

Part II:

English Language Proficiency Examinations

The internationalization of any college campus has countless benefits. However, this also places an important responsibility on admissions staff to determine the level of preparedness of its incoming students, which includes ensuring their English proficiency. Currently, this is done most commonly by examination.

In Part II of this publication, three major English language assessments will be explored, along with other options that exist. Each has its own defining characteristics and concentrations. Depending on the needs of the college or university and its programs within, different scores or different tests altogether may be required. Before choosing the test(s) to be accepted, it is important to consider the relevance of content, breadth of skills, and depth of detail that each examination has with respect to the goals of the institution.

TOEFL (formerly Test of English as a Foreign Language)

TOEFL was developed in the early 1960s at the Center for Applied Linguistics in response to demand for English-proficiency certification. Shortly thereafter, Educational Testing Service (ETS) stepped in, first as a partner with College Board, and later with Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) as well, to oversee the examination. A decade later, ETS became the sole manager. TOEFL's stated purpose is to evaluate the relative ability with which test takers comprehend and produce university-level English, based on reading-, writing-, listening- and speaking-skill testing procedures. Skills are tested in isolation and integration. Currently, more than 9,000 colleges, universities and other institutions in over 130 countries accept TOEFL scores as an international admission criterion.

OVERVIEW

Established	1960s
Administrator	Educational Testing Service (ETS)
Test Centers	Worldwide
Format	iBT (Internet-based Test) taken via computer accounts for 97% of tests. 3% is the PBT (Paper-based Test) taken by hand in areas where Internet access is unreliable.
Registration	Online, by mail, in person, or by phone at least 7 days before the iBT exam date. Online or by mail for the PBT.
Duration	Approximately 4 hours for the iBT. Approximately 2 ½ hours for the PBT.
Cost	Price varies by location worldwide, ranging from \$170-270 USD for the iBT.
Dates	Over 50 sittings per year for the iBT. Approximately 4 sittings for the PBT.
Result Turnaround	10 days after the iBT. 5 weeks after the PBT.
Delivery	Online or by mail for the iBT. By mail for the PBT.
Validity Period	2 years for both formats
Website	www.ets.org/toefl

TEST SECTIONS

TOEFL iBT (Internet-based Test)

Section	Tasks	Duration
Reading	Students read three-four academic passages, each followed by multiple-choice questions. Questions include identification of detail/purpose, vocabulary, inference, and sentence insertion, among others.	60-80 minutes
Listening	Students listen to recordings of academic lectures and conversations typical on a college campus. The recordings are followed by questions comparable to the reading section. Accents from multiple English-speaking countries may be used.	60-90 minutes
Writing	Students write two essays. One is opinion-based, requiring students to state and support their stance. The other requires students to read a passage, listen to a lecture on the same topic, and write an essay showing the connections between the two. Scoring is based on topic development, organization and language use.	50 minutes
Speaking	Students use a microphone headset to record their answer. Similar to the writing section, there are personal experience questions and integration of material questions. Content is university-related, some casual and some academic. Students are scored on the same criteria as the writing section, but factors like pronunciation, clarity and intonation are considered as well.	20 minutes

TOEFL PBT (Paper-based Test)


Section	Tasks	Duration
Reading	Students read several passages, followed by multiple-choice questions. These passages are about one-third the length of iBT passages. Questions include identification of detail/purpose, vocabulary, inference, and sentence insertion, among others.	55 minutes
Listening	Students listen to a series of conversations. After each conversation, recorded questions are played and students must choose an answer from their booklet.	30-40 minutes

Institution	Minimum Score
University of Texas at Austin	* Not applicable
University of Toronto	* Not applicable
University of Washington	65 (Graduate – School of Environmental and Forest Sciences)
Washington State University	* Not applicable
York University	* Not applicable

OVERVIEW OF 3 LEADING ENGLISH LANGUAGE EXAMS

TOEFL
iBT 

IELTS
Academic 

PTE
Academic 



3-4 exams/month
on fixed dates



3-4 exams/month
on fixed dates



Flexible



Accepted by 9000+
universities globally



Accepted by 9000+
universities globally



Accepted by 6000+
universities globally



Results in 10 Days



Results in 13 Days



Results in 5 Days



Delivery online
or by mail



Delivery online
or by mail



Delivery online



Writing responses are typed, with
speaking tasks recorded via
microphone headset.



Speaking is tested in person,
face-to-face. The other sections
are done on paper or by
computer*.



20 types of questions; all answers,
including speaking and writing,
are scored by computer.

Written and spoken sections have
academic and personal content,
scored by human raters.

Writing questions require
defending an argument and
describing a graph or chart.

Scored test content is academic;
one unscored spoken response
is sent to institutions.

* IELTS was first offered via computer
in 2016 in a select number of countries.