

CHAPTER  
6

## Writing

## Academic Writing Skills

The Writing section measures your ability to write in English in an academic setting. In all academic situations where writing in English is required, you must be able to present your ideas in a clear, well-organized manner.

Often you'll need to write a paper or an essay response on an exam about what you've been learning in class. This requires combining information you've heard in lectures with what you've read in textbooks or other materials. For this type of writing—often referred to as **integrated writing**—you must be able to:

- Take notes on what you hear and read, and use your notes to organize information before writing
- Summarize, paraphrase and cite information accurately from source material
- Write about the ways the information you heard relates to the information you read

You also must be able to write essays that express and support your opinions. In this type of writing—known as **independent writing**—you express an opinion and support it based on your own knowledge and experience.

For example, you may be asked to write an essay about a controversial issue. You would use past personal experience to support your position.

Planning before you write is an important skill to develop. In your university or college, you will have to write papers and essay exams that will require such skills.

## Writing Section Description

The total time for the Writing section is 50 minutes. You'll write responses to two writing tasks: an Integrated Writing Task and an Independent Writing Task.

The Integrated Writing Task comes first because it requires some listening and you'll be wearing headphones. When you finish the Integrated Writing Task, which takes about 20 minutes, you may take the headphones off to work on the Independent Writing Task. You'll then have 30 minutes to complete the Independent Writing Task.

You'll type your responses on the computer keyboard, and then your responses will be sent to the ETS Online Scoring Network.

Task Type	Description
<b>Task 1</b>	
Integrated Writing Task  Read/Listen/Write	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You read a short text of about 230–300 words (reading time: three minutes) on an academic topic.</li> <li>You may take notes on the reading passage.</li> <li>The reading passage disappears from the screen during the lecture that follows. It reappears when you begin writing so you can refer to it as you work.</li> <li>You listen to a speaker discuss the same topic from a different perspective. The listening passage is about 230–300 words long (listening time: two minutes).</li> <li>The listening passage provides additional information that relates to points made in the reading passage. You may take notes on the listening passage.</li> <li>You write a summary in connected English prose of important points made in the listening passage and explain how these relate to the key points of the reading passage. Suggested response length is 150–225 words; however, there is no penalty for writing more as long as it is in response to the task presented.</li> </ul>
<b>Task 2</b>	
Independent Writing  Writing from Experience and Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You write an essay that states, explains and supports your opinion on an issue. An effective essay will usually contain a minimum of 300 words; however, you may write more if you wish.</li> <li>You must support your opinions or choices rather than simply list personal preferences or choices.</li> <li>Typical essay questions begin with statements such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Use reasons and specific details to support your answer.</li> <li>Some people believe [X]. Other people believe [Y]. Which of these two positions do you prefer/agree with? Give reasons and specific details.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## How Writing Responses Are Scored

Your responses to all writing tasks are sent to the ETS Online Scoring Network. The responses are rated by four raters—two human raters for the integrated task and by one human rater and one *e-rater*® for the independent task. (With *e-rater*, your responses are scored by the computer.)

Your responses are rated on a scale of zero to five according to the Writing Scoring Guides in Appendix 4. Your average score on the two writing tasks is converted to a scaled score of 0 to 30. (See Appendix 6 for a chart that helps you convert the average score on your responses to a scaled score.)

- Your response to the Integrated Writing Task is scored on the quality of your writing (organization, appropriate and precise use of grammar, and vocabulary) and the completeness and accuracy of the content.
- The independent writing essay is scored on the overall quality of your writing: development, organization, and appropriate and precise use of grammar and vocabulary. It doesn't matter whether you agree or disagree with the topic—the raters are trained to accept all varieties of opinions.



For both of the writing tasks, the raters recognize that your response is a first draft. You're not expected to produce a comprehensive essay about a specialized topic. You can receive a high score with an essay that contains some errors.

## Writing Skills Practice

### General Writing Activities

Be sure you have developed fundamental writing skills before you progress to more targeted practice. Check to see if you can do the following:

- Learn the conventions of spelling, punctuation and paragraph creation.
- Study the organization of good paragraphs and essays. A good paragraph discusses ONE main idea. This idea is usually written in the first sentence, which is called the topic sentence. In essay writing, each paragraph should discuss one aspect of the main idea of the essay.
- Before you write, think about verb tenses that logically fit your topic. Are you writing about something in the past? Then you might use the simple past, present and past perfect, past continuous—tenses that naturally fit together.
- Read your writing three or four times; each time, check for a different thing. Make a checklist of errors you commonly make (for example: verb tenses, run-on sentences, subject-verb agreement).
- Reread your writing and circle common, uninteresting expressions (for example: *get, nice, things, stuff*). In your second draft, replace these with stronger words and phrases (for example: *obtain, pleasant, objects, possessions*). See how many alternate words you can come up with.
- Practice using transitions to show the relationship between ideas. Use words and phrases such as “on the one hand” or “in conclusion” to create a clear structure for your response.
- Practice typing on a QWERTY keyboard, the type of computer keyboard used in English-speaking countries. The name comes from the first six letters in the top row of the keyboard.

**Complete these Week 5 tasks and update the checklist on page 10.**

- See sample Writing questions in *Planner* Appendix 1.
- Review Writing Scoring Guides in *Planner* Appendix 4 to understand what score levels mean.
- **ePLAN** Read sample responses and raters' comments in Appendix 1 to help you identify your current level and understand what a response at your desired level is like. Refer to the Scoring Guides as you read.

