

# 4

# Speaking Section

## Read this chapter to learn

- The format of the 6 *TOEFL iBT*® Speaking questions
- How your spoken responses are evaluated
- Tips for answering each Speaking question type
- Strategies for preparing for the Speaking section

## The Speaking Section

The *TOEFL iBT*® Speaking section is designed to evaluate the English speaking proficiency of students whose native language is not English but who want to pursue undergraduate or graduate study in an English-speaking context. Like all the other sections of the *TOEFL iBT* test, the Speaking section is delivered via the Internet.

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-type content material. There are 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 responding. The other four questions are Integrated Speaking tasks. In these tasks you will listen to a conversation or to an excerpt from a lecture, or read a passage and then listen to a brief discussion or lecture excerpt, before you are asked the question. These questions are called Integrated tasks because they require that you integrate your English-language skills—listening and speaking, or reading, listening, and speaking. In responding to these questions, you will be asked to base your spoken response on the information in the discussion or lecture, or on both the discussion or lecture and the reading passage together.

### Tip

*For each question, you are given 45 or 60 seconds to respond. So when practicing, time your speech accordingly.*

The Speaking section takes approximately 20 minutes. Response time allowed for each question is 45 or 60 seconds. For Speaking questions that involve listening, you will hear short lectures or conversations on headphones. For Speaking questions that involve reading, you will read short written passages on your com-

puter screen. You can take notes throughout the Speaking section and use your notes when responding to the Speaking questions. For each of the six questions, you will be given a short time to prepare a response. You will answer each of the questions by speaking into a microphone. Your responses will be recorded and sent to a scoring center, and they will be scored by experienced raters.

### Tip

*Familiarize yourself with the scoring rubric. It will help you understand how responses are evaluated.*

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Your responses will be scored holistically. This means that the rater will 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 will generally be listening for the following features in your answer:

- **Delivery:** How clear your speech is. Good responses are those in which the speech is fluid and clear, with good pronunciation, natural pacing, and natural-sounding intonation patterns.
- **Language Use:** How effectively you use grammar and vocabulary to convey your ideas. Raters will be listening for how well you can control both basic and more complex language structures and use appropriate vocabulary.
- **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.

It is important to note that raters do not 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.

Use the sample Independent and Integrated Speaking rubrics on pages 188 to 191 to see how responses are scored.

## Speaking Questions

### Independent: Questions 1 and 2

#### Question 1

For this task, you will be asked to speak about a person, place, object, or event that is familiar to you. You will be given 45 seconds to speak your response. The topics for this question will vary, but you will always be asked to base your response on personal experience or a familiar topic. You might, for example, be asked about a place you like to visit, an important event in your life, a person who influenced you, or an activity that you enjoy.

**Tip**

*Make a list of familiar topics, and practice speaking about them. You may want to begin by describing a familiar place or recounting a personal experience.*

This question will always ask you both to *describe* something (for example, an important event, a favorite activity, an influential person) and to *give reasons*—to explain why the event was important, why the activity is one of your favorites, how the person influenced you, and so on. Be sure to respond to all parts of the question. Your response should include specific details and/or examples because they will make your description informative and your reasons comprehensible.

**Tip**

*When giving descriptions, try to avoid presenting long lists, since this will reduce the time you have available to elaborate on the rest of your response.*

After you are presented with the question, you will have 15 seconds to prepare an answer. You may want to jot down a few brief notes about what you will want to say, but you should not try to write out a full and complete answer. There will not be enough time for you to do that, and raters want to know how well you can *speak* in response to a question, not how well you can *read aloud* from something you have written. If you do jot down notes during the preparation time, you should not rely on them too much in giving your answer.

The question will be read aloud by a narrator and will remain on the screen throughout the time you are giving your response.

**Example**

The following example shows how a question of this type will appear on your computer screen.

1. Choose a teacher you admire and explain why you admire him or her. Please include specific examples and details in your explanation.



**Preparation Time: 15 Seconds**

**Response Time: 45 Seconds**

You will be told when to begin to prepare your response and when to begin speaking. After the question is read, a “Preparation Time” clock will appear below the question and begin to count down from 15 seconds (00:00:15). At the end of 15 seconds you will hear a short beep. After the beep, the clock will change to read “Response Time” and will begin to count down from 45 seconds (00:00:45). When the response time has ended, recording will stop and a new screen will appear alerting you that the response time has ended.

