

Academic Speaking Skills

The Speaking section measures your ability to speak English effectively in academic settings, during class as well as outside the classroom. The tasks in this section resemble the real-life situations that students encounter:

- **During a class**, students are expected to respond to questions, participate in academic discussions, summarize what they read and hear, and express their views on topics under discussion.
- **Outside the classroom**, students participate in casual conversations, express their opinions and communicate with people in such places as the bookstore, the library, the cafeteria and the housing office.

Speaking Section Description

In the Speaking section, you will be asked to speak on a variety of topics that draw on personal experience, campus-based situations and academic content. The Speaking section is approximately 20 minutes long and includes six questions.

The first two questions are called Independent Speaking Tasks because they require you to draw entirely on your own ideas, opinions and experiences when you respond.

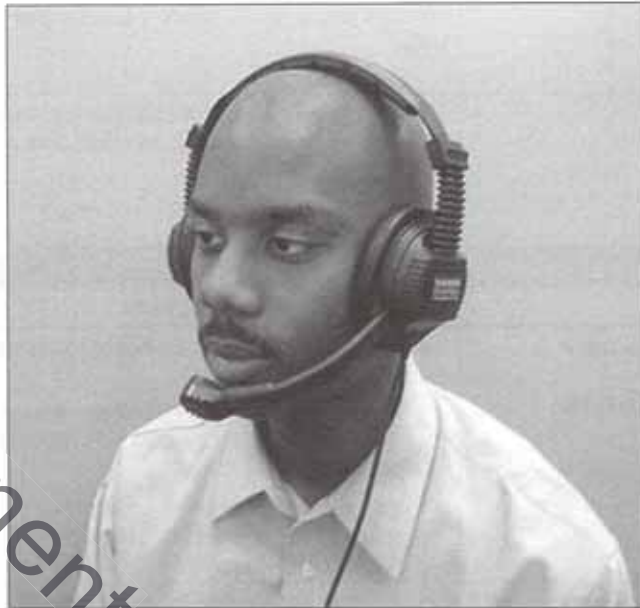
The other four questions are called Integrated Speaking Tasks because they require you to integrate your English-language skills—listening and speaking, or listening, reading and speaking—just as you must during class and outside the classroom.

Speaking Task Types

TASK TYPE	TASK DESCRIPTION	TIMING
Independent Tasks		
1. Personal Preference	This question asks you to express and defend a personal choice from a given category—for example, important people, places, events or activities that you enjoy.	Preparation time: 15 seconds Response time: 45 seconds
2. Choice	This question asks you to make and defend a personal choice between two contrasting behaviors or courses of action.	Preparation time: 15 seconds Response time: 45 seconds
Integrated Tasks		
Read/Listen/Speak		
3. Campus Situation Topic: Fit and Explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A reading passage (75–100 words) presents a campus-related issue. A listening passage (60–80 seconds; 150–180 words) comments on the issue in the reading passage. The question asks you to summarize the speaker's opinion within the context of the reading passage. 	Preparation time: 30 seconds Response time: 60 seconds
4. Academic Course Topic: General/Specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A reading passage (75–100 words) broadly defines a term, process or idea from an academic subject. An excerpt from a lecture (60–90 seconds; 150–220 words) provides examples and specific information to illustrate the term, process or idea from the reading passage. The question asks you to combine and convey important information from the reading passage and the lecture excerpt. 	Preparation time: 30 seconds Response time: 60 seconds
Listen/Speak		
5. Campus Situation Topic: Problem/Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The listening passage (60–90 seconds; 180–220 words) is a conversation about a student-related problem and two possible solutions. The question asks you to demonstrate an understanding of the problem and to express an opinion about solving the problem. 	Preparation time: 20 seconds Response time: 60 seconds
6. Academic Course Topic: Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The listening passage (90–120 seconds; 230–280 words) is an excerpt from a lecture that explains a term or concept and gives concrete examples to illustrate that term or concept. The question asks you to summarize the lecture and demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the examples and the overall topic. 	Preparation time: 20 seconds Response time: 60 seconds
TOTAL		20 minutes

Speaking Responses

Like all the other sections of the TOEFL iBT[®] test, the Speaking section is delivered via computer. For all Speaking tasks, you'll use a headset with a microphone.



