

CHAPTER
4

Reading

Academic Reading Skills

The Reading section measures your ability to understand university-level academic texts and passages. In many academic settings around the world, students are expected to read and understand information from textbooks and other academic materials written in English. The following are three purposes for academic reading:

Reading to Find Information

- Effectively scanning text for key facts and important information
- Increasing reading fluency and rate

Basic Comprehension

- Understanding the general topic or main idea, major points, important facts and details, vocabulary in context, and pronoun usage
- Making inferences about what is implied in a passage

Reading to Learn

- Recognizing the organization and purpose of a passage
- Understanding relationships between ideas
- Organizing information into a category chart or a summary in order to recall major points and important details
- Inferring how ideas connect throughout the passage

Reading Section Description

The TOEFL iBT[®] Reading section includes three to four reading passages. There are 12 to 14 questions per passage. You have 60 to 80 minutes to answer all the questions in the section.

Complete these Week 3 tasks and update the checklist on page 9.

- **EP1.AN** Review sample Reading questions in Planner Appendix 1 and experience them on the *Planner* website at www.ets.org/toefl/planner.

Reading Passages

TOEFL iBT[®] Reading passages are excerpts from university-level textbooks that would be used in introductions to a discipline or topic. The excerpts are changed as little as possible because the goal is to assess how well you can read the kind of writing that is used in an academic environment.

The passages will cover a variety of different subjects. You don't need to be familiar with the topic of a passage. All the information you need to answer the questions will be in the passage itself.

Often passages present information about the topic from more than one perspective or point of view. This is something you should note as you read because you'll usually be asked at least one question that allows you to show that you have understood the general organization of the passage.

You must read through or scroll to the end of each passage before receiving questions on that passage. Once the questions appear, the passage appears on the right side of the computer screen.

The questions are on the left. (To see how they appear on screen, download the sample questions on the *Planner* website.)

Reading Question Formats

There are three question formats in the Reading section:

- Questions with four choices and a single answer in traditional multiple-choice format
- Questions with four choices and a single answer that ask you to "insert a sentence" where it fits best in a passage
- "Reading to learn" questions with more than four choices that ask you to select more than one answer

Each passage is accompanied by a "reading to learn" question. These questions test your ability to recognize how the passage is organized and to understand the relationships among facts and ideas in different parts of the passage.

For these questions, you're asked to sort information and place the text options provided into a **category chart** or **summary**. The summary questions are worth up to two points each. The chart questions are worth up to three points if there are five options presented, and up to four points if there are seven options presented.

Reading Skills Practice

You can improve your reading skills in English by reading regularly, especially university textbooks or other materials that cover a variety of subject areas—such as sciences, social sciences, arts, business—and are written in an academic style.

The Internet is one of the best resources for reading material, but books, magazines or journals of any kind are very helpful as well. It's best to include material that is more academic in style, the kind that would be found in university courses.

Reading as much as possible in English is an essential part of building your reading skills. Go to www.lexile.com/toefl for a list of books that are associated with TOEFL iBT® skill levels.

General Reading Activities

You might try these general activities to practice your reading skills:

- Increase your vocabulary by keeping a journal of new words:
 - Group word lists by academic subject areas—such as biology, geology, psychology—and create flash cards to review the words frequently.
 - Learn to recognize the meanings of prefixes, suffixes and common roots of words.
- Study the organization of academic texts:
 - Look for the main ideas and the supporting details and pay attention to the relationship between them. Notice how the end of one sentence relates to the beginning of the next sentence.
 - Make a list of the important points of the passage and then write a summary of it. If the text is a comparison, be sure your summary reflects that. If the text argues two points of view, be sure both are reflected in your summary.
- Work with a friend to improve your reading skills. You read an article from a journal or magazine and your friend reads a different article. Each person makes up five basic information questions (who, what, where, when, how and why). Exchange articles, read the new article and answer each other's questions.
- Read a Reading passage from *The Official Guide to the TOEFL® Test* or from any academic text. Think about the main idea of each paragraph and then write a "headline" for each paragraph. The "headline" should be short (five to eight words) and it should capture the main idea of the paragraph. Then write a five- to six-sentence summary of the entire passage.
- Make a copy of an article from a newspaper or from an academic text. Cut the text into paragraphs and then try to put the text back together. Look for words that give you clues about the ordering of the paragraphs to help you put the text back together.

- Work on increasing your reading speed. This can be done by timing yourself as you read. Read a short text (article or short reading from a text) once and record the time it takes you to read it. Then read it again and try to improve your reading speed.
- Set up a book club with your classmates or friends. Have each person choose something for everyone to read. Set up a schedule and discuss one reading at each meeting.
- Keep a reading log in which you write summaries or responses to texts you read.

The TOEFL iBT® Reading section does not measure summarizing skills, but learning to summarize reading passages will help you on the Speaking and Writing sections.

Targeted Activities

Reading to Find Information

Try these activities to practice for “Reading to Find Information” questions:

- Scan passages to find and highlight key facts (dates, numbers, terms) and information. Look for capital letters, numbers and symbols, and special formatting (such as italics) as you scan.
- Look for words in a passage that have the same meaning. Highlight each one with the same color marker. Then look at the way the writer used these words with similar meanings.

Targeted Activities

Reading for Basic Comprehension

Try these activities to practice for “Reading for Basic Comprehension” questions:

- Practice skimming a passage quickly to get a general impression of the main idea instead of carefully reading each word and each sentence. Practice reading the introductory paragraph, the first sentences of paragraphs and the concluding paragraph to get the gist of a passage.

- Develop the ability to skim quickly and identify major points. After skimming a passage, read it again more carefully and write down the main idea, major points and important facts.
- Choose some unfamiliar words in a passage and guess the meaning from the context (surrounding sentences). Then look the words up to confirm their meaning.
- Underline all pronouns (for example: he, him, they, them, etc.) and identify the nouns to which they refer in the passage.
- Paraphrase individual sentences in a passage. Then paraphrase entire paragraphs.

Targeted Activities

Reading to Learn

- Whenever you read, identify the passage type (cause/effect, compare/contrast, classification, problem/solution, description, narration).
- Organize the information in the passage:
 - Make a list of the major points of the passage and the minor points that support them.
 - If the passage categorizes information, create a chart and place the information in appropriate categories.
 - Create an oral or written summary of the passage using the charts, lists and outlines.

About charts and the TOEFL iBT® Reading section: You won't be asked to create charts on the test. Instead, a chart with possible answer choices will be provided and you'll be asked to fill in the chart with the correct choices. By creating practice charts, however, you can practice categorizing information, and soon will be able to do so with ease.

Complete these Week 3 tasks and update the checklist on page 9.

- Pick three general activities and three targeted activities from pages 23–25 to work on your Reading skills.
- **OG** Use the Reading chapter in *The Official Guide to the TOEFL® Test* (Chapter 2) for more practice.