### Tip

*Do not memorize responses before the test, especially ones that you get from the Internet, or from test preparation instructors who say this is a good idea. It is not a good idea, and it will lower your score. Raters will recognize a memorized response because the rhythm, intonation, and even the content of the response will be very different from a spontaneous response. Memorized responses are easy to identify.*

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To answer a question like the one preceding, you would probably begin by briefly identifying the teacher you are going to speak about—not necessarily by name, of course, but by giving just enough relevant information so that someone listening to your response can make sense of your explanation. For example, what subject did the teacher teach? How old were you when you had him or her as a teacher? After briefly describing the teacher in whatever way is useful, you could then proceed to explain what it was about the teacher that made you admire him or her. Perhaps it was something specific that he or she did. If so, you should describe what the teacher did and provide details that illustrate why the action was admirable. Maybe the teacher displayed a special personal quality or had a special character trait. If so, you would want to describe it and give details that provide evidence of it—occasions when you noticed it, the effect it had on you, and so forth. There are many, many ways to answer this question, and of course there is no “right” or “wrong” answer. The important thing, if you were to receive this particular question, is that you communicate enough information about the person to help the rater understand why you find that person admirable.

### Question 2

In this second Independent Speaking task, you will be presented with two possible actions, situations, or opinions. Then you will be asked to say which of the actions or situations you think is preferable or which opinion you think is more justified and then explain your choice by providing reasons and details. As with question 1, you will have 45 seconds to give your response.

Topics for this question include everyday issues of general interest to a student. You may be asked, for example, whether you think it is better to study at home or at the library, or whether you think students should take courses from a wide variety of fields or focus on a single subject area, or whether first-year college students should be required to live in the dormitory or be allowed to live off campus in apartments of their own. You could also be presented with two opposing opinions about a familiar topic—for example, about whether television has been a benefit to humanity—and you would then be asked which of the opinions you agree with.

This question will always ask you to state what your choice or preference or opinion is and to explain why—in other words, to support your answer with reasons, explanations, details, and/or examples. It is important that you respond to all parts of the question, and that you are clear about what your opinion is and give reasons that communicate why you have made your choice. It does not matter which of the actions, situations, or opinions you choose, and, as with question 1, there is no “right” or “wrong” answer. Your response will be rated not on which of the alternatives you choose, but rather on how well you explain your choice by supporting it with reasons and details.

**Tip**

*One good exercise would be to state an opinion or a preference and then present supporting reasons clearly and with detail.*

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Like question 1, this question will appear on your computer screen and be read aloud at the same time by the narrator, and you will be given 15 seconds to prepare an answer. You should use this time to think about what you want to say, organize your thoughts, and jot down some notes if you feel this will be helpful. But remember, you should not try to write out a full answer—just a few words or phrases that may help remind you of the direction you want to take in giving your response.

**Tip**

*Study and practice words and expressions commonly used to express opinions, such as:*

*In my opinion . . .*

*I believe . . .*

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**Example**

The following example shows how a question of this type will appear on your computer screen.

2. Some students study for classes individually. Others study in groups. Which method of studying do you think is better for students and why?



**Preparation Time: 15 Seconds**

**Response Time: 45 Seconds**

After you hear the question, you will be told when to begin to prepare your response and when to begin speaking. As with question 1, a “Preparation Time” clock will appear below the question and begin to count down from 15 seconds (00:00:15). At the end of 15 seconds you will hear a short beep. After the beep, the clock will change to read “Response Time” and will begin to count down from 45 seconds (00:00:45). When the response time has ended, recording will stop and a new screen will appear alerting you that the response time has ended.

