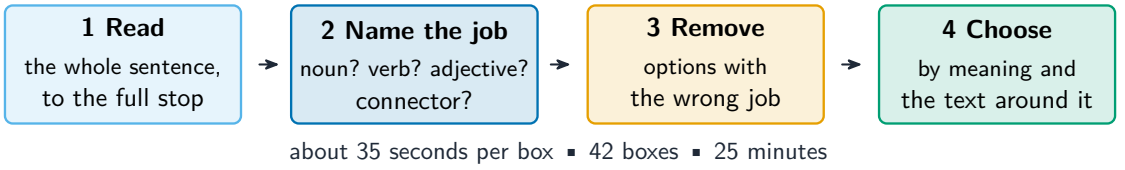
Language Form and Meaning

TOEFL Junior

What this topic covers

Language Form and Meaning is the second Standard section: **42 questions in 25 minutes**, about 35 seconds each. You read short texts such as e-mails, notices and articles. Inside them are boxes with four choices. You choose the one that makes the sentence correct **and** fits the text. ETS says this section tests the enabling skills behind listening and reading: grammar and vocabulary in context.

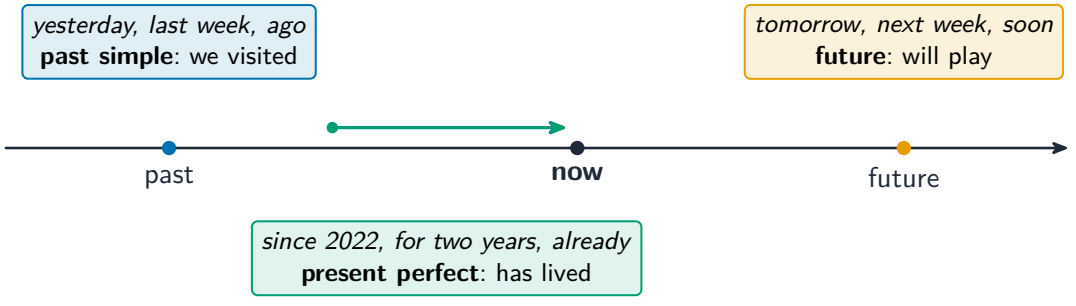


The 30-second routine: the job of the box removes most options before meaning decides

- Most boxes test one of six things: **verb tense**, **agreement**, **verb patterns**, **word forms**, **connectors and relative words**, or **word choice**.
- The clue may come **after** the box. Always read to the full stop.
- Memory hook: **job first, meaning second**.

Verbs: time words decide the tense

Look for a time word in the sentence, or in the sentence before it.



Time words point to the tense

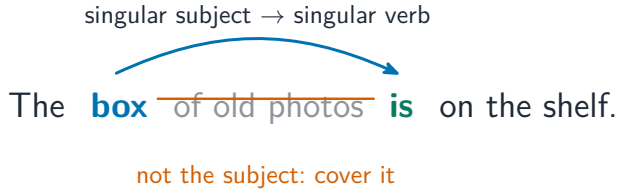
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Time words	Tense	Example
yesterday, last week, in 2019, ago	past simple	*We **visited** the museum last week.*
since, for, already, yet, ever	present perfect	*My cousin **has lived** in Canada since 2022.*
now, at the moment, look!	present continuous	*Look, it **is raining**.*
every day, usually, always	present simple	*The library **opens** at eight every day.*
tomorrow, next week, soon	future	*The band **will play** tomorrow.*
when …, while … (a past story)	past continuous + past simple	*We **were eating** when the bell **rang**.*

- △ In an article about a past event, the boxes are usually past too, even when the box's own sentence has no time word.

Agreement: find the real subject

The verb agrees with its subject , not with the nearest noun.



Jump over the words in the middle: box … is

- Phrases such as *of the students*, *with his friends*, *that I bought* sit between subject and verb. Cover them, then choose.
- *Each, every, everyone, nobody, either* take a singular verb: *Everyone in both classes **gets** a ticket.*
- Two subjects joined by *and* are plural: *Mia and her brother **are** late.*
- *There is / There are* agrees with the noun after it: *There **are** three new books on the desk.*

Verb patterns and word forms

Verb patterns. Some verbs take *to* + verb, some take *-ing*, and a few take the base form.

Pattern	Verbs	Example
to + verb	want, decide, hope, plan, agree, need	*We decided **to visit** the museum.*
-ing	enjoy, finish, avoid, mind, keep, practise	*She enjoys **building** models.*
base form	make, let, help (+ person)	*The coach made us **run** again.*
after a preposition: *-ing*	interested in, good at, before, after	*Are you interested in **joining**?*

Word forms. Name the job of the box, then use the ending: *-tion, -ment, -ness* (noun); *-ful, -ous, -ive, -al* (adjective); *-ly* (adverb); *-ify, -ise* (verb).

