Course Companion

TOEFL iBT

Every topic handout in one volume

全部专题讲义合集

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Contents 目录

---

1. About the test 2

2. Reading 7

3. Listening 12

4. Writing 17

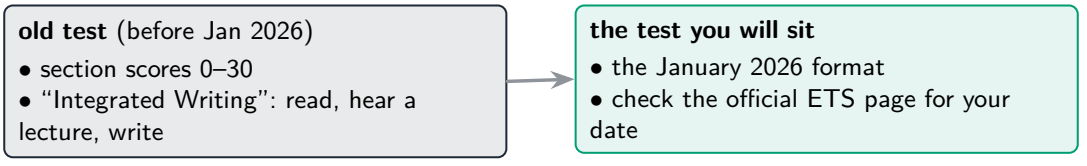
5. Speaking 23

About the test

TOEFL iBT

What the TOEFL is and who takes it

TOEFL iBT is one of the English tests most widely accepted by universities in the United States, and it is taken all over the world. It does not test what you know *about* English. It tests whether you can **use** it: read a page from a textbook, follow a lecture 讲座, answer an email, and speak back.



a 0–120 total alone proves nothing: reports show a comparable 0–120 score until January 2028

Spot advice written for the old test

- It is made by **ETS**, an American organisation, and it is taken **on a computer** at a test centre or at home.
- Most universities in the United States and Canada accept it, and many in the UK, Australia and Europe do as well – but always check the page for **your** course, because the number they ask for is written there and nowhere else.
- Four skills are tested in one sitting: **Reading, Listening, Writing and Speaking**, in that order.

△ **The test changed in January 2026, and most advice on the internet is older than that.** If a book, a video or a shared question file gives **section scores from 0 to 30**, or talks about an "Integrated Writing" task where you read a passage and hear a lecture, it is describing the **old** test. (A 0 to 120 total on its own proves nothing: current score reports still show a comparable 0 to 120 score until January 2028 – see below.) The sections below describe the test you will actually sit.

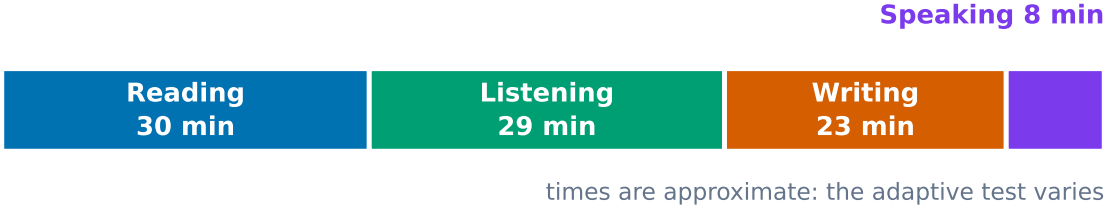
The shape of the test from January 2026

Reading and Listening are now **adaptive** 自适应: each runs in two stages, and how you do in the first stage decides how hard the second one is. Two students sitting on the same day may not see the same Reading and Listening questions. **Writing and Speaking** are not adaptive: everyone gets the same kinds of task.



The TOEFL iBT is taken on a computer, at a test centre or at home, so practise reading and typing on screen

Section	About	Items	What is in it
Reading	30 minutes	about 50	Complete the Words, Read in Daily Life, Read an Academic Passage
Listening	29 minutes	about 47	Listen and Choose a Response, Listen to a Conversation, Listen to an Announcement, Listen to an Academic Talk
Writing	23 minutes	about 12	Build a Sentence, Write an Email, Write for an Academic Discussion
Speaking	8 minutes	about 11	Listen and Repeat, Take an Interview