In answering a question like this one, it is important that you begin by clearly stating what your opinion is: do you think it is better for students to study for classes individually, or do you think it is better for them to study in groups? If you do not begin by stating your opinion, it may be difficult for someone listening to your response to understand your reasons for holding that opinion. As for the reasons you give in support of your opinion, they can vary widely and may be based on your own experience and observations. For example, if the position you

take is that it is better for students to study alone, you might say that when students meet to study in groups, they often waste time discussing matters that have nothing to do with their class work. You might continue this explanation by contrasting the inefficiency of studying in a group with the kind of productivity a student can achieve when studying alone. If you have personal experiences that help illustrate your point, you might want to include them in your explanation. If so, you should be clear about how they illustrate your point. Or perhaps you want to take the opposite position, that it is better for students to study in groups. In that case, you would explain the advantages of group study and the disadvantages of studying alone. Perhaps you think that the more capable students can help the less capable students when students study together. Or perhaps you have found that students who study in groups often share each other's lecture notes, and this way they can make sure everyone understands all the material that has been covered in a course. There are many good reasons for either choice. In fact, it may be your opinion that in some cases it is better to study in groups and in other cases it is better to study alone. If that is the opinion you would like to express, you should explain—with reasons, examples, and/or specific details—why group study is better in some cases and individual study is better in others. Here again, there is no “right” or “wrong” answer to a question like this. The important thing is to clearly communicate to the person who will be listening to your response what your opinion is and explain the reasons you have for holding it.

### Tip

*Practice making a recommendation and explaining why it is your preferred course of action.*

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## Integrated Reading/Listening/Speaking: Questions 3 and 4

### Question 3

Question 3 is the first of the four Integrated Tasks in the Speaking section. For this question, you will read a short passage on your computer screen about a topic of campus-related interest. You will then listen to two people discussing that topic and expressing an opinion about the topic from the reading. Then you will be asked a question based on what you have read and what you have heard. You will have 60 seconds to speak your response. The general areas from which these topics are typically drawn include university policies, rules, or procedures; university plans; campus facilities; and quality of life on campus. The topics are designed to be accessible to all test takers and will be presented to you in a way that does not require that you have prior firsthand experience of college or university life in North America.

The reading passage could take various forms. For example, it could be a bulletin from the administration of a university regarding a new parking rule, or a letter to the editor of a campus newspaper responding to a new university policy restricting the use of radios in dormitory rooms, or an article from the campus newspaper discussing a proposal to build a new football stadium. In addition

to describing the proposal, the reading passage will usually present two reasons either for or against the proposal. The reading passage is brief, usually between 80 and 110 words long. You will be given sufficient time to read the passage.

In the dialogue that will be played after you have read the reading passage, you will hear two students discussing the same article (or letter or announcement) that you have just read. One of the speakers will have a strong opinion about the proposed change—either in favor of it or against it—and will give reasons to support that opinion. The discussion is brief and typically lasts between 60 and 80 seconds.

After you have read the passage and then listened to the discussion, you will be asked a question about what you have read and heard. For example, there may be a reading passage that describes plans to make a new university rule and a conversation in which a professor and a student are discussing the rule. If in the conversation the student thinks the new rule is a bad idea, you would be asked to state what the student's opinion is and to explain the reasons the student gives for holding that opinion, using information from both the reading and the discussion.

This task tests your ability to integrate information from two sources—what you read and what you heard—and to summarize some aspect of it. The reading passage provides the context that allows you to understand what the speakers are talking about. The speakers will generally refer to the reading passage only indirectly. Therefore as you read the reading passage, you should pay attention to a number of things: the description of the proposal (*what* has been proposed, planned, or changed), and the reasons that are given for the proposal. This will help you understand what it is that the two speakers are discussing as you listen to their conversation.

In some cases, a speaker will object to the position taken in the reading and will give information that challenges the reasons offered in the reading for that position. In other cases, a speaker will agree with the position from the reading and will give information that supports those reasons. It is therefore important, as you listen to the discussion, to determine the speaker's opinion toward the proposal and to understand the relationship between what the speakers say and what you have learned from the reading passage.

To answer question 3, it is important to understand not only what the question asks you to do, but also what the question does *not* ask you to do. This type of Integrated Speaking task does not ask for your own opinion; rather, it asks you to state the opinion of one of the speakers and to summarize the speaker's reasons for having that opinion.

You will be given 45 or 50 seconds to read the passage, depending on its length, after which you will listen to the discussion. Then you will be given 30 seconds to prepare your answer and 60 seconds to respond. As with all the other questions, you may take notes while reading, listening, and preparing your answer, and you may refer to your notes while answering the question.

