

Most TOEFL marks are lost to a small number of habits, not to a gap in English. The ✕ line is what candidates do; the ✓ line is what scores. Start with the section holding your lowest number – universities set a floor on each section as well as on the overall score, so the weakest one decides the offer. 托福失分多半来自几个固定习惯，而不是英语不够好。✕ 是常见做法，✓ 是能得分的做法。先看你分数最低的那一项：学校对每个部分都有最低要求，最弱的那一项决定录取。

Preparing for the wrong test

- ✕ Working through a practice book printed before 2026.
- ✓ Check the date first. If it teaches Integrated Writing or a 0-to-120 score, it describes the previous test.

The January 2026 format is adaptive, about two hours, scored 1 to 6, and the read-then-listen writing task is gone.

先看出版年份

ETS TOEFL iBT content and structure
- ✕ Practising only academic reading and listening.
- ✓ Practise everyday English too – notices, emails, short conversations, announcements.

Two of the three Reading tasks and two of the four Listening tasks are now everyday English, which school practice rarely covers.

日常英语也要练

ETS TOEFL iBT content and structure
- ✕ Working out a target from a 0-to-120 number found online.
- ✓ Read the requirement for your own course, and check which scale it is written on.

Until January 2028 reports carry both scales, and departments differ from the university’s general page.

看清是哪套分数

ETS score scale update
- ✕ Treating a hard question as a sign the test is going badly.
- ✓ Expect it to get harder when you do well. That is what adaptive means.

The test adjusts to your level, so difficult items are evidence you are scoring, not evidence you are failing.

题变难是好事

ETS TOEFL iBT content and structure

2 · Reading 阅读

- ✕ Translating each sentence into Chinese while reading.
- ✓ Read in English and look words up afterwards.

Translating costs two to three times the reading speed, and the section gives about 30 minutes for about 50 items.

不要边读边翻译

class
- ✕ Leaving an item blank when unsure.
- ✓ Always answer. Guess from the word class if nothing else.

There is no penalty for a wrong answer, so a blank scores exactly what a wrong guess scores.

不要空题

class

- ✕ Hunting for a word from the question in the passage.
- ✓ Expect the passage to say it in different words.

Paraphrase is the normal case in this test. Matching on a keyword finds the distractor.

注意同义改写

class
- ✕ Spending two minutes rescuing one hard item.
- ✓ Answer, mark it, move on.

Every item is worth the same, so two minutes on one costs you three easy ones later.

每题分值相同

class
- ✕ Reading the passage carefully before looking at the question.
- ✓ Read the question first, then read to find its answer.

You are looking for one thing, and knowing what it is before you start is the difference between reading and searching.

先读题再读文

class
- ✕ Guessing a word’s meaning from the dictionary definition you remember.
- ✓ Answer from the sentence it sits in.

A vocabulary question asks what the word means in this passage, and the passage is where the evidence is.

按上下文判断词义

class
- 3 · Listening 听力
- ✕ Thinking about the detail you just missed.

✓ Let it go, guess, and stay with the speaker.

One missed item is one mark; thirty seconds of not listening is about five. Dwelling is the most expensive habit in this section.

漏了就放下

class

✕ Choosing the option that repeats words from the prompt.

✓ Expect the natural reply to use different words.

Distractors are built from the words you just heard, precisely because those are the ones you remember.

重复词多半是干扰项

class

✕ Trying to write down everything the lecturer says.

✓ Write the outline: topic, then each point on its own line with a dash for its example.

Your hand cannot keep up with speech, and while you write you stop listening. The questions are about the outline.

记提纲不记原话

class

✕ Practising with replays.

✓ Listen once, answer, and only then replay to see what you missed.

Every recording in the test plays once, so what you caught on the third pass is not evidence of anything.

先只听一遍

ETS TOEFL iBT content and structure
- TOEFL iBT · Common Mistakes 常见错误
- 2

✗ Relying on memory for a number, a date or a room name.

✓ **Write it down the moment you hear it.**

Those are exactly the details the practical listening tasks ask about, and they are gone from memory within a sentence.

数字立刻记下来class

✗ Only ever listening to the accent you find easiest.

✓ **Spend two or three minutes a day on an unfamiliar one.**

The test uses speakers from North America and elsewhere, and an accent you have never practised costs whole recordings.

多听不同口音ETS TOEFL iBT content and structure

4 · Writing 写作

✗ Answering the professor and ignoring both classmates.

✓ **Name a classmate and answer their point – agreeing and extending, or disagreeing and saying why.**

The task is to contribute to a discussion. A post that engages with nobody is an essay posted in a thread, and it caps task completion.

一定要回应同学class

✗ Restating the professor’s question before you start.

✓ **Open with your position.**

The reader already knows what was asked, and in a 23-minute section that sentence costs a quarter of your time.

不要复述题目class

✗ Opening with a memorised phrase.

✓ **Open with a position and a reason in one sentence.**

‘With the development of society’ appears in thousands of scripts, adds nothing, and a marker reads straight past it.

不要用背诵套句class

✗ Writing ‘Dear Sir or Madam’ to a named person, or signing off formally to a classmate.

✓ **Match the greeting to the reader the situation names.**

Register is wrong in every sentence at once, which makes it far more visible than a grammar slip.

语境要对上读者class

✗ Answering one of the two things the situation asked for.

✓ **Check the prompt again before you finish: everything it asked, nothing it did not.**

Task completion asks whether the writing did its job. Half the job is half the marks, however good the sentences are.

题目要求逐条对照class

✗ Using a soft ‘maybe’ to mean no.

✓ **Decline clearly, give a brief reason, then be warm.**

Indirect refusal is polite in Chinese and reads as evasive in English, so the email fails at its job.

拒绝要说清楚class

✗ Writing as much as possible because there is no maximum.

✓ **Write fewer sentences and make each one carry weight.**

Padding is marked as padding. The section is about 23 minutes for three kinds of task, so length costs you the next one.

宁可少写，句句有用class

✗ Finishing with no time to read the answer back.

✓ **Leave sixty seconds and check articles, plurals and verb endings.**

Those three are most of what a Chinese candidate gets wrong AND can still fix in a minute.

留一分钟回读class

5 · Speaking 口语

✗ Pausing in silence while you plan the whole answer.

✓ **Start within a second, using a natural filler if you need one.**

The section is about eight minutes. Silence is the most expensive thing on that clock, and fillers sound like real speech.

一秒内开口ETS TOEFL iBT content and structure

✗ Reciting a prepared general answer.

✓ **Answer the question that was asked, then give one reason and one example.**

A recited answer is audible – the rhythm changes and it does not quite fit the question – and markers discount it.

不要背答案class

✗ Stopping and restarting a sentence you stumbled over.

✓ **Repair it out loud and carry on: ‘sorry, what I mean is...’**

That is what fluent speakers do, and it is marked as fluency. A restart costs more than the stumble did.

出声修正，继续说class

✗ Slowing down to pronounce every sound carefully in Listen and Repeat.

✓ **Say it back at a normal speed, and finish the sentence even if you miss a word.**

Slowing down breaks the rhythm, which is part of what is judged; a complete sentence beats half a perfect one.

正常语速，说完整class

✗ Practising by writing down what you would say.

✓ **Speak aloud, on a timer, into a microphone, and listen back.**

A typed answer gives no hesitation, no silence to fill and unlimited time, so it always flatters you.

要开口练，不要写class

✗ Listing three things without explaining any of them.

✓ Give one reason and develop it.

A developed reason is what fluency and coherence are judged on; an unexplained list is three fragments.

一个理由讲透

class