The four sections drawn to scale by their approximate time

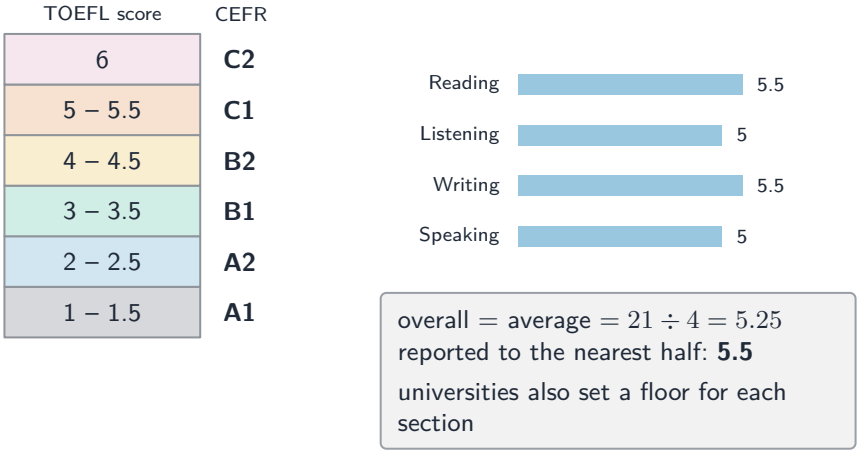
- ETS asks you to allow about **two hours** in total. The exact time and the exact number of items **vary**, because the test adapts as you go.
- Two things follow from "adaptive", and both change how you should practise. First, **you cannot work out your score from a number of right answers**

– the same 30 correct answers mean different things depending on how hard the items were. Second, **in Reading and Listening the second stage gets harder when you do well in the first**. Meeting difficult items is a good sign, not a bad one.

- Notice how much of the test is now **everyday English** 日常英语: a notice, an email, an announcement, a short conversation. The old test was almost entirely academic. Practise both.

The 1 to 6 score scale

- You get **four section scores** and one **overall score**. Each runs from **1 to 6** in **half-point** steps: 4, 4.5, 5, 5.5, 6.
- The overall score is the **average of the four sections**, rounded to the nearest half point. So 5.5, 5, 5.5 and 5 average 5.25, which is reported as **5.5**.
- The scale is lined up with the **CEFR** 欧洲语言共同参考框架, the ladder used across Europe. The right-hand column is only a rough guide; your course page decides:



The 1–6 scale beside the CEFR ladder, and how four section scores become one overall score

Score	CEFR level	Roughly what it means
1 – 1.5	A1	beginner
2 – 2.5	A2	elementary
3 – 3.5	B1	intermediate
4 – 4.5	B2	upper intermediate – many undergraduate requirements sit around here
5 – 5.5	C1	advanced – often asked for by selective universities and many Master's courses
6	C2	near-native

- △ Universities usually set a minimum **overall** score **and** a floor on each section. An overall 5 with a 3.5 in Speaking is not the same application as a flat 5 – a single low section can sink it. **Work on the lowest number, not the average.**

Old scores and new scores together

- Until **January 2028**, every score report shows **three** things: your **CEFR level**, your **1 to 6 scores**, and a **comparable 0 to 120 overall score**.
- That third number exists because universities write their requirement years in advance. A course page that still says "100 on the TOEFL iBT" can be compared against it.
- So when you read an offer, check **which scale it is written on** before you decide whether you have met it. The safest move is to look at the university's own page in the month you apply.

How to use these notes

- The four sections that follow are one per skill, in the test's own order. Each explains what the tasks ask for, what the marker is actually looking at, and the mistakes that cost Chinese candidates marks most often.
- A number in these notes is a **format fact**, and format facts change. Every one here was checked on the ETS website on 13 September 2026. Before you book, check the two pages below yourself – it takes five minutes and it is the cheapest insurance you will ever buy.

Exam tips

- **Do not buy a practice book printed before 2026.** It is not a slightly old book; it is a book about a different test.

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- **Decide early which scale your universities use**, then write the target number on the first page of your notebook. A target you can see is a target you work towards.
- **Practise everyday English deliberately.** Many candidates arrive stronger on academic reading than on emails, notices and short conversations, because that is what school rewarded. The new test rewards both.
- **Type, do not write.** The whole test is on a computer, including all three Writing task types. If you type slowly in English, that alone costs you marks in a 23-minute section – practise on a keyboard from today.
- Sources, checked on 13 September 2026: score scale update, content and structure.

Vocabulary card meanings

adaptive: Later questions depend on earlier answers. everyday English: The language of campus and daily life. CEFR: The European scale of language levels (e.g. B2).

