

# TOEFL Speaking



At the moment there are two TOEFL speaking tests:

TOEFL TAST  
TSE

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## TAST

One test that measures test taker's ability to communicate effectively in academic settings is TAST. It is important to know what this test is about for two reasons. First, non-educational institutions use this test to measure student's ability to speak English. Second, the question types of TAST are used in the new generation TOEFL-iBT test.

The TOEFL Academic Speaking Test (TAST) lasts approximately 20 minutes. During the test, students will answer 6 speaking questions **over the telephone**. Two of the questions ask about familiar topics. Four questions ask about short conversations, lectures, and reading passages. The questions and the reading passages are printed in the test book. The time students will have to prepare your response and to speak is printed below each question. Students should answer all of the questions as completely as possible in the time allowed.

## Question Types

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### Exercise:

As you read through the question types, answer the sample questions. Don't forget to time your preparation and response time. (A stop watch is a useful tool in a TOEFL class).

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### Question 1: Personal Experience

Students will be asked to speak about a person, place, object, or event that is familiar to them.

*Scoring criteria:*

ability to speak clearly  
ability to speak fluently  
ability to speak coherently  
relevance to the topic

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### Question 2: Personal Preference

Students will be presented with two possible actions or situations and they will be asked to decide which of the actions or situations they prefer. They will have to further explain the reasons for their choice.

*Scoring Criteria:*

ability to state and support an opinion  
ability to convey the information clearly, fluently, and coherently

*Sample Question:*

Some prefer to travel alone. Others prefer to travel in a group. Which way of travelling do you prefer and why?

Preparation Time: 15 seconds

Response Time: 45 seconds

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### Question 3: Reading/Listening/Speaking Situation

1. Students will read a short passage about a topic of campus related interest.
2. They will then listen to a person or two people discussing something directly related to that topic.

3. They will be asked a question about the connection between what they have just read and listened to.

*Scoring Criteria:*

- ability to understand information or opinions in the two sources
- ability to organize and draw requested connections between the two sources
- ability to convey the information, opinions, and connections clearly, fluently, and coherently
- ability to provide a complete response
- ability to speak accurately

*Sample Question:*

Reading time: 45 seconds

***New Museum***

Vienna's city council has decided to renovate their museum. The museum is located in the historical part of the city. One proposal is to build a building that fits the historical architecture. Another proposal is to build a modern building consisting of glass blocks. The cost of both buildings is nearly the same. The modern glass building might be considered more visually disturbing by some and the historical building could be considered boring by others.

The student expresses concerns about one of the proposals. State the concerns and explain how they relate to the city council's decision between the two alternatives.

Preparation Time: 30 seconds

Response time: 60 seconds

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Question 4: Reading/Listening/Speaking Academic

Students will read a short passage about an academic subject. Next, they will listen to a short talk on that subject. They will then be asked a question about the information provided in the reading text and the conversation.

*Scoring Criteria:*

- ability to understand information from the two sources
- ability to draw clear connections between them
- ability to convey the information clearly, fluently, and coherently
- ability to provide a complete and accurate response

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### Question 5: Listening/Speaking Situation

Students will listen to a short conversation, in which the speakers discuss a problem and possible solutions. They will then be asked to briefly describe the situation that was discussed in the conversation and to give their opinion about solutions to the problem.

*Scoring criteria:*

- ability to use conversational language
- ability to summarize the problem and its solutions clearly, fluently, and coherently
- ability to talk about the solution based on their own knowledge and experience
- ability to provide a complete and accurate response

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### Question 6: Listening/Speaking Academic

Students will listen to part of a talk by a professor in a class at a university. They will be asked a question about key information from the talk. In their response, they should summarize the main ideas and supporting information from the lecture.

*Scoring criteria:*

- ability to understand key information from an academic lecture
- ability to convey requested information and ideas clearly, fluently, and coherently in spoken English
- ability to provide a complete and accurate verbal response

*Sample Question:*

Using points and examples from the talk, describe the two strategies presented by the professor.

Preparation time: 20 seconds

Response Time: 60 seconds

Another TOEFL test that examines students' verbal proficiency is TSE.