**Tip**

*Remember that taking notes on the reading and listening material in the Integrated Speaking tasks on the TOEFL iBT test is allowed.*

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## Speaking Section

### Example

The following sample question consists of an announcement of a university's decision to increase tuition and a discussion between students about whether the increase is justified. This example shows how a question of this type will be presented to you on your computer.



*You will hear:*

#### **Narrator**

In this question, you will read a short passage about a campus situation and then listen to a conversation on the same topic. You will then answer a question using information from both the reading passage and the conversation. After you hear the question, you will have 30 seconds to prepare your response and 60 seconds to speak.

*Then you will hear this:*

#### **Narrator**

City University is planning to increase tuition and fees. Read the announcement about the increase from the president of City University.

You will have 45 seconds to read the announcement. Begin reading now.

#### **Announcement from the President**

The university has decided to increase tuition and fees for all students by approximately 8% next semester. For the past 5 years, the tuition and fees have remained the same, but it is necessary to increase them now for several reasons. The university has many more students than we had 5 years ago, and we must hire additional professors to teach these students. We have also made a new commitment to research and technology and will be renovating and upgrading our laboratory facilities to better meet our students' needs.



The reading passage will appear on the screen.

When the passage appears, a clock at the top of your computer screen will begin counting down the time you have to read. When reading time has ended, the passage will disappear from the screen and will be replaced by a picture of two students engaged in conversation.



*You will then hear:*

**Narrator**

Now listen to two students as they discuss the announcement.

*Then the dialogue will begin.*

**Man**

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

**Woman**

Yeah, I know, but I can see why. When I first started here, classes were so much smaller than they are now. With this many students, it's hard to get the personal attention you need . . .

**Man**

Yeah, I guess you're right. You know, in some classes I can't even get a seat. And I couldn't take the math course I wanted to because it was already full when I signed up.

**Woman**

And the other thing is, well, I am kind of worried about not being able to get a job after I graduate.

**Man**

Why? I mean you're doing really well in your classes, aren't you?

**Woman**

I'm doing OK, but the facilities here are so limited. There are some great new experiments in microbiology that we can't even do here . . . there isn't enough equipment in the laboratories, and the equipment they have is out of date. How am I going to compete for jobs with people who have practical research experience? I think the extra tuition will be a good investment.

When the dialogue has ended, the picture of the students will be replaced by the following:

**Now get ready to answer the question.**

The question will then appear on your computer screen and will also be read aloud by the narrator.

3. The woman expresses her opinion of the announcement by the university president. State her opinion and explain the reasons she gives for holding that opinion.

**Preparation Time: 30 Seconds**

**Response Time: 60 Seconds**

After you hear the question, you will be told when to begin to prepare your response and when to begin speaking. A “Preparation Time” clock will appear below the question and begin to count down from 30 seconds (00:00:30). At the end of 30 seconds you will hear a short beep. After the beep, the clock will change to read “Response Time” and will begin counting down from 60 seconds (00:01:00). When the response time has ended, recording will stop and a new screen will appear alerting you that the response time has ended.

### Tip

*Try to recognize the attitude of the speaker by listening for intonation, stress, and word choice. This helps you understand his or her point of view and plan an appropriate response.*

In giving your response to this question, you should state what the woman’s opinion about the tuition increase is, and then explain her reasons for holding that opinion. You will probably have noticed as you listened to the conversation that the woman’s reasons are essentially the same as those of the university president but are drawn from her own experience as a student, so in your answer you would probably want to connect information from the two sources. You could perhaps begin by saying that the woman agrees with the announcement and thinks that the university is right to increase its fees. In describing her

reasons, you might say that she thinks the tuition increase is necessary because the university can then hire more teachers. She feels that classes are getting too crowded and more teachers are needed. You might also want to mention that she has found it hard to get personal attention from her professors. You could also point out that she agrees that the money should be spent to improve laboratory facilities because they are out of date, and that this has made it hard for her to get the practical laboratory experience she feels she needs to get a good job. Your response should be complete enough that someone listening to your response who has not read the announcement or heard the conversation would understand what the new policy is, what the woman's opinion about it is, and the reasons she has for her opinion. There is a great deal of information in the reading passage and the conversation, and you are not expected to summarize all of the information in giving your response.