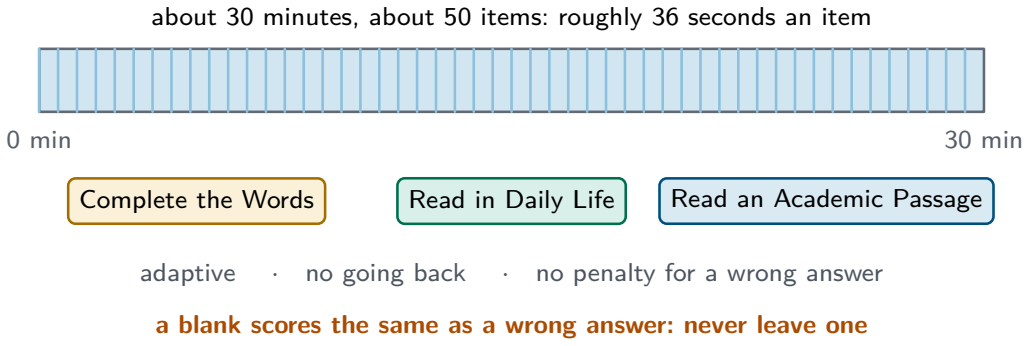
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Reading

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.



About 36 seconds an item, and a blank scores nothing

- 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 paragraph in which the second half of some words is missing; you type the missing letters to complete each word.

- 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 infinitive *to* a base verb (but *look forward to read**ing***: when *to* is a preposition, an *-ing* form follows).
- **Spelling counts.** A word with a letter missing is a wrong word.

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- 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.



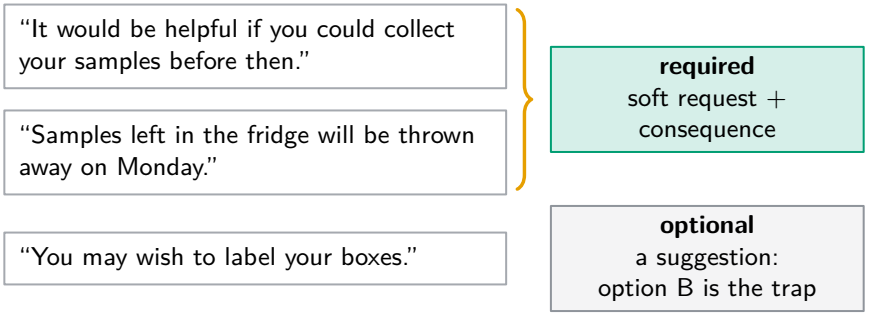
A notice board: Read in Daily Life uses short real-world texts (notices, emails, menus) that you scan for one detail

- The question often asks **what the reader should 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 small words often carry the answer, so never skim past them.
- Watch the **register** 语域. An email from a tutor is polite and indirect, so read the strength of each phrase: "It would be helpful if you could…" is usually a real request, while "you may wish to…" is usually a suggestion you are free to ignore. Decide from the whole message whether the action is required or optional.
- △ 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.

■ Worked example: required or optional?

> *Dear students, the chemistry lab will close at 5 p.m. on Friday instead of 7 p.m. It would be helpful if you could collect your samples before then. You may wish to label your boxes with your name. Please note that any samples left in the lab fridge will be thrown away on Monday morning.*

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Soft words plus a consequence

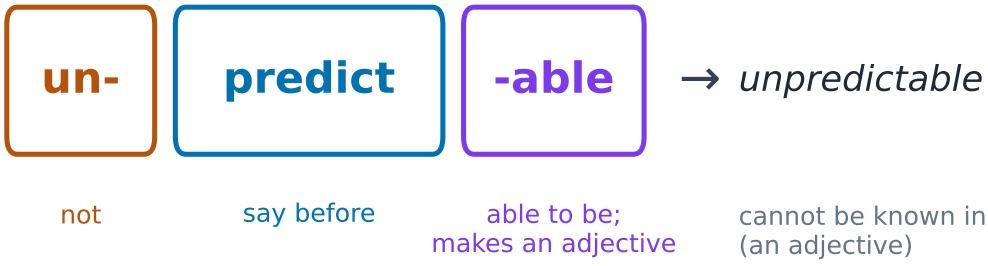
What must students do? (A) collect their samples before 5 p.m. on Friday (B) label their boxes (C) come to the lab on Monday morning (D) empty the fridge

- **A** is right. *It would be helpful if you could* sounds soft, but the last sentence gives it a consequence: samples left in the fridge are thrown away on Monday. A polite request with a consequence is a requirement.
- **B** is the trap. *You may wish to* is a suggestion, so labelling is optional.
- **C** repeats *Monday morning* from the text, but that is when samples are thrown away, not when students come. **D** is not something students are asked to do.
- The small words did the work: *instead of 7 p.m.* (a change), *before then* (a deadline).

