

Writing

TOEFL iBT

The Writing section and its clock

About **23 minutes**, about **12 items**, across three kinds of task: **Build a Sentence**, **Write an Email** and **Write for an Academic Discussion**.

- You type everything. There is no handwriting anywhere in the test.
- Twenty-three minutes is short, so there is no time for a long plan — but there is always time for a thirty-second one, and it is the best thirty seconds you will spend.
- △ The old **Integrated Writing** task, where you read a passage, heard a lecture and wrote about both, is **gone** from the 2026 test. If a practice book teaches it, the book is out of date.

Build a Sentence

You assemble or complete a sentence so that it is grammatically correct.

- **Accuracy is the whole point.** Nothing is being measured except whether the sentence is right.
- The traps are the ones Chinese candidates already know: **articles** 冠词 (*a / the / nothing*), **agreement** 主谓一致 (*the data show, each student has*), **tense** 时态 across a sentence, and the preposition 介词 that a particular verb takes (*depend on, consist of, result in*).
- Word order in English is fixed in ways Chinese is not: subject, verb, object; adverbs of frequency before the main verb; adjectives before the noun in a set order.
- Read your finished sentence once, slowly. Most errors here are visible on a second look and invisible on the first.

Write an Email

A short email that does a job: reply to a message, make a request, explain a problem, decline politely.

- Start by deciding **who you are writing to** and **what you want to happen**. Everything else follows from those two answers.
- **Register** 语域 is graded here. To a tutor or an office you are polite and slightly indirect: *I was wondering whether, would it be possible to, I would be grateful if*. To a classmate you are direct and warm.

- A good short email has four moves: **why you are writing, the detail, what you are asking for, a close**. Four sentences can carry all four.
- △ Do not open with *Dear Sir or Madam* when the prompt names the person, and do not sign off *Yours faithfully* in a message to a classmate. Getting the register wrong is more visible than a grammar slip, because it is wrong in every sentence at once.
- Answer **everything the prompt asks**. An email that is beautifully written and leaves out one of two requests has failed at the job the task set.

Write for an Academic Discussion

You are shown a professor's question and two students' replies, and you add your own contribution to the discussion.

- This is the task that most resembles real university work, and it is scored on whether you can **join a conversation**, not on whether you can write an essay.
- A contribution that scores well usually does four things:
 1. **States a position** clearly, in one sentence.
 2. **Gives a reason** for it.
 3. **Supports the reason** with an example, a consequence or a piece of evidence 证据.
 4. **Engages with a classmate** — agreeing and extending, or disagreeing and saying why.
- That fourth move is what separates a good answer from an average one, and it is the one Chinese candidates leave out most often. *I agree with Mei that... but I would add that...* is worth more than another paragraph of your own opinion.
- **Length:** one solid paragraph. You have minutes, not an hour. Write fewer sentences and make each one carry weight.
- △ Do not restate the professor's question before you start. It costs you a quarter of your time and earns nothing: the reader already knows what was asked.

What the marker is actually looking at

Across the writing tasks, four things are judged, and they are the same four that any English marker looks at:

What	What it means here
Task completion 任务完成	you did everything the prompt asked, and nothing it did not
Organisation 结构	a reader can follow your argument without going back
Vocabulary 词汇	precise words, used correctly, not long words used vaguely
Grammar 语法	accurate sentences, with enough variety to be natural

- **A memorised phrase is a risk, not a shortcut.** *With the development of society and every coin has two sides* appear in thousands of scripts and add nothing; a marker reads straight past them and the words you spent on them are gone.
- **Precision beats decoration.** *Cost fell sharply after 2015* says more, and scores better, than *there was a considerable diminution in the pecuniary outlay*.
- **A short correct sentence outranks a long broken one.** Complexity only earns marks when it is accurate.

Exam tips

- **Type in English every day**, not just in practice tests. Typing speed is part of this section whether you like it or not.
- **Plan for thirty seconds** before the Academic Discussion task: position, reason, example, whose comment you will answer. Then write straight through.
- **Leave sixty seconds to read your answer back.** Look for articles, plurals and verb endings — those three account for most of the errors a Chinese candidate makes and can fix.
- Practise writing **to a person**: a tutor, an office, a classmate. An email with no sense of its reader is the commonest weak answer in this section.
- Format facts in this section were checked on the ETS website on 13 September 2026: TOEFL iBT content and structure.