropriate score use:

1. TOEFL scores measure English language proficiency at a particular point in time. Proficiency may improve or decrease based on the amount of study and exposure to the language following the test date. For this reason, TOEFL scores are only verified for 2 years, and we encourage score recipients to only accept scores that are no more than 2 years old.
2. Consider all relevant information related to English proficiency when evaluating applications, not only TOEFL scores.
3. TOEFL test scores can be used in a complementary way with other standardized tests such as the SAT® and GRE® tests, as they provide different but complementary information about the applicant.
4. Whenever possible, use score ranges instead of rigid cut scores; score ranges provide more flexibility in selecting qualified applicants for admission.
5. Establishing requirements for one or more TOEFL section scores, not just the total score, can help you differentiate between applicants and better meet your program's needs. Even if specific section scores are not required, we encourage institutions to review them during the admissions process.
6. Think about the kinds and levels of English language proficiency required in various fields and levels of study, and what level of proficiency your program may need.
7. Evaluate the validity of your admissions criteria by performing a validity study. Gather validity evidence for your use(s) of total or section scores.
8. Make your score requirements work for you. Review them on a regular basis and make adjustments as needed.
9. Avoid setting score requirements so high that you eliminate qualified applicants, or so low that your applicants will not be successful.
10. Institutions offering English as a second language (ESL) support may have more flexibility in accepting applicants with lower language proficiency.

Using TOEFL iBT Scores to Select International Teaching Assistants

In some countries, TOEFL iBT test scores are used to screen and select international teaching assistants (ITAs). Research presented in another volume in the TOEFL Research Insight Series (Educational Testing Service 2021) suggests that scores from the TOEFL iBT Speaking section can facilitate initial screening of ITAs to determine whether they have the necessary English language proficiency to assist in teaching students at the university level.

Receiving TOEFL Scores

The TOEFL program makes it easy to digitally receive official score reports directly from ETS through a secure online portal, designed to integrate effortlessly with common customer relationship management (CRM) platforms, or access data through automated server-to-server feeds.

Paper Score Reports

Featuring the ETS Security Guard, a special heat-sensitive ink that, when activated, verifies the report's authenticity, paper score reports are mailed to institutions twice a week. Test takers should allow 7–10 days for mail delivery within the United States and 4–6 weeks for other locations.

For more information on receiving TOEFL scores, visit <https://www.ets.org/toefl/institutions/ibt/report-scores.html>.

Resources

ETS provides a variety of resources to help score users set and review their TOEFL score requirements: TOEFL iBT score comparison information, TOEFL test and score data summaries, , and TOEFL® Destination Search.

TOEFL iBT Score Comparison

The TOEFL iBT score comparisons aim to give institutions the information they need to make the best admissions decisions. ETS has conducted research to make it easier for to compare TOEFL iBT scores to the IELTS® Academic module.

The score comparison tables were based on research conducted comparing the TOEFL iBT test and the IELTS Academic test. For this research, ETS obtained a sample of 1,153 students who had both IELTS and TOEFL scores. Under this approach, TOEFL iBT score ranges were identified for test takers meeting a particular score level on the equivalent IELTS score band. The score comparison results for each section (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing) and the total test scores showed that most of the students in the sample scored in the middle to mid-high score ranges on both tests.

The full report is available on our website at <https://www.ets.org/toefl/comparescores>.

TOEFL iBT Score Mapping to the Common European Framework of Reference

TOEFL iBT score mapping to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been conducted by ETS researchers. Scores are mapped at both the total and section levels and can be found on the TOEFL website at <https://www.ets.org/toefl/comparescores>. The research publication *The Association Between TOEFL iBT Test Scores and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) Levels* is also available on the website. Another volume in the TOEFL Research Insight series documents the score mapping of all TOEFL tests onto the CEFR levels, include mapping to CEFR C2 level for the TOEFL iBT test (Educational Testing Service, 2023).

TOEFL Test and Score Data Summary

The TOEFL Test and Score Data Summary is an annual report published by ETS that provides score means and percentile data on the performance of TOEFL iBT test takers during the previous calendar year. Data are available for a variety of criteria, including total and section scores, reason for taking the test, gender, native language, and native country. The most recent version can be found at www.ets.org/toefl/teachers-advisors-agents/ibt/resources.

TOEFL® Destination Search

The TOEFL Destination Search (www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/where-to-study/destinations-search.html) lists an institution's name, TOEFL code number, score requirements, and a link to the institution's website. The directory allows students to search for institutions accepting TOEFL scores by location or institution name. Score users may wish to consider using the tool to review score requirements set by peer institutions when considering their own requirements.

For English Language Teachers and Learners

The goal of English language instruction is to help learners use English to perform tasks and to communicate effectively. For university study or for other educational or professional endeavors, the ability to communicate in English is a key element of success. English language teachers are a primary resource to help students build a foundation and learn to perform tasks and communicate in English.

There is no specific length of time or English language course that will ensure an improvement in a person's English proficiency. To help students improve their English language skills, it is important for them to use English as much as possible. This can include such activities as listening to English language programs on the radio, TV, or internet; reading newspapers, magazine articles, and books written in English and writing summaries of what has been read; and reading aloud in class and discussing topics in English. The more students practice their communication skills under the guidance of an English language teacher, the more likely their English language skills will improve.