Read an Academic Passage

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

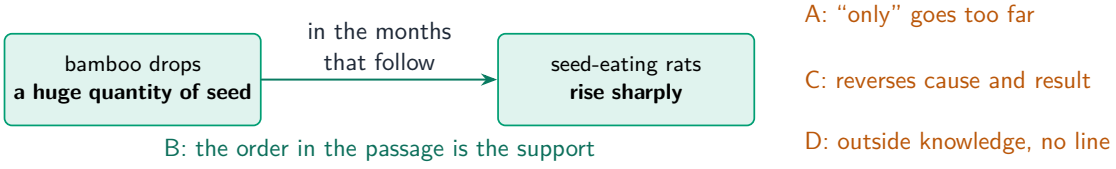
- **Skim** 略读 first, thirty seconds, for the shape: what is this about, how many parts has it, where does the argument turn? Then answer, and scan 扫读 back for each fact.
- The **topic sentence** 主题句 – usually the first sentence of a paragraph – tells you what that paragraph is for. When a question asks 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.



Read an unknown word by its parts: the prefix narrows the meaning, the suffix fixes the word class

■ Worked example: an inference you can point at

Some species of bamboo flower only once every few decades. When they do, almost every plant of the species flowers at the same time across a whole region, drops a huge quantity of seed, and then dies. In the months that follow, the number of seed-eating rats in the area often rises sharply.



Point at the line that supports it

What can be inferred about the rats? (A) They eat only bamboo seed. (B) The sudden supply of seed helps more of them survive and breed. (C) They cause the bamboo to flower. (D) They live mainly in bamboo forests.

- **B** is right, and you can point at the line: *a huge quantity of seed* is followed by *the number of seed-eating rats … rises sharply*. The passage never says "because", but it puts the food first and the rise second. That order is the support.
- **A** goes too far: *seed-eating* does not mean *only bamboo seed*. Words like *only*, *always* and *never* in an option are a reason to check the text twice.
- **C** turns cause and result round: the flowering comes first.
- **D** may be true in the real world, but no line in the passage says it. An inference must come from the passage, not from what you already know.

What costs Chinese candidates marks

- **Translating while reading.** Turning each sentence into Chinese in your head takes much longer than 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 reading speed at your speaking speed, which is far slower than the silent reading the test rewards.
- **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 can cost you several 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.

Vocabulary card meanings

endurance: The ability to keep working accurately through a long test. penalty: A loss of marks for breaking a task rule. notice: A short public message, often posted for students. skim: To read quickly for the general idea, not for every word. inference: A conclusion drawn from clues when the text does not say it directly. subvocalise: Silent speech-like activity during reading, which need not move the lips and need not slow every reader.

Listening

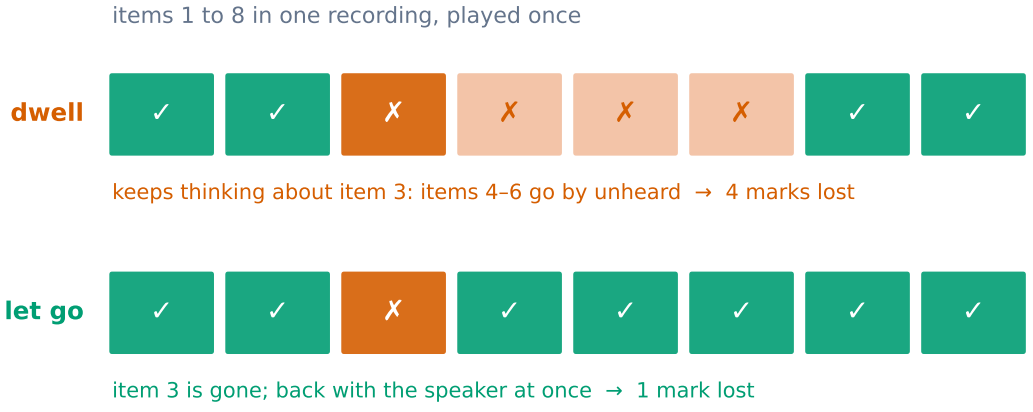
TOEFL iBT

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** in two stages, so what you hear in the second stage depends on how the first went.