**Vocabulary tip:** Expand your vocabulary by doing crossword puzzles and other word games. These are available on sites like <http://www.yourdictionary.com>. This website also has a "Word of the Day."

## Targeted Activities

### Independent Writing

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

- Make a list of familiar topics and write essays about them. Practice taking 30 minutes to plan, write and revise each essay.
  - Think about and list all ideas related to a topic or task before writing. This is also called "prewriting."
  - Identify one main idea and create a list of some major points to support that idea. Develop the essay by using appropriate explanations and details.
  - When your essay is complete, reread what you have written. Make sure your supporting ideas are clearly related to your main point and are developed in detail.
- Read a sample essay response from Appendix 1 or in *The Official Guide to the TOEFL® Test* and make an outline of the essay. Include the main idea and supporting points for each paragraph. Paraphrase the key points in your own words and summarize the essay you read.
- Read articles and essays written by professional writers that express opinions about an issue, such as a social, environmental or educational issue. Identify the writer's opinion(s). Notice how the writer addresses possible objections to the opinion(s).

## Practice Tips for the Writing Section

- Use the sample Independent Writing topics in Appendix 5 of the *Planner* and Chapter 5 of *The Official Guide to the TOEFL<sup>®</sup> Test* to practice writing for the TOEFL iBT<sup>®</sup> test. Time yourself, taking 30 minutes to read the question, plan your work and write your essay. Review your essay and ask yourself these questions:
  - Did I complete the task?
  - Did I write clearly?
  - Did I make grammatical errors?
  - Did I use words correctly?
  - Did I organize my ideas clearly and coherently?
  - Did I use the time effectively?
- When practicing the Integrated Writing response:
  - Plan your time carefully (for example, two to three minutes to plan, 15 minutes to write, two to three minutes to edit).
  - Start your response with a strong topic statement that clearly shows the main point of the lecture.
  - Show how the points made in the lecture relate to specific points made in the reading. Do not simply summarize the reading and the writing.
- Ask an English teacher or tutor to evaluate your essay using the appropriate Writing Scoring Guides from Appendix 4 and to give you feedback.

## Targeted Writing Activities

### Paraphrasing

In your academic classes, you must be careful never to plagiarize (copy another writer's words without acknowledging the source). Paraphrasing is an important skill because you are expressing ideas about something from source material in your own words. Practice paraphrasing words, phrases, sentences and entire paragraphs frequently using the following activities:

- Learn to find synonyms. Pick 10–15 words or phrases in a passage and quickly think of synonyms without looking them up in a dictionary or thesaurus.



- Practice writing a sentence using the noun form of a word and then convey the same meaning using the verb form.
- Try paraphrasing two or three sentences. Later, move on to paraphrasing paragraphs and longer passages.
- Write a paraphrase of a reading passage using only your notes. If you haven't taken notes, write the paraphrase without looking at the original text. Check your paraphrase to make sure it's factually accurate and that you've used different words and grammatical structures.

**Vocabulary tip:** Randomly choose a word from your vocabulary log. Define the word, use it in a sentence, and see how many words with similar meanings you can list.

### Targeted Activities

### Integrated Writing

You can do these activities to build the skills you'll need for the Integrated Writing tasks:

- Find a textbook in English that includes questions about the material at the end of a chapter and practice writing answers to the questions.
- Read academic articles and listen to related lectures.
  - Take notes in your own language and then take notes in English.
  - Make a list of the major points and important details.
  - Use your list to write a summary of the major points and important details. Be sure to paraphrase using different words and grammatical structures.
  - Ask your teacher to review your writing and help you correct your errors.
  - Gradually decrease the time it takes you to read the material and write these summaries.
- Practice finding main points by listening to recorded lectures or talks online. Stop the recording about every 30 seconds to write out a short summary of what you heard. Replay the recording to check your summary.

- Read two articles on the same topic. Write a summary of each, and then explain the ways in which they are similar and the ways in which they are different.
- Listen to a recorded news story online. In a newspaper or online, read another story on the same news item. The material can provide similar or different views.
  - Take notes on the material.
  - Summarize both the written and spoken portions. Clearly identify which source you are referring to throughout your summary.
  - Combine the information and discuss how the materials relate. Explain how the ideas are similar, how one idea expands upon another, or how the ideas differ or contradict each other.
- Watch a movie with a friend or go to a restaurant together. Ask your friend's opinion of the movie or restaurant; take some notes. Read an online review of the same movie or restaurant. Write a response comparing your friend's opinions with the online review.
- Read an opinion or editorial piece from a newspaper. Interview a friend, classmate, family member or teacher on the same topic. Write a response comparing your interview with the written response.

Be sure to paraphrase! On the TOEFL iBT® test, you will receive a score of zero if you copy words from the reading passage.

- Practice integrating all four language skills.
  - Listen to an online lecture and take notes. Then prepare both an oral and a written summary. Find and read a text on the same topic. Take notes. Then prepare both an oral and a written summary of the lecture and reading. Later, discuss the reading and lecture with a friend. Prepare a vocabulary list of the important words on the topic.
  - Read an essay from an academic text or from *The Official Guide to the TOEFL® Test*. Take notes on the main and supporting details. Use your notes to summarize the essay orally. Record your summary. Then listen to your summary to make sure you have included all the main points of the essay. Finally, write your own essay on the same topic.

### Complete these Week 5 tasks and update the checklist on page 10.

- Pick three general activities and three targeted activities from pages 34–37 to work on your Writing skills.
- **OG** Use the Writing chapter in *The Official Guide to the TOEFL® Test* (Chapter 5) for more practice.