

# Preliminary Study About The TOEFL ITP Test Focusing On Structure And Written Expression Section

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## **Abstract:**

*Test Of English as a Foreign Language, TOEFL, is a vital measure of proficiency in English. TOEFL iBT, which focuses on the effective application of English in academic situations, covers the essentials of English, including Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing. Whereas, TOEFL ITP test, which is paper based and use 100 percent academic content to evaluate the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers, assess learners' ability in three components: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. All questions in the TOEFL test are in multiple-choice format, with four answer choices per question. The test is designed to assess how foreign students will perform in an English-only academic setting. This requires not only the understanding of given material, but also the effective application of that material for specific academic purposes. The TOEFL ITP assumes that test takers have a mastery of the basic principles of English, and such mastery is essential for success on the test. This study focuses on describing Section 2, Structure and Written Expression, of the TOEFL ITP test, which cover various aspects of grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, test takers often find it hard to to achieve high score in this part of the test.*

**Keywords:** *TOEFL, ITP, test, score, academic, proficiency*

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## **I. About The TOEFL Test**

*The TOEFL test measures how well test takers use English, not just their knowledge of the language. Because it is a valid and reliable test with unbiased, objective scoring, the TOEFL test confirms that a student has the English language skills necessary to succeed in an academic setting.*

*This test was first started by an American Council for the testing of English as a foreign language in early 1962 (Sulistyo, 2009). Since its establishment, TOEFL has developed several versions due to shifts in the views of the nature of language.*

*The first TOEFL was the Paper and Pencil Based TOEFL (PBT). It was developed on the basis of the belief that language comprises two layers: the layer of form and that of meaning (Sulistyo, 2009). In this version of TOEFL, good mastery of English grammar was ultimately important. It can be seen from the format of the test. The PBT had three sub-sections: (1) the listening section, (2) the structure and written expression section, and (3) the reading comprehension section. Another two tests, commonly tested separately, were the Test of Written English (TWE) and the Test of Spoken English (TSE) (Sulistyo, 2009). In the listening section, there were three parts: part A is the comprehension of fragmented sentences, part B is the comprehension of dialogues, and part C is the comprehension of texts larger than dialogs/monologs. In part A, accuracy of common grammatical points were tested (Sulistyo, 2009). In section two, Structure and Written Expression, it was crystal clear that test takers must have an adequate knowledge of English grammar without which they would be sure to get a low score in this section. From the explanation above, we can understand that the PBT still put great emphasis on the form of language.*

*However, a need to assess the test takers' proficiency in using English communicatively found there were shortcomings in the PBT and the next version of TOEFL, the computer based TOEFL (CBT) was developed. In the early part of its development, however, the CBT also still included sub-sections similar to the PBT: listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension as well as TWE (Test of Written English) and TSE (Test of Spoken English) were both tested separately. The major difference was that while the PBT was paper based, the CBT was computer based. In the later development of the CBT, more emphasis on communication skills was prioritized. It can be seen from the tested sections which include macro skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the most recent development of the CBT, the concept of language as a means of communication was viewed as highly important (TOEFL internet based test, 2007, as cited in Sulistyo, 2009).*

*The development of the CBT gave birth to the new version of TOEFL, so called internet based TOEFL (iBT) in 2005. Linguistically, the rationale behind iBT and CBT is the same, namely to test the students' ability to use language communicatively and functionally. The difference is that in the iBT academic settings and themes*

are more emphasized (Sulistyo, 2009). To summarise, the creation of the iBT has the purpose to assess the ability of the test takers to use English for speaking, orally. That's why TOEFL iBT is the most highly regarded and widely accepted test in the world. More than 10,000 colleges, universities, and agencies in 130 countries accept TOEFL scores, so test takers have the flexibility to use their TOEFL test scores worldwide. The TOEFL test is also the most accessible English-language test. It is administered at secure, ETS (Educational Testing Service) approved test centers in 180 countries.

Because the TOEFL iBT test is designed to assess the actual skills, the very best way to develop the skills being measured is to study English focusing on: communication using all four skills, especially speaking and integrated skills (for example, listening/reading/speaking, listening/reading/ writing)

## II. The TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program)

Aside from the three versions of TOEFL elaborated above, there is one other version called ITP, which has become the focus of this study. Basically, ITP includes the same sub-tests as does the PBT explained above, but in the ITP, there are no TWE and TSE. In line with this, Sharpe (2004) reckons that ITP and PBT are quite similar in terms of their length, format, and level of difficulty.

In ITP there are three sections: listening, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. However, the examples of conversations, dialogue, reading passages, and questions are not given here so to have a clear look at what all these look like go to Pyle and Page (2002); Philip (2001).