The Test of Spoken English (TSE) is designed to evaluate the oral language proficiency of non-native speakers of English who are at or beyond the postsecondary level of education. It is used in conjunction with other measures, for example TOEFL. The main aim is to demonstrate the examinee's ability to successfully communicate in English in an academic or professional setting. TSE is mainly required of foreign trained teachers, physicians, nurses and pharmacists. Some large English-speaking corporations require a specific TSE score as a proof of person's ability to communicate in English. TSE will be available until 2007.

### Test of Spoken English Sample Test (directly obtained from ETS bulletin)

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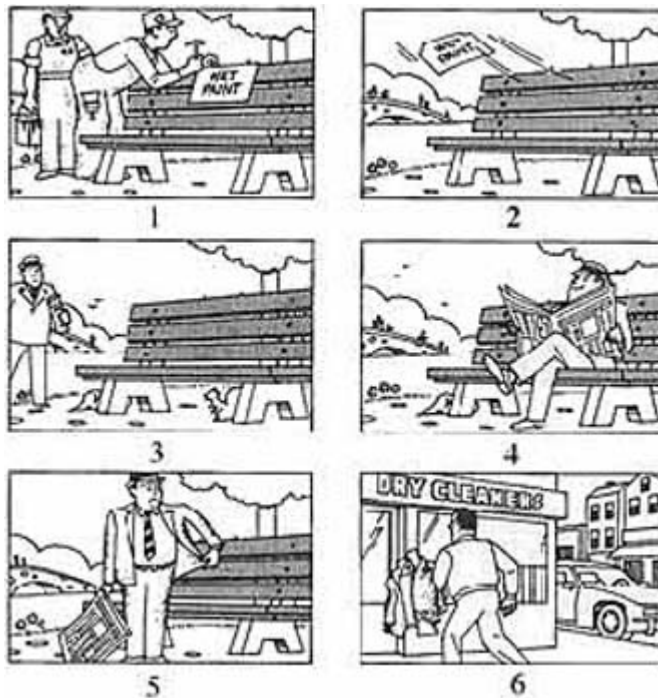
#### Exercise:

As in TAST perform the requested tasks as if you were taking TSE.

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Please look at the 6 pictures below. I'd like you to tell me the story that the pictures show, starting with picture number 1 and going through picture number 6. Please take 1 minute to look at the pictures and think about the story. Do not begin the story until I tell you to do so.

1. Tell me the story that the pictures show. (60 seconds)

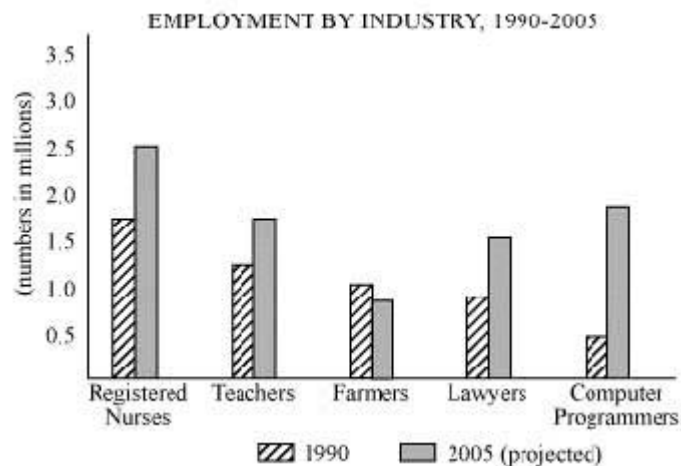


2. The man in the pictures is reading a newspaper. Both newspapers and television news programs can be good sources of information about current events. What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of each of these sources? (60 seconds)

Now I'd like to hear your ideas about some topics. Be sure to respond to the questions as clearly and completely as you can.

3. Many people enjoy visiting zoos and seeing the animals. Other people believe that animals should not be taken from their natural surroundings and put into zoos. I'd like to know what you think about this issue. (60 seconds)
4. If you could visit any place in the world for a month, where would you go and what would you do there? (60 seconds)

The graph below shows the number of workers in five different occupations in the United States in 1990 and the projected number for the year 2005. Take 15 seconds to look at the graph.