For Speaking questions that involve listening, you'll hear short spoken passages or conversations. For Speaking questions that involve reading, you'll read short written passages on your computer screen. You can take notes throughout the Speaking section and use your notes when you respond to the questions.

Your responses will be recorded and sent to the ETS Online Scoring Network where they will be scored by experienced raters.

How Speaking Responses Are Scored

Your responses will be scored holistically. This means that raters listen for various features in your response and assign a single score based on the overall skill you display in your answer. Although scoring criteria vary somewhat depending on the question, the raters generally will be listening for the following features in your answer:

- **Delivery:** How clear and fluid your speech is, including good pronunciation, natural pacing and natural-sounding intonation patterns.
- **Language Use:** How effectively you use grammar and vocabulary to convey your ideas.

- **Topic Development:** How fully you answer the question and how coherently you present your ideas. Good responses generally use all or most of the time allotted, and the relationship between ideas and the progression from one idea to the next is clear and easy to follow.

For more detailed criteria, see the Speaking Scoring Guides in Appendix 3. These will help you better understand how responses are evaluated.

It's important to note that raters don't expect your response to be perfect, and high-scoring responses may contain occasional errors and minor lapses in any of the three areas described above.

Speaking Skills Practice

The best way to practice speaking is with native speakers of English. In some countries, you can find English-speaking tutors or assistants to help you with conversation skills and overall communication skills. If you can't do that, find a friend to practice speaking with every day.

Targeted Activities

Independent Speaking

Try the following activities to build the skills you'll need for the Independent Speaking tasks:

- Make a list of topics that are familiar to you and practice speaking about them. The topics can be academic or non-academic (sports, hobbies, travel, etc.).
- Think for 20 seconds about what you did yesterday, then recount your experiences in one minute. Remember to use the past tense of verbs and use connecting words and phrases, such as "first," "then" and "while I was."
- Think for 20 seconds about what you plan to do tomorrow, then talk about it for one minute.
- Think of a story with which you are familiar. Tell the story to several different people. Try to tell the story faster each time.
- Collect a number of pictures from magazines and newspapers. Look at each picture, then describe it in one minute. Describe the same thing more than once, using different adjectives and adding details.

Complete these Week 2 tasks and update the checklist on page 9.

- See sample Speaking questions in *Planner* Appendix 1 and experience them on the *Planner* website at www.ets.org/toefl/planner.
- Review Speaking Scoring Guides in *Planner* Appendix 3 to understand what score levels mean.
- **ePLAN** Listen to sample responses and view raters' comments on the *Planner* website to help you identify your current level and your desired level.

General Speaking Practice

- Practice using language for giving opinions, language for describing problems and solutions, and language to compare and contrast.
- Learn to use idiomatic and informal speech naturally and appropriately by listening to native English speakers and trying to mimic their expressions.
- Practice using contractions, such as *it's*, *there's*, *I'm* and so on, in order to sound more natural when speaking.
- Work on pronunciation, including word stress, intonation patterns and pauses. There are a number of products and websites that can help you develop pronunciation skills, including *Pronunciation in English* from AmEnglish.com[®] and ETS.

About note taking: You are permitted to take notes on the reading and listening material in the Integrated Speaking tasks on the TOEFL iBT® test. Because the reading and listening materials are very brief, taking notes may not be necessary. However, note-taking practice will help you prepare for the test.

- State an opinion or a preference for something familiar and present clear, detailed reasons for your choices. Use connecting words or phrases to help explain your opinion (for example, “the reason I prefer” or “this is important to me because”).
- Make a recommendation about a topic of concern or interest to you and explain why your idea is the best way to proceed.
- Think about topics related to student life (for example, the types of classes you enjoy taking or the best place to study). For each topic, write down two reasons to explain your preference and speak on this topic for one minute.
- Write down topics on slips of paper. Each day, choose one randomly and practice giving a one-minute response. Repeat your responses to each topic two or three times to build fluency.