*The TOEFL ITP* test is paper based and it evaluates skills in three areas:

- Listening Comprehension measures the ability to understand spoken English as it is used in colleges and universities.
- Structure and Written Expression measures recognition of selected structural and grammatical points in standard written English.
- Reading Comprehension measures the ability to read and understand academic reading material written in English.

### Test format

The test consists of three sections and takes about two hours.

Section	Number of Questions	Admin. Time	Score Scale
Listening Comprehension	50	35 minutes	31-68
Structure and Written Expression	40	25 minutes	31-67
Reading Comprehension	50	55 minutes	31-67
Total	140	115 minutes	310-677

### Test content

The *TOEFL ITP* test has three sections: Listening Comprehension, Structure and Written Expression, and Reading Comprehension. All questions are multiple choice.

#### *Section One: Listening Section*

The Listening section contains recorded material that includes the vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, and grammatical constructions typical of spoken English. The section tests comprehension of both short and long conversations and talks.

The purpose of the listening section is to assess the ability to comprehend spoken English (Pyle & Page, 2002). There are three parts to the listening section: Part A, with short dialogues containing 30 questions, Part B with longer dialogues consisting of 8 questions, and part C, a lecture with 12 questions. In all parts of these sections, the conversations and dialogues are not played a second time so that test takers need to listen to the recordings very carefully and attentively. Then, they choose one out of four possible answers for each of the 50 questions. The time allotted for the listening section is 30 to 35 minutes (Pyle & Page, 2002).

#### *Section Two: Structure and Written Expression*

Section 2 consists of sentences that test knowledge of structural and grammatical elements of standard written English. These sentences include a variety of topics and give no advantage to students in specific fields of study. When topics have a national context, they may refer to United States or Canadian history, culture, art or literature. However, knowledge of these contexts is not needed to answer questions concerning the structural or grammatical points.

The structure and written expression section was developed to test the ability to identify appropriate language for standard written English (TOEFL ITP assessment series, 2013). This section entails two parts: Part A (Structure), and Part B (Written Expressions). In Part A, there are 15 incomplete sentences; beneath each sentence are four words or phrases, marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Test takers are to choose the one word or

phrase that most perfectly completes the sentence. On the answer sheet, find the number of the question and fill in the corresponding blank space with the letter for the answer they have chosen (Pyle & Page, 2002). Subsequently follows Part B, which is the written expressions, with 25 questions which each having four underlined words or phrases. The four underlined parts of the sentence are marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Test takers are to choose the one underlined word(s) or phrase that must be changed so that the sentence will be correct. This section usually lasts for 25 minutes.

### ***Section Three: Reading Comprehension***

The Reading section contains reading passages and questions about the passages. After you read a passage, you will be asked about main ideas and important details. You will also be asked to make inferences based on given information, identify textual organization, figure out unfamiliar vocabulary based on context, and recognize referential relationships of pronouns and abstract nouns.

The last section is reading comprehension whose purpose is to measure the ability to read and comprehend short passages which uses the same topics and styles as most universities and college). There are usually four to five long passages, each of which commonly has about eight to twelve questions. Test takers are asked to answer these questions which are usually related to main ideas of the whole passage, vocabulary, detailed information, inferences and reference items. The time given for this section is 50 minutes.

### ***Structure and Written Expression Section***

The Structure and Written Expression section is designed to measure your ability to recognize language that is appropriate for standard written English. It is intended as an indirect measure of your ability to write in an academic style rather than as a simple test of grammar. Nevertheless, to communicate clearly in academic writing, familiarity with correct grammar and word usage is essential. It is also important in listening and reading comprehension as well as speaking, especially in a university setting.

The Structure and Written Expression section contains 40 questions and takes 25 minutes to complete. There are two types of questions, with special directions for each type.

#### ***Structure questions***

Questions in the Structure part of this section are designed to test your ability to construct complete and grammatically correct sentences. In this section, you will be given sentences from a variety of academic or reference sources. Each sentence has a blank. The blank indicates where a part of the sentence is missing. You are also given four answer choices. Each choice consists of one or more words. You must identify the one choice that could be put into the blank to complete the sentence correctly.

Structure questions deal, in general, with the proper use of sentence elements to create complete sentences. The questions especially focus on larger units of syntax, such as clauses and phrases. Specific points tested include (but are not limited to) the correct formation and use of regular and irregular verbs; agreement between subjects and verbs; the correct formation and use of nouns, adjectives, and adverbs; comparisons; proper word order; and the appropriate use of pronouns, prepositions, articles, and conjunctions.