△ A common way to lose 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 can be several. **Let it go and stay with the speaker.**



Dwelling turns one missed item into four; letting go keeps it at one

Listen and Choose a Response

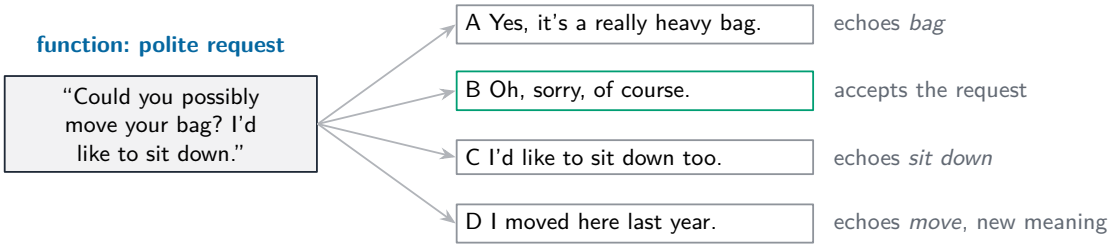
You hear one short turn of speech and choose what would naturally come next.

- 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.
- △ Do not choose an answer just because it repeats words from the prompt. Natural replies often use different words, so check the function, not the echo.

■ Worked example: function, not echo

You hear: *"Could you possibly move your bag? I'd like to sit down."*



Match the function, not the echo

(A) Yes, it's a really heavy bag. (B) Oh, sorry, of course. (C) I'd like to sit down too. (D) I moved here last year.

- The function is a **polite request**. The natural reply accepts it or refuses it, so **B** is right, though it repeats none of the speaker's words.
- **A** and **C** echo *bag* and *sit down* but do not answer the request. **D** echoes *move* with a different meaning (to change home).

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.



A university lecture hall: the academic talk tests whether you can follow a lecturer's main point and examples

- 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**?"

■ Worked example: notes in the shape of the talk

You hear part of a talk:

> *Today I want to look at why cities are often warmer than the countryside around them. There are two main reasons. The first of these is materials. Concrete and asphalt absorb heat during the day and give it back slowly at night, so a car park can still feel warm at midnight. The second reason is that cities have fewer trees, and trees cool the air by releasing water through their leaves. So, surprisingly, planting trees can be one of the cheapest ways to cool a city.*

Notes that copy the words run out of time by the second sentence: *today want look at why cities warmer than countryside around them two main reasons first …*. Notes in the shape of the talk look like this:

copying the words

today want look at why cities warmer than countryside around them two main reasons first of these is materials concrete and asph…

out of time by the second sentence

notes in the shape of the talk

cities warmer than countryside: why? (2 reasons)
1 materials: concrete, asphalt store heat
– car park warm at midnight
2 fewer trees (trees cool the air)
⇒ *surprisingly*: planting trees = cheap cooling

topic, numbered points, a dash for each example, the speaker's attitude

Write the outline, not the transcript

- cities warmer than countryside: why? (2 reasons)
- 1 materials: concrete, asphalt store heat → release at night
  - e.g. car park warm at midnight
- 2 fewer trees: trees cool air (water from leaves)
- "surprisingly": trees = cheap way to cool a city

The signposts gave the outline: *two main reasons*, *the first of these*, *the second reason*. Now the notes answer the typical questions at once:

- **Why does the speaker mention a car park?** As an example of materials releasing stored heat at night. The dash under point 1 shows what it is an example of.
- **What is the speaker's attitude to planting trees?** They find it a surprisingly cheap way to cool a city. Only the attitude line holds this.

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 a useful 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.
- Short, focused practice every day usually does more than one long session a week. 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 at first; a few weeks of daily practice builds it.
- 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, choose the best guess **now** and move on: Listening does not let you go back to an item. There is no penalty 扣分 for a wrong answer and a blank scores the same as a wrong one.
- △ Watch the everyday tasks. Many candidates do better on the academic talk than on the short conversation, because school listening practice is mostly academic.
- Format facts in this section were checked on the ETS website on 13 September 2026: TOEFL iBT content and structure.