Targeted Activities

Integrated Speaking

These activities can help build the skills you’ll need for the Integrated Speaking tasks:

- Listen to a talk on the National Geographic website at www.nationalgeographic.com/ and take notes. Then use your notes to give a summary of the talk to a friend and eventually record a one-minute oral summary.
- Read an article or listen to a talk on an issue that interests you (for example, the environment). Prepare an outline for a one-minute opinion speech about the article or talk. Your outline should include your opinion, two points to support your opinion and one detail/reason to support each point.
- Find campus newspaper articles on the Internet. After reading the articles, express your opinions about them to a friend.
- Read a short article from a newspaper or a textbook. Write down two or three questions and then answer them orally. Eventually, record your answers to the questions.
- Find a textbook in English that includes study questions at the end of each chapter. Practice answering the questions orally. Start by reading about subjects with which you’re familiar and later move on to less familiar subjects.

- Find listening and reading material on the same topic. The material can contain similar or different views. The listening material can be a news report on a current topic on TV or radio, and the reading material can be a newspaper or Internet report.
 - Take notes or create lists of important points on the listening and reading material.
 - Do separate oral summaries of the information in the listening and reading material. Practice paraphrasing using different words and grammatical structures.
 - Combine the information from the reading and listening material and explain in writing how they relate. Later, practice explaining it orally using only your notes for reference.
 - State an opinion about the ideas and information presented in the reading and listening material and explain how they relate.
 - If the reading and/or listening material describes a problem, suggest and explain your own solution to the problem.

Practice Tips for the Speaking Section

- When you practice for the TOEFL iBT® Speaking section, take 15 seconds to think about what you're going to say before you speak. Write down a few key words and ideas and plan how you will organize your response. Don't attempt to write down exactly what you're going to say. It's a waste of your time, and raters will be able to detect responses that are read and will give them a lower rating.
- Record your responses and replay them. Evaluate your effort by asking yourself these questions:
 - Did I complete the task?
 - Did I speak clearly?
 - Did I make grammatical errors?
 - Did I use words correctly?
 - Did I organize my ideas clearly and appropriately?
 - Did I use the time effectively?
 - Did I speak too quickly or too slowly?
 - Did I pause too often?
- Record your response another time a few days later. Compare these responses with your earlier responses.
- Ask an English teacher or tutor to evaluate your recordings using the appropriate TOEFL iBT Speaking Scoring Guides from Appendix 3.

Complete these Week 2 tasks and update the checklist on page 9.

- Pick three general activities and three targeted activities from pages 17–20 to work on your Speaking skills.
- **OG** Use the Speaking chapter in *The Official Guide to the TOEFL[®] Test* (Chapter 4) for more practice.

Group Speaking Activities

Have fun trying these activities to practice your speaking skills with friends or a study group:

- Make “note cards” with description prompts. For example, describe your favorite restaurant, your best friend or an ideal house. Put the cards face down, choose one and respond in 45 seconds.
- Join a club whose members meet to converse in English about movies, music and travel. If a club doesn’t exist in your area, start one. Invite native English speakers to join you.
- With a group, list opinion topics and write these on cards. Topics might include research papers vs. oral presentations, laptops vs. desktops, school uniforms vs. wearing regular clothes to school, and so on. Each person chooses a card, prepares a one-minute presentation and then presents to the group. The speaker must support his or her opinion with reasons. The group then can debate each topic.
- Divide group members into pairs. Have each pair of partners choose a common problem college students face and brainstorm two solutions to the problem. They should prepare role-plays in which one person describes the problem and the other provides the solutions and indicates which solution he or she prefers and why.
- Practice using transition words and phrases such as *however*, *first*, *on the other hand* and *in contrast* to help listeners follow your speech. With a group, write as many transitions as you can think of on cards. Each person must randomly choose one card and then create two sentences connected by the transition word on the card. You can use a timer and allow each person 30 seconds to respond.
- Set up a discussion club with a group of friends. Each week, one member chooses a talk or a speech (available online or in audio or video form) and everyone in the group listens to it. When the group gets together, the leader for that week summarizes the talk/speech and leads a discussion on the topic.