#### ***Written expression questions***

Questions in the Written Expression part of this section are designed to test your ability to detect errors in academic writing. The questions consist of individual sentences adapted from academic or reference sources. Each sentence contains an error that might be made by a nonnative learner of English. Four parts of the sentence are underlined. You must choose the one part that must be changed to make the sentence correct in standard written English.

Some of the errors reflect grammatical problems related to agreement, parallel structure of words in a series, the formation or combination of words, or the use of articles, prepositions, and conjunctions. Others may involve the incorrect choice of a noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, or article. Sometimes a necessary word is missing or an extra word is wrongly inserted. Errors in word order might be included to test awareness, for example, that an adverb or adjective is out of place. Questions in the Structure and Written Expression section do **not** test your ability to recognize word-level punctuation errors, such as errors in the use of hyphens, apostrophes, or capitalization. These questions are also **not** designed to test knowledge of English spelling.

#### ***Strategies for preparing for the structure and written expression section***

The aspects of English that are tested in the Structure and Written Expression section must be understood within a larger context. This section tests the intermediate point between grammar knowledge and the skill of writing. Therefore, if you have the ability to write fluently and correctly in English, you will generally perform better on this section than if you simply memorize grammar rules but are unable to use those rules for

communication.

In other words, knowledge of grammar rules does not, in itself, equal an ability to communicate in a language. Being able to recite a rule is not helpful if you are not able to make practical use of the rule. Rather, it is essential to be able to use grammatical rules accurately. Without accurate grammatical usage, meaning can be obscured or lost.

Therefore, to prepare for the Structure and Written Expression section, it is necessary to go beyond a mere understanding of grammar rules. In order to improve both your test scores and your skills in English, you should practice using these structures and rules in active communication.

In particular, to perform better on this section, you will need to use the grammar you have learned in a variety of writing activities involving communication. A variety of reading, speaking, and listening activities can also help you perform better. As you become increasingly proficient in communicating in English, your use of the grammatical structures that you have practiced will typically become more automatic, and your performance on this section will improve.

***Structure and Written Expression Score Descriptor***

TOEFL ITP Section Scores	CEFR Level	Proficiency Descriptors
64-68	C1	Test takers at this level are usually able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understand less familiar verb tenses, subjunctive mood and reduced clauses, such as “while eating” and “how to go”</li> <li>• monitor interactions among various elements in a complex sentence for completeness of sentence structure, singular/plural agreement, etc.</li> <li>• deal with idioms and multiple usages of words, such as “so” and “as”</li> </ul> recognize different levels of abstraction or formality in choices, such as “in an agreement”/“in agreement” and “The star was just discovered recently”/“Only recently was the star discovered”
53-63	B2	Test takers at this level are usually able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use suffixes and other morphemes in crafting appropriate word forms</li> <li>• modify nouns by adding participles, relative clauses, appositives, etc.</li> <li>• deal with multiple and less frequent uses of common words</li> <li>• understand limitations imposed by the use of specific vocabulary, as with phrasal verbs such as “refer to” in which only a particular preposition may follow a particular verb</li> </ul> recognize acceptable variations in basic grammatical rules, as well as exceptions to those rules
43-52	B1	Test takers at this level are usually able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use common tenses of verbs correctly, including passive forms</li> <li>• use linking verbs with ease and use an expletive, such as “there is” in the absence of another main verb</li> <li>• recognize when verbs require objects, such as infinitives, gerunds or clauses beginning with “that”</li> <li>• introduce a clause with very common words, such as “before” or “if”</li> </ul> recognize the correct structure of a sentence or clause, even when its subject and verb are slightly separated
32-42	A2	Test takers at this level are sometimes able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• demonstrate familiarity with the most often used tenses of common verbs</li> <li>• use a singular or plural noun correctly as the subject of a sentence in very simple contexts</li> <li>• link subjects to nouns or adjectives with very common linking verbs</li> <li>• recognize that some common verbs require nouns as objects</li> </ul> make proper use of simple comparatives and common conjunctions and prepositions

**III. Conclusion**

TOEFL ITP is used in an academic setting to help educators understand their students' English language skills and where they are progressing, whereas the urgency is important for scholarship programs, applying for jobs with well-known companies, and even as a condition for admission to domestic universities. The TOEFL ITP test contains multiple-choice questions that assess your English language skills in three areas: 1) Listening comprehension assesses your ability to understand spoken English; 2) Structure and written expression assesses your ability to construct structured and grammatically correct English sentences; and 3) Reading comprehension assesses your ability to read and comprehend reading material written in English. In order to be successful in the test, you should practice a lot, use English every day; set aside time each day to communicate only in English; listen, read, and write in English every chance you get.

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