5. Tell me about the information given in the graph. (60 seconds)
6. What do you think might be some of the reasons for the changes represented in the graph above? (60 seconds)

In the following questions, you will be asked to imagine yourself in a work situation. The questions are designed to allow you to show how well you can communicate in the workplace. It will be helpful for you to make notes. Remember to make your response appropriate to the situation and to the people you are addressing.

7. Now you will be asked to respond to a co-worker. Imagine that you happen to meet a colleague who has recently received a promotion. Greet your colleague and be sure to
  - o mention the recent promotion,
  - o express your positive reaction to the promotion, and
  - o extend appropriate wishes to the colleague.

You will have 30 seconds to prepare your response. Do not begin speaking until I tell you to do so. (60 seconds)

Now you will be asked to respond to a telephone message containing a complaint. Imagine that you are the manager of a catalog company that sells office furniture. After you hear the message, you will have 30 seconds to prepare your response. In your response be sure to

- o show that you recognize the caller's problem, and
- o propose a way of dealing with the problem.

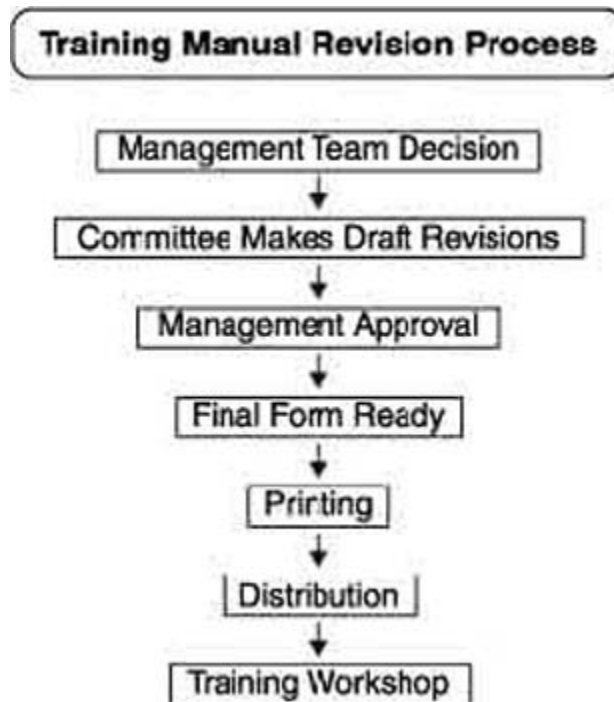
Now listen to the voice message.

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Hello. My name is Margaret Willis. . I'm calling because last week I ordered a wooden desk chair from your store. The salesperson said it would be delivered in five days. They also said it would be easy to put together. Well, I'm happy to say that the chair arrived ahead of schedule, you know, in just three days. But when I started . . . when I tried to assemble it, I discovered that one of the legs was missing. Please call me back today and let me know what you are going to do about this. Oh, the model number of the chair is . . . let's see, . . .B50, and it's the front right leg that's missing--the front right leg for model B50, OK? This is the third message I've left, and I am rather upset.

You will have 30 seconds to prepare your response. Do not begin speaking until I tell you to do so. (60 seconds)

Now you will be asked to make a progress report in a voice-mail message. Imagine that you work for the personnel department of a company or hospital that is revising its training manual for new employees. The flowchart below represents the steps taken in reviewing training manuals. Please take 15 seconds to look at the flowchart.



See *Voicemail Etiquette* at the end of this section for more ideas.

Now you will hear a conversation between two of your colleagues about the revision of the training manual for new employees. After the conversation, you will have 45 seconds to prepare a voice-mail report for Mr. Jacobson, your supervisor at work who has asked for a progress report on the project. Please listen to the conversation.

**Ann:** Hi, Bill! Still working on that new employee training manual that the management team decided to revise?

**Bill:** Oh yeah! It's been quite a job. I wish I hadn't been part of the revisions committee.

**Ann:** There was a revisions committee? I thought it was just a couple of you working on it.

**Bill:** No, the management team chose six people for the committee and we met a number of times. We eventually came up with a series of draft revisions.

**Ann:** Did you agree on all the changes?

**Bill:** Oh no! That's too much to ask! Well, we agreed about a lot of the revisions, but we ended up sending some to the management team for them to decide.

**Ann:** And they're still arguing over it, right?

**Bill:** Nope! They chose what they wanted, approved it, and sent it right back to us to prepare the final form for printing. And this is it! This document is the final form of the revised manual! I'm just taking it to be printed.

