

# Speaking

## TOEFL iBT

### The Speaking section and its clock

About **8 minutes**, about **11 items**, in two kinds of task: **Listen and Repeat** and **Take an Interview**.

- You speak into a microphone 麦克风 at a computer. There is no examiner in the room, and no one reacts to what you say — which is exactly what makes it feel strange the first time.
- △ The old independent and integrated speaking tasks, where you prepared for fifteen seconds and spoke for forty-five, are **gone** from the 2026 test.
- Eight minutes is short. Almost all of your preparation is therefore about **starting quickly**, not about having more to say.

### Listen and Repeat

You hear a sentence and say it back.

- This belongs to **Speaking**, and it is scored on what you say. It is not a listening warm-up.
- You are being heard on **pronunciation** 发音, on **stress** and on whether you reproduce the whole sentence, not on inventing anything new.
- The skill is holding a whole sentence in your head long enough to say it. That is trainable, and the training is simple: take any recording, play one sentence, say it back, and lengthen the sentences as you improve.
- Say it at a **normal speed**. Slowing down to be careful breaks the rhythm 节奏 of the sentence, and rhythm is part of what is being judged.
- If you miss a word, keep going and finish the sentence. A complete sentence with one wrong word is worth much more than half a perfect one.

### Take an Interview

You answer a series of spoken questions, as you would in a conversation.

- Answer the question that was asked, **first**. Then add one reason, and one example. That shape — answer, reason, example — fits almost every question and starts you speaking within a second.

- **A silence is worse than an imperfect sentence.** Fillers 填充词 that real speakers use — *well, I suppose, that's an interesting one* — buy you a moment and sound natural. Long pauses do not.
- **Do not recite.** A memorised answer is audible: the rhythm changes, the vocabulary jumps a level, and it usually does not quite fit the question. Markers discount it.
- If you lose your way mid-sentence, **repair it out loud** — *sorry, what I mean is* — and carry on. That is what fluent speakers do, and it is marked as fluency, not as failure.
- Give reasons, not lists. *Because the bus is cheaper and I can read on it* is one good answer; three unexplained items is a weaker one.

## What the marker is actually listening for

| What                 | What it means here                                                    |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Fluency</b> 流利度   | you keep going, at a natural speed, without long silences             |
| <b>Pronunciation</b> | you can be understood without effort — not that you sound American    |
| <b>Vocabulary</b> 词汇 | the right word for the idea, used naturally                           |
| <b>Grammar</b> 语法    | accurate, with enough variety to sound like speech rather than a list |

- **Being understood is the standard, not sounding native.** An accent 口音 is not an error. Sounds that change a word's meaning are.
- **Word stress** 重音 matters more than individual sounds. *PHOtograph, phoTOgrapher, photoGRAPHic* — the vowels change with the stress, and a listener tracks the stress first.
- **Sentence stress** 句重音 carries meaning: *I didn't say she stole it* means six different things depending on which word you lean on.
- Practise the sounds that Chinese does not use: final consonants (*cost, asked, fifths*), /θ/ and /ð/ (*think, this*), and the /l/-/n/ and /r/ distinctions. A few minutes a day for a month is enough to change how easily you are understood.

## Speaking with nobody in the room

- Record yourself and **listen back**. It is uncomfortable and it is the single most useful thing you can do — you will hear pauses, repetitions and unfinished sentences you did not notice.

- Practise **with a timer running**, answering aloud, into a microphone. The format is the hardest part for most candidates and it is free to rehearse.
- Talk to yourself in English during ordinary tasks: describe what you are doing, argue with a podcast, explain your day. Fluency is built by speaking hours, not by reading about speaking.
- △ A typed answer always flatters you. When you practise writing what you *would* say, you get no hesitation, no silence to fill, and as much time as you like. Speak it aloud instead.

## Exam tips

- **Start within one second** of the prompt ending. The clock is short, and a slow start costs more than a poor sentence.
- **Finish your sentences.** An abandoned sentence reads as a breakdown; a simple completed one does not.
- **Warm your voice up** before the test — read aloud for five minutes. A cold first answer is a wasted one, and in an eight-minute section you cannot afford it.
- Do not try to use difficult vocabulary. Use the right word. Markers reward precision and hear straight through decoration.
- Format facts in this section were checked on the ETS website on 13 September 2026: TOEFL iBT content and structure.