Vocabulary card meanings

note: A short written point made while listening or reading. dwelling: Staying too long on one question instead of moving on. intonation: The rise and fall of the voice across a sentence. signpost: A word that shows the direction of a talk, such as however. transcript: The written record of what was said. shadowing: Speaking along with a recording, just after the voice.

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Writing

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The Writing section and its clock

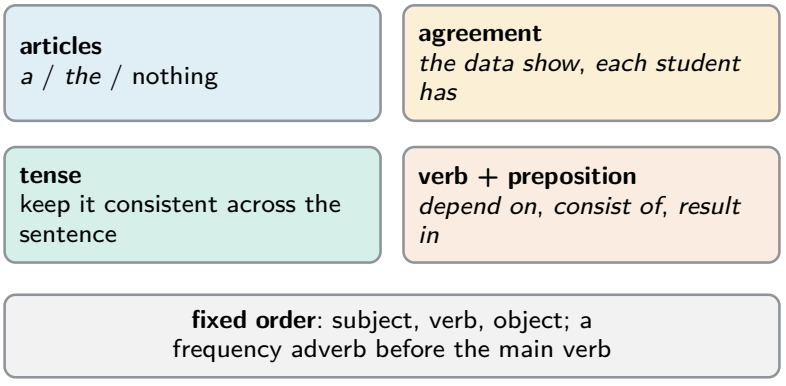
About **23 minutes**, about **12 items**, across three kinds of task: **Build a Sentence**, **Write an Email** and **Write for an Academic Discussion**.

- You type every answer. Only your notes, on the paper the test centre gives you, are handwritten.
- 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.

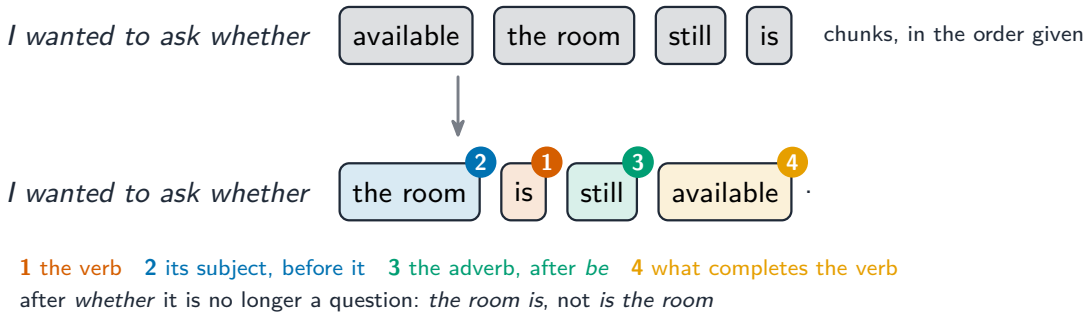
- **Accuracy is the whole point.** Nothing is being measured except whether the sentence is right.
- The traps are the ones Chinese candidates already know: **articles** 冠词 (*a* / *the* / nothing), **agreement** 主谓一致 (*the data show*, *each student has*), **tense** 时态 across a sentence, and the preposition 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.



The four traps, and the fixed word order behind them

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■ **Worked example: build from the verb out**



Build from the verb out: verb, its subject, the small adverb, then the rest

Fixed start: *I wanted to ask whether* · chunks: *available* / *the room* / *still* / *is* · fixed end: .

1. **Find the verb**: *is*. Every other chunk hangs on it.
2. **Find its subject**: *the room*. After *whether*, the sentence is not a question any more, so the subject comes **before** the verb: *the room is*, not *is the room*.
3. **Place the small adverb**: *still* goes after *be*: *the room is still*.
4. **The rest completes the verb**: *available*.

I wanted to ask whether the room is still available. Read it once more, slowly: it is a statement, so it ends with a full stop, not a question mark.