**Ann:** Really! That's great! And when will the new manuals be back from the printers? We're waiting to give them to the new employees to read through.

**Bill:** I expect you'll be able to distribute them on Tuesday next week.

**Ann:** Wow! That means we could do the training workshop on Friday. I'll set it up.

You will have 45 seconds to prepare your voice-mail report for Mr. Jacobson. In your report you should talk about:

- what the situation is,
- what has been accomplished, and
- what remains to be done.

Do not begin speaking until I tell you to do so. (60 seconds)

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Usefull tools for TSE

A teacher should constantly collect the following for their portfolio:



cartoons  
picture stories  
statistical graphs  
organizational charts

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## TOEFL - iBT

### Speaking

*The following is a guideline on speaking tasks. Note, that these tasks are not presented in isolation but they are presented as integrated tasks with other skills. The question types are taken from the TOEFL TAST above.*

2 independent tasks about familiar topics

Test takers state, explain, and support their response using personal knowledge and experience.

2 tasks based on reading and listening material

Tasks include a short reading passage and a short talk (These are shorter than those in the Reading and Listening sections.)  
Questions require test takers to combine information from both the reading and the listening material in the responses

One task is based on a campus-related situation, and the other is based on academic classroom material.

Test takers can take notes and use them to respond

2 tasks based on listening material, including a short lecture or conversation

Questions require test takers to summarize key ideas from the talks in the responses  
One task is based on a campus-related situation, and the other is based on academic classroom material.

*Test takers can take notes and use them to respond*

*Trained raters evaluate test takers' ability in:*

- *Topic development - show they understand and can make connections, and convey relevant information*

- *Delivery - use clear, smooth, sustained speech for overall intelligibility*
- *Language use - demonstrate control of grammar and word choice, and respond coherently*

## TOEFL- iBT Sample Task

### Narrator

Describe a place you have visited and explain why it was important to you. Include details and examples to support your explanation.

Speaking task. Please begin speaking after the beep.  
*[2 secs beep]*

Preparation Time: 15 seconds



### Narrator

You may begin to prepare your response after the beep.  
*[2 secs beep]*

Some people prefer living in the city, some in the country. Which do you prefer? Include details and examples in your explanation.

Please begin speaking after the beep.  
*[2 secs beep]*

Preparation time: 15 seconds

Response time: 45 seconds

### Narrator

You may begin to prepare your response after the beep.  
*[2 secs beep]*

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### Narrator

The United Airlines is planning to increase the fees and taxes. Read the announcement about the increase from the president . You will have 45 seconds to read the announcement. Begin reading now.

### Reading Activity

*Reading Time: 45 seconds*

#### Announcement from the president

The United Airlines is planning to increase domestic fares because of an expected 4 billion in extra costs related to the government's decision. The president said the airline was considering an average increase of \$50 in domestic one-way regular fares to pay for the extra cost added to landing fees. The increase would affect more than 80 domestic routes, and about 90 percent of the airline's routes. But the carrier said that passengers paying regular fares account for less than 10 percent of its 40 million passengers who fly domestically each year.

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### Narrator

Now listen to two passengers as they discuss the above announcement.  
*[2 seconds]*

### Listening Activity

#### Passenger A

Oh great, now we have to come up with more money for our next trip.

#### Passenger B

Well, I really don't understand why. There have been rumours that the company has mismanaged their funds.

#### Passenger A

All airlines are the same, though. I heard that it's a really tough and competitive business. Last year many airports increased their fees. So I paid \$40 more when I flew to Rome.

#### Passenger B

What I am worried about is that if they continue like this I won't be able to go anywhere in a couple of years.

### Passanger A

Well, there are cheaper ailine companies you could fly with.

### Passanger B

I'm aware of several other airlines but the service is nothing to write home about. Also the seats are usually too close together and sometimes I'm not sure how safe these kinds of planes are. Last year a friend of mine flew to Florida and the plane had to return twice. I would be very unhappy about that.

