

Listening

TOEFL iBT

The Listening section and its clock

About **29 minutes**, about **47 items**. Four kinds of task: **Listen and Choose a Response**, **Listen to a Conversation**, **Listen to an Announcement** and **Listen to an Academic Talk**.

- Every recording is played **once**. There is no second chance, and there is no pause button.
- You may take notes 笔记 while you listen, on the paper the test centre gives you.
- The section is **adaptive**, so what you hear depends on how the earlier items went.

△ The single biggest cause of lost marks here is **dwelling** 纠结: a student misses one detail, keeps thinking about it, and misses the next thirty seconds as well. One missed item is one mark. Thirty seconds of not listening is five. **Let it go and stay with the speaker.**

Listen and Choose a Response

You hear one short turn of speech and choose what would naturally come next.

- This is a test of **everyday conversation**, not of academic English. The right answer is the reply a real person would give.
- Listen to the **function** 功能 of what was said, not only the words: was it a request, an offer, a complaint, an apology, a suggestion? The reply has to match the function.
- Intonation 语调 carries meaning here. “You’re coming to the meeting?” with a rising tune is a question; the same words falling are a statement.
- △ An answer that repeats words from the prompt is usually wrong. Natural replies use different words.

Listen to a Conversation, and to an Announcement

- A **conversation** is two speakers, often a student and someone at a university — a tutor, a librarian, an office. Track **who wants what**: one speaker has a problem and the other offers a solution, and most questions sit on that line.
- An **announcement** is one speaker giving practical information: a change of room, a deadline, a procedure. Listen for what has **changed** and what the listener must

do.

- In both, a change of direction is signalled before it happens. *Actually, but, the thing is, having said that, on second thoughts* — a signpost 路标词 tells you the next sentence matters.
- Numbers, dates, room names and prices are exactly the details these tasks ask about. Write them down as you hear them; do not trust your memory for a number.

Listen to an Academic Talk

A lecture-style talk on a study topic, with one main speaker.

- Do not try to write everything. Write the **shape**: the topic, then each new point on its own line, with a dash for the example that supports it. Your notes should look like the talk’s outline, not like its transcript 文字稿.
- Lecturers signal structure: *today I want to look at, there are three reasons, the first of these, which brings me to, so to summarise*. Those phrases are the outline, spoken aloud.
- Listen for the lecturer’s **attitude** 态度 as well as the facts. *Surprisingly, of course, it is often claimed* and a change of tone all tell you what the speaker thinks — and some questions ask exactly that.
- An example is there to support a point. If you catch the example but not the point, you have the less useful half; ask yourself “what is this an example of?”

Training your ear

- **Listen once, like the test.** Practising with replays trains a skill the test does not measure. Play a recording once and answer; only then replay it to see what you missed.
- **Shadowing** 跟读 — playing a sentence and saying it back immediately — is the fastest way to improve both listening and pronunciation, because it forces you to hear the whole sentence, not the words you already know.
- Accents: the test uses speakers from North America and elsewhere. Listen to a range on purpose, not only to the one you find easiest.
- Fifteen focused minutes a day beats two hours on Sunday. Listening is a habit of attention, and attention is trained by frequency.

Exam tips

- Practise **taking notes with your hand while your ears keep working**. Most students can do either but not both, and that is a skill you build in about two weeks.
- Use **abbreviations** you already know: arrows for cause and result, + and -, initials for long names. Inventing a system on test day costs you the first recording.
- If you miss an answer, mark the item, choose the best guess **now**, and move on. There is no penalty 扣分 for a wrong answer and a blank scores the same as a wrong one.
- △ Watch the everyday tasks. Chinese candidates often score well on the academic talk and lose marks on the short conversation, because school listening practice is almost entirely academic.
- Format facts in this section were checked on the ETS website on 13 September 2026: TOEFL iBT content and structure.