Write an Email

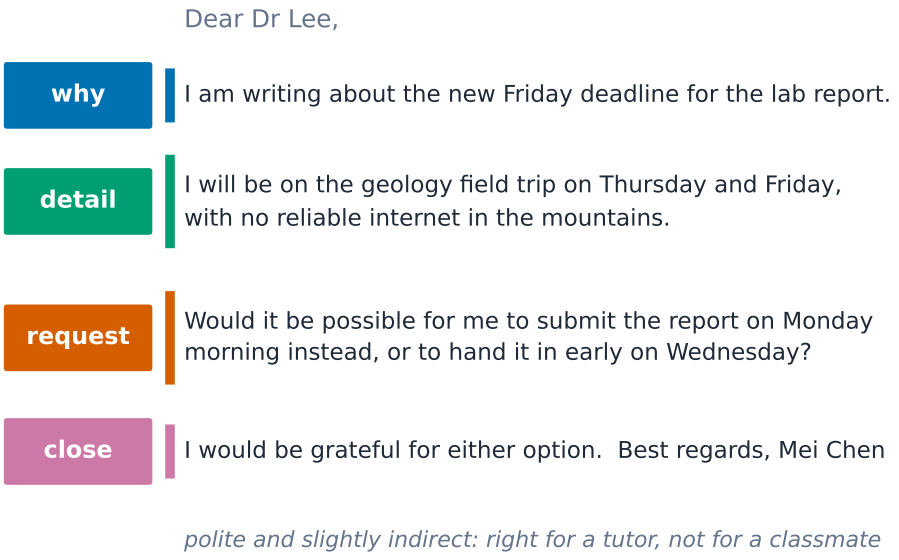
A short email that does a job: reply to a message, make a request, explain a problem, decline politely.

- 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.

Worked example. *Your professor, Dr Lee, has moved the lab report deadline to Friday. You will be on a field trip on Thursday and Friday. Write to Dr Lee: explain the problem and ask for a solution.*

> Dear Dr Lee,
>
> I am writing about the new Friday deadline for the lab report. Unfortunately, I will be on the geology field trip on Thursday and Friday, with no reliable internet in the mountains (the rocks, sadly, do not offer Wi-Fi). Would it be possible for me to submit the report on Monday morning instead, or to hand it in early on Wednesday? I would be grateful for either option.
>
> Best regards,
> Mei Chen

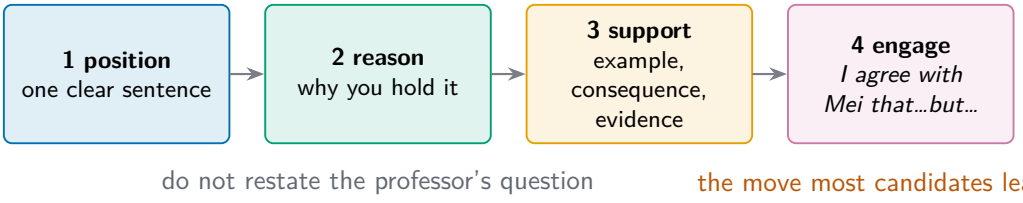
The four moves, in order: **why** (the new deadline), **the detail** (the trip and no internet), **the request** (two possible solutions, so the professor can choose), **the close**. The register is polite and slightly indirect (*Would it be possible*, *I would be grateful*), right for a tutor. The joke is one small bracket and does not get in the way of the request.



The worked email, move by move: why, detail, request, close

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.



Four moves of a discussion post

- 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 turns a short essay into a real contribution to the discussion, and it is the one many candidates leave out. *I agree with Mei that… but I would add that…* shows you have read the other posts and are adding to them.
- **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 uses up your limited time and adds nothing: the reader already knows what was asked.

Worked example. *Your professor asks: "Should universities require all first-year students to live on campus?" Ana writes that living on campus helps students make friends. Ben writes that campus housing is too expensive for many families.*

> I see Ben's point about cost, but I think the real issue is flexibility rather than a single rule. Living on campus helps students who have just moved from another country find friends and support quickly; for them, the first year can decide whether they stay. However, a local student who lives ten minutes away gains far less. So instead of requiring everyone to live on campus, universities could reserve first-year places for students from outside the city and offer them at a discount. That keeps Ana's social benefit where it matters most and answers the cost problem Ben raised.

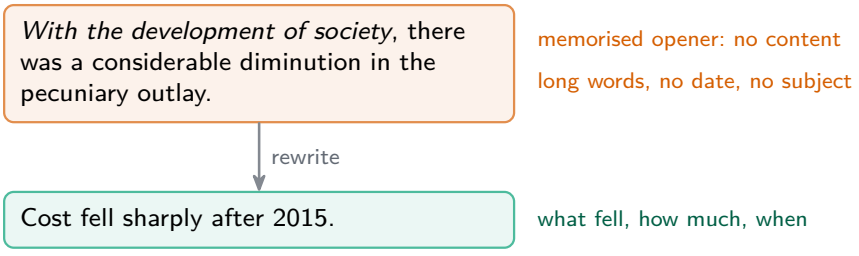
This post **names both classmates**, takes a clear position, and **adds a new idea** (reserve places for students from far away) instead of repeating either post. Each sentence moves the discussion forward, and the post is about 100 words.