#### Question 4

Question 4 is the second of the Integrated Speaking tasks. For this task you will read a short passage about an academic subject and listen to a brief excerpt of a professor's lecture on that subject. You will then be asked a question, which you will answer based on what you have read and heard. You will have 60 seconds in which to give your spoken response.

#### Tip

*Find listening and reading material on a topic that you like. The reading material and the listening material can provide similar or different views. Take notes on what you listen to and read, and create outlines. Use your notes and outlines to orally summarize the information and ideas from the listening and reading materials. Try to paraphrase what you have heard and read by using different words and grammatical structures.*

The topics for this question are drawn from a variety of fields: life science, social science, physical science, and the humanities. Although the topics are academic in nature, none of the written passages, lectures, or questions themselves requires prior knowledge of any academic field in particular. The language and concepts used are designed to be accessible to you no matter what your academic specialization may be.

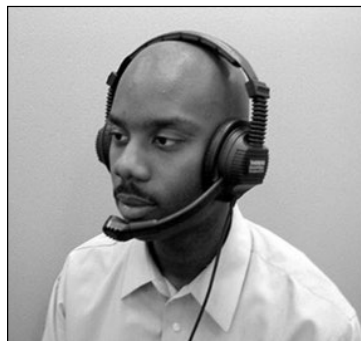
The reading passage is usually between 80 and 110 words in length. It provides background or context to help you understand the lecture that will follow. The reading passage will usually treat the topic in somewhat general and abstract terms, and the lecture will treat the topic more specifically and concretely, often by providing an extended example, counterexample, or application of the concept presented in the reading. To answer the question that follows the lecture, you will need to draw on the reading as well as the lecture, and integrate and convey key information from both sources.

For example, some tasks will contain a reading passage that gives the definition of a general principle or process and a lecture that discusses a specific instance and/or counterexample of the principle or process. For a pairing like this, you might be asked to explain the principle or process using the specific information from the listening. Or another pairing might include a reading passage that describes a problem and a lecture that presents the success, failure, or unintended consequences of an attempt to solve the problem, together with a question that asks you to explain the attempt to solve the problem and account for its results.

The sample question 4 task presented below is a typical example. It begins with a reading passage discussing a general concept—the domestication of animal species—by describing two characteristics that make an animal species suitable for domestication. This passage is coupled with a lecture in which the professor talks about the behavior of two species of animals—a familiar domesticated animal that has both of the characteristics and a common, undomesticated species that lacks these characteristics. The question asks you to apply the more general information you have learned in the reading to the examples discussed in the lecture and explain how the behavior of the two species of animals is related to their suitability for domestication.

### Example

The following example shows how a question of this type will be presented to you on your computer. Question 4 will be presented visually in the same way as question 3.



*First you will hear the narrator say this:*

#### **Narrator**

In this question, you will read a short passage on an academic subject and then listen to a talk on the same topic. You will then answer a question using information from both the reading passage and the talk. After you hear the question, you will have 30 seconds to prepare your response and 60 seconds to speak.

*Then you will hear this:*

#### **Narrator**

Now read the passage about animal domestication. You have 45 seconds to read the passage. Begin reading now.

*The reading passage will then appear on the screen.*

**Animal Domestication**

For thousands of years, humans have been able to domesticate, or tame, many large mammals that in the wild live together in herds. Once tamed, these mammals are used for agricultural work and transportation. Yet some herd mammals are not easily domesticated.

A good indicator of an animal's suitability for domestication is how protective the animal is of its territory. Nonterritorial animals are more easily domesticated than territorial animals because they can live close together with animals from other herds. A second indicator is that animals with a hierarchical social structure, in which herd members follow a leader, are easy to domesticate, since a human can function as the "leader."

A clock at the top of your computer screen will count down the time you have to read. When reading time has ended, a picture of a professor in front of a class will appear on the screen:



*And you will hear this:*

**Narrator**

Now listen to a lecture on this topic in an ecology class.

*Then you will hear the lecture.*

**Professor**

So we've been discussing the suitability of animals for domestication . . . particularly animals that live together in herds. Now, if we take horses, for example . . . in the wild, horses live in herds that consist of one male and several females and their young. When a herd moves, the dominant male leads, with the dominant female and her young immediately behind him. The dominant female and her young are then followed immediately by the second most important female and her young, and so on. This is why domesticated horses can be harnessed one after the other in a row.