Resources for Teachers

ETS has developed a number of resources to supplement the curriculum for teachers of English as a second or a foreign language. While some are aimed specifically at preparation for the TOEFL test, other products are available to help teachers develop an effective English language curriculum.

To help students prepare for the TOEFL iBT test, we recommend that teachers become familiar with the test. There are sample questions from the TOEFL iBT test on the TOEFL website at <https://www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/prepare/sample-test.html>. Teachers may also want to create a TOEFL TestReady account at www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/prepare/toefl-testready to experience the actual testing process through a free practice test. In addition to looking at the sample questions, it can be helpful for teachers to become familiar with the scoring guidelines (rubrics) that are used by TOEFL raters to score the Speaking and Writing sections. The rubrics for the Speaking and Writing tasks can be viewed at the ETS website (<https://www.ets.org/toefl/teachers-advisors-agents/ibt/scores>).

English language teachers should also encourage students to share their TOEFL score reports with them, so they can review the section scores and associated performance feedback. It is important for teachers to look not only at the total score, but also at the four section scores, to help identify areas of strength and weakness for each particular student. This is helpful in directing students to exercises that focus on the particular skills that need improvement.

The Teaching TOEFL iBT Skills workshop (formerly Propell® workshop for the TOEFL iBT test) is a 1-day professional development program designed to help English language teachers meet the challenges of teaching English to students. The workshop uses examples from the Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing sections of the TOEFL iBT test. It also provides instructional techniques and strategies for using the integrated-skills approach to teaching language and for preparing students for success. The TOEFL website provides additional resources to support the professional development of teachers (<https://www.ets.org/toefl/teachers-advisors-agents/ibt/teaching/teacher-development>)

ETS has also created tools to measure student progress and identify areas for improvement:

- TOEFL ITP Assessment Series Program: These tests provide a flexible and reliable way to assess student proficiency, to conduct student placement, or to evaluate the effectiveness of your English language learning program. The TOEFL ITP tests contain reading, listening, and structure and written expression items, with speaking offered as a separate test component. Institutions can choose who they want to test and when for an affordable price. Note that TOEFL ITP scores should not be used for university admissions purposes in the same way TOEFL iBT scores are used.
- Criterion® Online Writing Evaluation Service: This is a web-based instructional tool that helps students plan, write, and revise essays and provides instant scoring and annotated diagnostic feedback.

Resources for Learners

ETS has products that provide hands-on, targeted instruction to familiarize students with the format and types of questions on the TOEFL iBT test.

The following free materials are available to learners online:

- TOEFL Test Preparation: The Insider's Guide, the TOEFL® MOOC massive open online course (MOOC), is a free 6-week course developed by the experts who create, administer, and score the TOEFL test to help English learners improve their skills. Register at <https://www.edx.org/course/toeflr-test-preparation-insiders-guide-etsx-toeflx-4>.
- TOEFL® TestReady™ combines test preparation offerings with exclusive features and deeper insights to enhance students' English communication skills. All feedback, recommendations, personalized insights and tips are developed by the same teams that write and produce the TOEFL iBT test. Students should create a TOEFL TestReady account to the resources to help them prepare for the TOEFL iBT test (www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/prepare/toefl-testready).
- TOEFL iBT Free Practice Test, available through TOEFL TestReady can help students become familiar with the types of questions and content on the actual test and understand how the TOEFL iBT test is structured and formatted. The Official Guide to the TOEFL Test, available through TOEFL TestReady, is a best-selling guide developed by ETS with real test questions, practice exercises, and hundreds of valuable test preparation tips. The guide is available through TOEFL TestReady.
- The Official TOEFL iBT Tests, Volumes 1 and 2, available through TOEFL TestReady, offer additional TOEFL tests for practice with real reading, listening, speaking, and writing questions.
- The TOEFL Test Prep Planner is a free 8-week planner that helps students set weekly practice goals and stay on track with tips and tasks for the weeks leading up to test day. The planner helps students understand how to prepare for the test effectively and build the English skills needed for success. The planner can be downloaded at https://www.ets.org/toefl/ibt/prepare/test_prep_planner/.
- TOEFL TV Channel on YouTube® is the official YouTube channel of the TOEFL test and offers videos containing advice from English teachers, TOEFL test experts, and students to help learners improve their English skills and prepare for the test. Visit the TOEFL TV channel at <https://www.youtube.com/toeflty>.
- Students can also find the TOEFL test on a wide range of social media, including WeChat®, Instagram®, Facebook®, YouTube®, TikTok®, LinkedIn®, Weibo®, Zhihu®, and Naver® to prepare for the test, interact with other English learners, and receive special offers.

- Students can connect with independent tutors at Preply® who have been trained to teach the kind of academic English that appears on the TOEFL iBT test <https://www.ets.org/toefl/test-takers/ibt/prepare/tutors.html>

After taking the TOEFL iBT test, test takers receive enhanced score reporting with personalized feedback and performance insights to help with future studying efforts. Enhanced score reporting includes:

- Proficiency level for each section of the test.
- Feedback on Reading and Listening question types
- Insights into language use, grammar, mechanics and other aspects of language production in the Speaking and Writing test sections.
- Sample high-scoring Speaking and Writing responses with explanations to help test takers practice and improve.

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