What the marker is actually looking at

ETS publishes its own scoring guides for each writing task; read them for the exact wording. Underneath the wording, any careful reader of your English notices four things, and they make a useful checklist for practice (this table is a study aid, not the official rubric):

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.



Precision beats decoration.

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 are the slips a quick reread catches best.

- Practise writing **to a person**: a tutor, an office, a classmate. An email with no sense of its reader is a typical 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.

Vocabulary card meanings

agreement: The matching of a verb with its subject in number. tense: The verb form that shows the time of an action. task completion: How fully an answer does what the question asked. organisation: How the parts of a piece of writing are ordered.

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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 – short preparation time (15 to 30 seconds) and then 45 to 60 seconds of speaking – 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 usually earns 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.

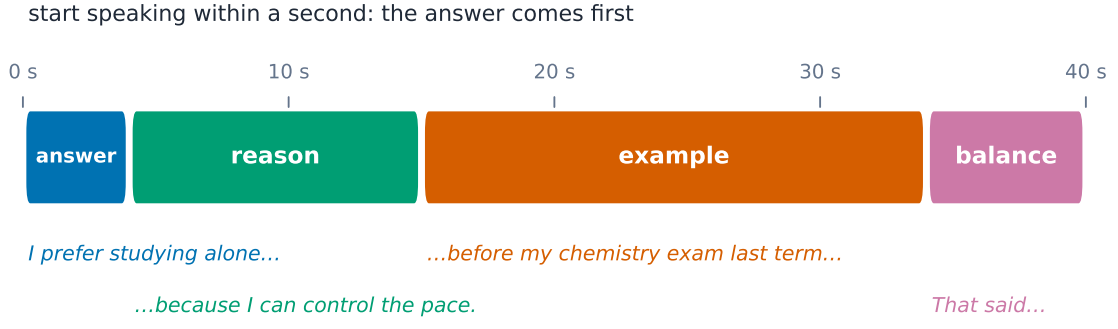
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- **Do not recite.** A memorised answer is audible: the rhythm changes, the vocabulary jumps a level, and it usually does not quite fit the question. Markers discount it.
- If you lose your way mid-sentence, **repair it out loud** – *sorry, what I 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.

Worked example. *Interviewer: "Some people prefer to study alone; others prefer to study in a group. Which do you prefer, and why?"*

> I prefer studying alone, mainly because I can control the pace. When I study with friends, we spend the first twenty minutes deciding where to sit and the next twenty talking about lunch. For example, before my chemistry exam last term, I studied alone in the library for three evenings and could spend extra time on the topics I found hardest, especially equilibrium. That said, I do like meeting a group once at the end, to test each other.

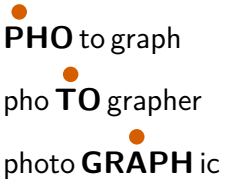
Answer (study alone), **reason** (control the pace), **example** (the chemistry exam), then one sentence of balance. It is spoken at an easy speed, in about 40 seconds, and it sounds like a person, not a memorised template.



The worked answer laid out in time: answer first, then reason, example and balance

What the marker is actually listening for

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



a listener tracks the stress first; an accent is not an error, a meaning change is

Word stress first

I	didn't	say	she	stole	it	→ someone else said it
I	**didn't**	say	she	stole	it	→ I deny saying it
I	didn't	**say**	she	stole	it	→ I implied it
I	didn't	say	**she**	stole	it	→ someone else stole it
I	didn't	say	she	**stole**	it	→ she borrowed it
I	didn't	say	she	stole	**it**	→ she stole something else

Stress carries meaning

- **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 one of the most useful things 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 usually 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.



A headset with a microphone: in the speaking section you talk to a computer, so practise answering into a recorder

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.

Vocabulary card meanings

filler: A sound or word that fills a pause and adds no meaning. accent: A way of pronouncing words that shows where a speaker is from. sentence stress: The louder syllables that show which words in a sentence matter.

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