They're "programmed" to follow the lead of another horse. On top of that, you often find different herds of horses in the wild occupying overlapping areas—they don't fight off other herds that enter the same territory.

But it's exactly the opposite with an animal like the, uh, the antelope . . . which . . . well, antelopes are herd animals too. But unlike horses, a male antelope will fight fiercely to prevent another male from entering its territory during the breeding season; OK—very different from the behavior of horses. Try keeping a couple of male antelopes together in a small space and see what happens. Also, antelopes don't have a social hierarchy—they don't instinctively follow any leader. That makes it harder for humans to control their behavior.

When the lecture has ended, the picture of the professor will be replaced by a screen instructing you to get ready to answer the question. Then the question will appear on the screen and will be read aloud by a narrator as well.

4. The professor describes the behavior of horses and antelope in herds. Explain how their behavior is related to their suitability for domestication.

**Preparation Time: 30 Seconds**

**Response Time: 60 Seconds**

After you hear the question, you will be told when to begin to prepare your response and when to begin speaking. A "Preparation Time" clock will appear below the question and begin to count down from 30 seconds (00:00:30). At the end of 30 seconds you will hear a short beep. After the beep, the clock will change to read "Response Time" and will begin to count down from 60 seconds (00:01:00). When the response time has ended, recording will stop and a new screen will appear alerting you that the response time has ended.

### Tip

*Read a short article. Make an outline that includes only the major points of the article. Use the outline to orally summarize the information. Then add detail to the outline and orally summarize it again.*

To answer this question, you would use information from both the reading passage and the lecture, linking the specific information the professor provides in the lecture with the more general concepts introduced in the reading. For example, you could begin your response by saying that herd animals can be easily domesticated if they have a hierarchical social structure and are not territorial, and that this is why it is easier to domesticate horses than antelopes. You would

want to provide some details about the behavior of horses, pointing out that their hierarchical social structure makes them willing to follow one another and thus allows a human being to act as their leader. You could also say that because horses are not territorial, they can be harnessed together without fighting. You would probably want to contrast horses' behavior with that of antelopes, which are territorial. You could explain that unlike horses, male antelopes fight if they are together, and that because antelopes do not have a social hierarchy, humans cannot control them by acting as their leader. Notice that you are not asked to summarize all the information in the reading and in the lecture. But you should provide enough information so that even a listener who had not read the passage or listened to the lecture would be able to understand your explanation. Here, as in all speaking questions that are based on academic content, you are provided with all the facts necessary to give your response, and no outside knowledge is required.

## Integrated Listening/Speaking: Questions 5 and 6

### Question 5

The Integrated Listening/Speaking tasks in questions 5 and 6 do not have a reading passage associated with them. For question 5, you will listen to a short conversation about a campus-related situation and respond to a question based on what you have heard. In the conversation, two people will typically discuss a problem and two possible solutions. The problem is one that concerns one of them or both of them directly. After you listen to the conversation, you will be asked to briefly describe the situation that was discussed in the conversation and to give your own opinion about solutions to the problem. You will have 60 seconds in which to give your spoken response. The topics for this task are based on common, everyday situations or problems that might arise at a college or university.

Typically, the speakers in the conversation will be students, or a student and a professor, or a student and a university staff member (for example, a teaching assistant, librarian, or administrator). The problems may involve such issues as scheduling conflicts, unavoidable absences, unavailable resources, student elections, financial difficulties, and so forth. In some cases, the problem is one that affects both speakers equally, and they must decide on a single, common solution. In other cases, the problem may involve only one of the speakers, and in this situation that speaker will present his or her problem, and the other speaker (or both of them) will propose the two possible solutions. The conversations are usually between 60 and 90 seconds long.

The question you are asked when the conversation has ended has several parts: you are asked first to describe the problem that the speakers are discussing, then to state which *one* of the solutions you prefer (note that you do not need to talk about *both* solutions), and finally to explain why you prefer that solution. The reasons you give for your preference can include information provided by the speakers in their discussion as well as your own experiences. For example, if your own experience with a similar or related problem is relevant to your choice of one solution over the other, you may draw on that experience when explaining your reasons. Here, as in other Speaking tasks in which you are asked to choose between two alternatives and give reasons for your choice, it does not matter which of the proposed solutions you choose, and there is no “right” solution or “wrong” solution. Your response will be rated not on which solution you choose, but rather on how well you describe the problem, state the solution you prefer, and explain the reasons for your preference.

