

Reading

TOEFL iBT

The Reading section and its clock

About **30 minutes**, about **50 items**. That is much faster than the old test, and the items are shorter — so the skill being tested is not endurance 耐力 any more. It is speed with accuracy.

- Three kinds of task appear: **Complete the Words**, **Read in Daily Life** and **Read an Academic Passage**. The first two are new in 2026.
- The section is **adaptive**, so the passages you see depend on how you are doing. Do not try to read the difficulty of the test as a sign of how you are performing.
- You cannot go back to a section once you have left it. Answer every item as you meet it.

△ There is no penalty 扣分 for a wrong answer. An item left blank scores exactly what a wrong answer scores: nothing. **Never leave an item empty.**

Complete the Words

A short text with letters or whole words missing, which you supply.

- This is a test of **grammar** and **vocabulary** 词汇, not of finding information. You are not hunting through a passage; you are asking “what word belongs here?”
- Use the sentence around the gap. The word class 词性 is usually decided before the meaning is: after *the* you need a noun, after *very* an adjective, after *to* a base verb.
- **Spelling counts.** A word with a letter missing is a wrong word.
- Read the completed sentence back to yourself. If it does not sound like English, it is not.

Read in Daily Life

Emails, notices 通知, timetables, advertisements and other short practical texts.

- The question is almost always **what should the reader DO** — or what has changed, or what is not allowed.
- Practical texts hide their key information in small places: a date, a room number, a word like *except, unless, only, from Monday*. Those words carry the answer far more often than the long sentences around them.

- Watch the **register** 语域. An email from a tutor is polite and indirect: "you may wish to consider" means *do this*. "It would be helpful if you could" is an instruction, not a comment.
- △ A daily-life text is short, so students read it too fast and answer from memory of a similar text. Read the one in front of you.

Read an Academic Passage

A passage from the kind of book a first-year university course would set.

- **Skim** 略读 first, thirty seconds, for the shape: what is this about, how many parts has it, where does the argument turn? Then answer, and scan 扫读 back for each fact.
- The **topic sentence** 主题句 — usually the first sentence of a paragraph — tells you what that paragraph is for. When a question asks which paragraph contains something, you are matching against topic sentences, not reading everything again.
- A question about a word asks what it means **in this passage**, not what it means in general. Answer from the sentence, not from your dictionary memory.
- Guess an unknown word from its **parts**: a prefix 前缀 (*un-*, *re-*, *over-*) and a suffix 后缀 (*-tion*, *-able*, *-ly*) narrow the meaning and fix the word class before you have understood the root at all.
- An **inference** 推理 question asks what the passage lets you conclude, not what it says. The right answer is always supported by a line you could point at. If you cannot point at the line, it is the wrong answer.

What costs Chinese candidates marks

- **Translating while reading.** Turning each sentence into Chinese in your head takes two to three times as long as reading it. At about 30 minutes for 50 items there is no room for it. This is not a habit you can drop on test day; it takes weeks of reading without a dictionary to lose.
- **Subvocalising** 默读出声 — saying each word silently. It caps your speed at speaking speed, around 150 words a minute, when you need double that.
- **Hunting for a word from the question.** The test writes questions in different words on purpose. A synonym 同义词 in the passage is the normal case, not a trick.
- **Perfectionism on one item.** Every item is worth the same. Two minutes spent rescuing one hard item costs you three easy ones later.

Exam tips

- Practise with a **timer** from the first day. Reading well and reading fast are two different skills, and only one of them is trained by reading slowly.
- Read **one academic page and one practical text** every day — a science article and an email, a history page and a noticeboard. The section now asks for both.
- Build vocabulary from the **Academic Word List**, but learn each word in a sentence. A word you have only met on a flashcard is a word you will not recognise inside a line of prose.
- After every practice set, write down **why** each wrong answer was wrong: did you misread the question, miss a word, run out of time, or not know the vocabulary? Four different problems need four different fixes, and only your own list tells you which one you have.
- Format facts in this section were checked on the ETS website on 13 September 2026: TOEFL iBT content and structure.