



What is the TOEFL?

The TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is the most commonly required English test to apply to U.S. universities. Anybody who doesn't speak English as a native language and wants to apply to an American school will probably need to take the TOEFL. (Note that [some universities make exemptions](#) for specific countries that use English as an official language.)

Although there is also a [paper-based TOEFL](#), the most common form is the IBT (internet-based test), which is taken completely on a computer. It is offered regularly at special testing centers around the world.

What does the TOEFL cover, and how is it scored?

The TOEFL IBT is made up of four sections, each scored from 0 to 30 points: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Admission offices usually state their [score requirements](#) on their websites, but most programs require 70+, 80+, 90+, or 100+. If you have to take the TOEFL, your first step is to find your target score.

Reading

Within those four sections, two of them are made of multiple choice questions: reading and listening. In the [TOEFL reading](#) section, you have to read three or four academic passages, each about 700 words long, and answer 12 to 14 questions on each. The passages are similar to material you would read in college classes, but they're about a wide variety of topics that may be new to you. You might read about the skeletons of swimming dinosaurs, the uses of iron in second-century China, or any other random academic topic. Meanwhile, the questions don't require much analytical thought, the way GRE, GMAT, and SAT questions do—those other tests are created to measure the logical abilities of native speakers, but the TOEFL is made to measure English communication alone. Timing, by the way, is extremely important for the TOEFL reading section. You only have 20 minutes for each passage and question set, and many students have trouble with this.

Listening

[TOEFL listening](#) is pretty similar to reading. You hear either a conversation or an academic lecture about a topic similar to the topic in the reading section. The recordings are short, at just a few minutes each, but there's a lot of information in them and you can only listen once before you see the five or six multiple choice questions. That means you must rely on notes and memory. If you don't remember a detail from a lecture, and it's not in your notes, but you see a question about that detail, you may get a wrong answer. Notes and staying focused during the recordings are the most common difficulties with the listening section.

Speaking

The [TOEFL speaking](#) section is one of the most unique parts of the test and is unlike anything in other English tests. You don't actually speak to a person. Instead, you have six tasks that you must complete by speaking into a microphone. The first two are simple questions about your life and opinions, but the next two are each about a text and a recording, and the final two are about recordings alone. So although the section is called "speaking," it also tests reading and listening skills. And since there is no specific grammar evaluation on the TOEFL, your spoken grammar is quite important.

Writing

Finally, the last section of the test is made up of two essays written using a [QWERTY keyboard](#). The first one, similar to a speaking task, requires you to read and listen before writing a summary. The second essay is about your opinions, not about other material. Again, grammar is important for both essays. But in general, [TOEFL writing](#) is somewhat similar to the writing assignments on other tests, such as the GRE or SAT. But as I mentioned earlier, the TOEFL IBT isn't focused on your logic. The most important aspect of TOEFL essays is *communication*