- Before a noun → adjective: *a **careful** plan.* After a verb → adverb: *worked **carefully**.*
- After *the, a, his* and before *of* → noun: *the **building** of the hall.*
- △ *Friendly, lovely, lonely* end in *-ly* but are adjectives. *-ed* describes a feeling (*interested*); *-ing* describes the cause (*an interesting talk*).

Connectors, relative words and pronouns

A connector shows how two ideas link. All four options are often real words; only one has the right meaning.

Result	Reason	Contrast	Condition	Time
so, therefore, as a result	because, since	but, although, however	if, unless	when, while, after, before
It rained, so we stayed in.	*We stayed in because it rained.*	*It rained, but we went out.*	*Unless it rains, we'll go out.*	*When it stopped, we went out.*

Name the link first, then choose the connector

- **Relative words**: *who* (people), *which* (things), *whose* (belonging), *where* (places), *when* (times). *The park **where** we had our picnic.*
- **Pronouns** point back to one clear noun: *the students → they, the school → it. Its* (belongs to it) ≠ *it's* (it is); *their* ≠ *there* ≠ *they're.*

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- **Comparison**: two things → *taller than*, *more useful than*; three or more → *the tallest*, *the most useful*; equal → *as tall as*. Irregular: *good, better, best*; *bad, worse, worst*.

Passive, conditionals and word choice

- **Passive** = *be* + past participle: *The invitations **were sent** last week.* A *by* phrase is a strong clue: *The poem **was written** by a student.*
- **Conditionals**: fact → *If you heat ice, it **melts**.* Real future → *If it **rains**, we **will stay** inside.* Imagined → *If I **had** wings, I **would fly**.* △ Never *will* in the *if* part.
- **Word choice**: when all four options are grammatical, choose by meaning and collocation : *make a mistake, do homework, take a photo, pay attention, raise money.*
- **Articles**: *a* or *an* for the first mention, *the* when the reader knows which one, no article for general plurals: ***Elephants** can live for sixty years.*

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Missing -s.** Chinese verbs do not change, so *he go* and *three book* look normal. In the test, check every singular subject for *-s* on a present verb, and every plural noun.
- △ **Articles.** Chinese has no *a* or *the*. A singular countable noun almost always needs one: *We visited **a** beautiful garden.*
- △ **Tense after time words.** *Since* and *for* need the present perfect, not the past: *I **have studied** here for two years*, not *I study here for two years.*
- △ **Spending too long.** At 35 seconds per box, a minute on one question costs another question later. Decide, mark, move on, and never leave a blank.

Try it

Choose the best option for each box. Cover the answers first.

Dear Ms Park,

Thank you for (1) [A organise B organising C organised D to organising] the science trip last Friday. Everyone in our class (2) [A have B are C has D were] talked about it all week. The museum guide, (3) [A who B which C where D whose] knew so much about dinosaurs, made the visit very (4) [A interest B interested C interesting D interestingly]. (5) [A Because B Although C So D Unless] the bus was late, we still saw every room. Next year, if the school (6) [A will plan B plans C planned D planning] another trip, I hope we can visit the space centre. The photos (7) [A took B were taken C taking D have took] by Mr Lee are now on the class website. Our class (8) [A raised B rose C grew D lifted] 500 yuan for the museum's children's room.

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Best wishes, Lin

Answers. 1 **B**: after the preposition *for* → *-ing*. 2 **C**: *everyone* is singular, and *has talked* is present perfect with *all week*. 3 **A**: the guide is a person. 4 **C**: *the visit* causes the interest → *-ing* adjective. 5 **B**: late bus but still saw everything = contrast. 6 **B**: *if* + present for a real future. 7 **B**: the photos receive the action; *by Mr Lee* is the clue. 8 **A**: the collocation is *raise money*.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. What do you check before meaning? – **The job of the box**: noun, verb, adjective, adverb or connector.
2. *The list of winners* ____ *on the wall.* is or are? – **is**: the subject is *list*.
3. *Since 2022* needs which tense? – **The present perfect**: *has lived*.
4. *If it* ____ *tomorrow, we will stay in.* – **rains**: no *will* in the *if* part.
5. All four options are grammatical. What decides? – **Meaning and collocation**, and the sentences around the box.

Vocabulary card meanings

enabling skills: The basic grammar and vocabulary skills that listening and reading depend on. agrees: Has the matching form, for example a singular verb with a singular subject. subject: The person or thing that does the action of the verb. connector: A word that joins two ideas and shows how they are related. passive: A sentence form in which the subject receives the action, made with be + past participle. collocation: Words that are often used together, such as make a mistake.

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