***The passanger B expresses her opinion about airlines. State her opinion and explain the reasons she gives for holding that opinion.***

Please begin speaking after the beep.  
[2 secs beep]

Preparation time: 30 seconds  
Response time : 60 seconds

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## Microphone

It is crucial for the students to know how to adjust the microphone volume. They will be asked to repeat a sentence that will appear on the screen. When the sentence disappears from the screen, the volume will be automatically adjusted.

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## Sample Task

### Voicemail Etiquette



Voicemail has taken over auditory communications technology, so if we want to avoid endless frustration and productivity loss, we need to learn to leave messages that get returned.

1. Don't begin your voicemail with small talk, jokes or other needless filler words. Remember the fellow at the airport? Your message may be one of many, so he may be tired of listening when he gets to yours, so get right down to business. Identify yourself and the purpose of calling.

*Bad: "Hey, Charlie! It's me. Got a great one for you. Did you hear the one..."*

*Better: "Hi Charlie. This is John Smith, calling about our meeting in Toronto."*

2. Say something immediately after your greeting that puts you and your importance in the mind of the listener. She may not remember you if you just met once or twice, so give her a reference. The listener is always thinking, "Who the heck are you and why should I return your call?" If they asked for the call, make sure you say so.

*Bad: "Hello Ms. Watson. I'm calling today to let you know of our great new line of..."*

*Better: "Hi Ms. Watson. This is John Smith. We met last Tuesday at the Internet trade show in Chicago at my company's booth, The Speaking Connection. I'm following up on your request to..."*

3. What does the call recipient get if he gets back to you? Pleasant conversation? A special offer? Offer something compelling that makes the listener want to get back to you for his own good. Everyone wants to know what's in it for me, so provide the listener with an answer to that question.

*Bad: "I'd like you to call me back so we can discuss..."*

*Better: "I'm holding the cruise dates for 24 hours until I hear from you. Call me by tomorrow to book your vacation or plan something else."*

4. Most voicemail systems have automatic time stamps, but don't rely on them. I never listen to them because the electronic voice is annoying, and many answering machines don't have a time stamp. Let the person know the day and time you called and more importantly, when she can call you back. Provide a window for the return call that is accurate but not too restrictive.

*Bad: "We need to talk on the medical account. Call me anytime to discuss."*

*Better: "I'm calling on Thursday around 3 pm. I can be reached in my office tomorrow from 10 to 1 in the afternoon at 555-1212. Please call to discuss..."*

5. Simple right? Give the listener a phone number for a return call and an alternate like a digital phone that's always with you. If you're never around and don't have a mobile phone, use the convenience of email technology to let her know an email address that she can reply to that you can be sure to get.

*Bad: "Call me back so we can get to it."*

*Better: "I can be reached at 555-1212 from 3-5 today, or at my mobile / cell number of 555-2121 anytime. You can also get me through email at \_\_\_\_\_. I check it regularly."*

6. Tell the listener exactly what you want him to do. For business calls, discussion isn't good enough. What is this person needed for? The "I need" phrase is the most powerful two words in the English language, so use it.

*Bad: "Call me back so we can discuss the Warren account."*

*Better: "I need your approval on the final contract to propose to Mr. Warren for the half-million dollar widget order."*

7. This is a great call-return-getter that most people don't use. Think of the cruise example earlier, with the implied consequence of losing the trip reservation unless a return call was made. If you can, be explicit.

*Bad: "Honey, call me back about the groceries you wanted me to pick up."*

*Better: "Honey, call me back to let me know if you wanted skim milk or whole milk. If I don't hear from you, I'll assume you found other nourishment and no longer wish for me to pick up groceries. Bye-bye!"*

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## Exercise:

*Prepare a script for your own: (You can use the same exercise with your students)*

- 1) Leave a voicemail to somebody who left you a message on your voicemail but you don't know who they are.
  - 2) Leave a voicemail to make a doctor's appointment.
  - 3) Leave a voicemail at the bank to call you back. There is something wrong with your account.
  - 4) Leave a voicemail for somebody who left a message for you for a job interview. But you didn't get their address.
  - 5) Leave a voicemail to your boss. You want to invite them to a party.
  - 6) Leave a voicemail to change an appointment with your dentist.
  - 7) Leave a voicemail to congratulate your colleague on promotion.
  - 8) Leave a voicemail to let the teacher know that your child is sick.
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Now it's time to take a short test.

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