### Tip

*It is very important to practice your conversational speaking skills as often as possible. One way of doing this might be by joining an English language conversation club. If such clubs do not exist in your area, you may want to start your own and, if possible, invite native speakers to join in.*

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The types of problems discussed by the speakers in these conversations will vary. The problem could be that one of the speakers needs to arrange transportation for a class field trip and does not know whom to ask. Or the problem could be that a student has a doctor’s appointment scheduled at the same time as a meeting with job recruiters. Another could be about a student who is not getting along with other members of his or her study group. In the following sample question, the speakers are discussing a problem that you may find very familiar: too much schoolwork and not enough time to do it.



**Example**

The following example shows how you would hear and see this task on your computer:

*You will hear:*

**Narrator**

In this question, you will listen to a conversation. You will then be asked to talk about the information in the conversation and to give your opinion about the ideas presented. After you hear the question, you will have 20 seconds to prepare your response and 60 seconds to speak.

*Then a picture of two students will appear on the screen.*



*Then you will hear the conversation.*

**Man**

Hey, Lisa, how's it going?

**Woman**

Hi, Mark. Uh, I'm OK, I guess, but my schoolwork is really stressing me out.

**Man**

Yeah? What's wrong?

**Woman**

Well, I've got a paper to write and two exams to study for. And a bunch of math problems to finish. It's just so much that I can't concentrate on any of it. I start concentrating on studying for one of my exams, and then I'm like, how long's it gonna take to finish that problem set?

**Man**

Wow. Sounds like you've got a lot more work than you can handle right now. Look, have you talked to some of your professors . . . I mean, you know, try to explain the problem. Look, you could probably get an extension on your paper, or on the math assignment . . .

**Woman**

You think? It would give me a little more time to prepare for my exams right now.

**Man**

Well, I mean another thing that you might do . . . I mean have you tried making yourself a schedule? I mean that's what I do when I'm feeling overwhelmed.

**Woman**

What does that do for you?

**Man**

Well, I mean it helps you to focus your energies. You know, you make yourself a chart that shows the next few days and the time till your stuff is due and . . .

**Woman**

Uh-huh . . .

**Man**

I mean think about what you need to do and when you have to do it by. You know, then start filling in your schedule—like, all right, 9:00 to 11:30 A.M., study for exam; 12:00 to 3:00, work on problem set. But I mean don't make the time periods too long. Like, don't put in eight hours of studying—you know, you'll get tired, or start worrying about your other work again. But if you keep to your schedule, you know, you'll just have to worry about one thing at a time.

**Woman**

Yeah, that might work.

When the conversation has ended, the picture of the two students will be replaced by a screen instructing you to get ready to answer the question. Then the question will appear on the screen and will be read aloud by the narrator.

5. The students discuss two possible solutions to the woman's problem. Describe the problem. Then state which of the two solutions you prefer and explain why.
- 

**Preparation Time: 20 Seconds**

**Response Time: 60 Seconds**

After you hear the question, you will be told when to begin to prepare your response and when to begin speaking. A "Preparation Time" clock will appear below the question and begin to count down from 20 seconds (00:00:20). At the end of 20 seconds you will hear a short beep. After the beep, the clock will change to read "Response Time" and will begin to count down from 60 seconds (00:01:00). When the response time has ended, recording will stop and a new screen will appear alerting you that the response time has ended.

To answer this question, you should begin by briefly describing the woman's problem, giving just enough details so that someone listening to your response but who has not heard the conversation would know what you are talking about. Then you would state which solution you prefer and explain why. If you believe the second solution is preferable, you would probably begin by saying that you think it would be better if the woman prepared a schedule, and then you would proceed to explain why. There are many possible reasons you can give: you might say, for example, that the problem of too much work to do is something that the woman is going to confront in the future as well, and that if she learns how to organize a schedule now, this will help her throughout her academic career. You could also speak about the disadvantages of the other solution: for example, even though her professors might be willing to give her an extension, they might somehow penalize her for it by grading her assignments more severely. If your own personal experiences are relevant to your reasons for choosing one solution over the other, you may wish to mention those experiences, but you should keep in mind that the focus of the question is the problem faced by the speaker or speakers, not your own situation. Remember, too, a question like this can be answered in many different ways, and there is no "right" or "wrong" choice.

