



Noteworthy Features of the TOEFL ITP® Speaking Test

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Overall design

The TOEFL ITP Speaking Test consists of four tasks that enable students to show what they can do in spoken English. Within a total of 15 minutes, test takers read a passage aloud, speak about familiar topics, and offer their opinion about an issue overheard in a conversation. These tasks represent the kinds of speaking students need to do in English-medium university settings, and the topics covered in the tasks are reflective of typical social and navigational uses for English at university. A student's performance on the TOEFL ITP Speaking Test gives teachers and other test users a very good idea about what the student is able to do in English.

Test tasks

The four test tasks on the TOEFL ITP Speaking Test differ in relative challenge presented to test takers as well as the aspects of English ability called upon in performance. In order to maximize each test-taker's possibility of success, the tasks are all carefully introduced, and they all have time for planning before speaking.

In the first task, test takers read a written announcement aloud. This task was designed to make sure that even learners with relatively lower levels of English proficiency would be able to experience task success. It also emphasizes the importance of speaking English intelligibly, that is, with effective word-level pronunciation as well as sentence-level fluency, intonation, and stress patterns. These features of English speaking ability also underlie successful performance on the other test tasks.

The second and third tasks require test takers to speak about topics that are familiar to them by having them express opinions and preferences or give advice and make recommendations. While these tasks are accessible to even lower proficiency learners, they are also designed to allow test takers to demonstrate what they are capable of doing when talking about familiar topics. Success on these tasks emphasizes clarity of speech, effective use of grammar and vocabulary, and coherence of expression.

The fourth task is the most challenging. It requires test takers to first listen to and understand the ideas expressed by two speakers having a conversation. The test taker then has to state a particular point of view or opinion on the issue being discussed, providing a convincing argument that is supported by details and examples. For this task, success depends on the test taker utilizing all available English language knowledge and skills to present a convincing and coherent point of view. This task represents many similar task types that are highly characteristic of speaking in the university academic setting.

Scoring

Performances on the TOEFL ITP Speaking Test are scored automatically using proprietary ETS AI speech scoring technology. This technology has been developed over many years of innovation and research, the result of which is a fine-tuned approach to scoring spoken English with accuracy and reliability. For each task, a

test-taker's recorded response is first processed by speech detection technology and then measured for a variety of language features that are expected in the performance. These features are based on scoring rubrics used by human raters, and they include aspects of spoken delivery (e.g., fluency, pronunciation, and intonation), language use (e.g., grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range), and topic coverage (e.g., organization and coherence of the response). The use of automated scoring allows for test scores to be calculated immediately following the test.

Score interpretation

TOEFL ITP Speaking Test scores are reported on a unique and specific score scale that reflects a broad range of English speaking ability, from relatively beginning to advanced levels. As such, test scores are particularly useful for monitoring progress in students' development of speaking skills over time and as a result of language instruction programs. They can also indicate when a student is most likely ready to perform well on the speaking section of the TOEFL iBT test. To help facilitate meaningful score interpretation, TOEFL ITP Speaking Test scores have been scientifically mapped by ETS researchers to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR scale. Test score bands are associated with levels A2, B1, B2, and C1 on the CEFR, providing ample range for assessing the speaking abilities of most university-level English learners. ETS researchers have also created a table of score descriptors which provide detailed explanations of what test takers are able to do at each of the four CEFR levels, based on the different features of speaking ability measured on the test. These score descriptors are a useful resource for helping guide English language learners and teachers toward meaningful learning objectives.

Test preparation

The best approach to preparing for the TOEFL ITP Speaking Test is for students to develop confidence and competence in their overall English speaking ability. Teaching and learning activities should focus on regular and frequent opportunities for students to practice speaking English for a real and meaningful communication purpose. Working on tasks like those featured on the test, as well as similar speaking tasks encountered in academic settings, will help students become familiar and comfortable with the demands of the test. While practicing such communication tasks, it is also important to help learners focus on and improve specific aspects of their speaking ability, including the intelligibility of their pronunciation and intonation, spoken fluency, grammatical accuracy, syntactic variety, and vocabulary range and sophistication, among other features. Overall, the goal should be speech that is highly intelligible and clearly delivered, and that coherently addresses a given topic.