

TOEFL iBT SPEAKING

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Test Reviewed: TOEFL iBT Speaking Section

Language Assessed by this Test: English

Intended Purpose and Audience: The intended purpose of this assessment is to assess test taker's abilities to effectively communicate in an academic environment. The test takers are non-native English speakers who intend to study at English speaking universities.

Ordering Information: Test takers register for the test online at <https://www.ets.org/toefl/ibt/register/>, by phone, mail and/or in person. It costs between \$160 and \$250 U.S. dollars, however prices vary by country. ETS accepts credit/debit cards, e-checks, paypal or paper check payments. On the test day, learners report to the test center they registered for. These centers are equipped with computers, headsets and microphones.

Description of the Test: TOEFL iBT speaking has six spoken tasks. There are 2 independent tasks and 4 integrated tasks. The integrated tasks require test takers to read a passage, listen to a passage/excerpt and orally respond to the prompt. They have 15 seconds to prepare their responses and 45 seconds to respond. Similarly the integrated tasks allocate 20 – 30 seconds for preparation and 45 – 60 seconds for responses. (See *Table 1* for specific details). Note taking is permitted. It takes 20 minutes to complete the 6 tasks.

Evaluation of the Test: The TOEFL iBT is a norm-referenced test that has developed from the pBT, cBT to the iBT. Institutions use the test's scores to measure potential students' proficiency. To produce reliable and valid data, ETS (a) promotes positive washback by publishing student guides, practice tests, and maintaining an informative website; (b) ensures inter-rater reliability as 3 - 6 raters score the speaking tasks using an integrated or independent scoring rubric; (c) uses multimedia (images/audio/written) directions and permits note taking for bias for the best and; (d) continuously evaluates the tools and methods used for scoring the test.

Despite TOEFL iBT's development and ongoing research, there are still reliability and validity problems. There are concerns regarding: (a) inconsistencies amongst human raters (b) doubts in the holistic scoring method, (c) reported aggregate scores rather than individual task scores, (c) effects of speaking to a computer for bias for the best and, (c) negative washback from memorize chunks (e.g. for example, first, second etc etc).

Although studies have shown that the TOEFL iBT speaking scores are valid and reliable measures of learners' abilities to interact and communicate at English speaking universities (Sawaki & Sinharay, 2013), I still question its reliability and validity. Regardless, I believe it is a relatively fair test that is useful for institutions gauging learner's proficiency levels.

Table 1

TOEFL iBT Test Description

Task	Topic	Learner's Task	Learner's Spoken Response
<i>Independent</i>			
(1)	Personal Preference Preparation time: 15 seconds Response time: 45 seconds	Understand the prompt	Express and defend a personal choice from a given category (important people, places, events or activities)
(2)	Choice Preparation time: 15 seconds Response time: 45 seconds	Understand the prompt	Defend a personal choice between two contrasting behaviors or courses of action
<i>Integrated</i>			
(1)	Campus Situation: <i>Fit & Explain</i> Preparation time: 30 seconds Response time: 60 seconds	(a) Read a passage on a campus related issue & (b) Listen to a passage on the issue	Summarize the speakers' opinion within context of the reading passage
(2)	Academic Course <i>General</i> Preparation time: 30 seconds Response time: 60 seconds	(a) Read a passage on describing an academic subjects' term, process or idea & (b) Listen to a expert that describes examples of the term, process or idea	Combine and convey information from the reading and listening passages
(3)	Campus Situation <i>Problem/Solution</i> Preparation time: 20 seconds Response time: 60 seconds	Listen to a conversation on a student-related problem and solutions	Provide an opinion about solving the problem
(4)	Academic Course <i>Summary</i> Preparation time: 20 seconds Response time: 60 seconds	Listen to a lecture that explains and gives examples of a term/concept	Summarize the lecture demonstrating the relationship between the examples and topic

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¹ Sawaki, Y., & Sinharay, S. (2013). Investigating the value of section scores for the TOEFL iBT test. Princeton, NJ: E.