### Question 6

This Integrated task, the last of the six Speaking tasks, is based on academic content. For this task you will first listen to a brief excerpt from a professor's lecture on an academic subject, and then you will be asked a question about what you have heard. You will have 60 seconds in which to give your spoken response.

As with question 4 (the other Speaking task that is based on academic content), the topics for this question are drawn from a variety of fields within the life sciences, social sciences, physical sciences, and humanities. Here too, no prior knowledge of any academic field in particular is required for you to understand the lecture or answer the question.

## Speaking Section

The lecture excerpt is between 60 and 90 seconds long and focuses on a single topic. Usually the professor will begin the lecture by defining a concept, by highlighting an issue, or by introducing a phenomenon, and will then go on to discuss important aspects of it or perspectives relating to it. The lecture will contain illustrative examples that help explain or clarify the main concept or issue. The question you are asked after you have heard the lecture will typically ask that you explain the main concept or issue of the lecture, using points and examples that were given in the lecture.

The lectures can be about processes, methods, theories, ideas, or phenomena of any type—natural, social, psychological, and others. If a lecture is about a process, the professor might explain the process by describing some of its functions. In a lecture about a theory, the professor might explain the theory by describing its applications. In a lecture about a phenomenon, the professor might explain it through examples that illustrate its causes or its effects.

### Tip

*Find a textbook that includes questions about the material at the end of chapters. Practice answering the questions orally.*

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In the sample question 6 given below, the lecture is about a social phenomenon—the emergence of a national culture in the United States in the early twentieth century. The professor illustrates this phenomenon by describing two of its causes—radio and the automobile—and how they contributed to it. After you hear the lecture, you are asked to use information from the lecture to explain how the causes contributed to the formation of a national culture.

### Example

The following example shows how a question of this type will be presented to you on your computer.

*First you will hear the narrator say this:*

#### **Narrator**

In this question, you will listen to part of a lecture. You will then be asked to summarize important information from the lecture. After you hear the question, you will have 20 seconds to prepare your response and 60 seconds to speak.

*Then a picture of a professor standing in front of a class will appear on your screen.*



*You will hear:*

**Narrator**

Now listen to part of a talk in a United States history class.

*The professor will then begin the lecture.*

**Professor**

Because the United States is such a large country, it took time for a common national culture to emerge. One hundred years ago there was very little communication among the different regions of the United States. One result of this lack of communication was that people around the United States had very little in common with one another. People in different parts of the country spoke differently, dressed differently, and behaved differently. But connections among Americans began to increase thanks to two technological innovations: the automobile and the radio.

Automobiles began to be mass-produced in the 1920s, which meant they became less expensive and more widely available. Americans in small towns and rural communities now had the ability to travel with ease to nearby cities. They could even take vacations to other parts of the country. The increased mobility provided by automobiles changed people's attitudes and created links that had not existed before. For example, people in small towns began to adopt behaviors, clothes, and speech that were popular in big cities or in other parts of the country.

As more Americans were purchasing cars, radio ownership was also increasing dramatically. Americans in different regions of the country began to listen to the same popular radio programs and musical artists. People repeated things they heard on the radio—some phrases and speech patterns heard in songs and radio programs began to be used by people all over the United States. People also listened to news reports on the radio. They heard the same news throughout the country, whereas in newspapers much news tended to be local. Radio brought Americans together by offering them shared experiences and information about events around the country.

When the lecture has ended, the picture of the professor will be replaced by a screen instructing you to get ready to answer the question. Then the question will appear on the screen and be read aloud at the same time by the narrator.

6. Using points and examples from the talk, explain how the automobile and the radio contributed to a common culture in the United States.

**Preparation Time: 20 Seconds**

**Response Time: 60 Seconds**

After you hear the question, you will be told when to begin preparing your response and when to begin speaking. A “Preparation Time” clock will appear below the question and begin to count down from 20 seconds (00:00:20). At the end of 20 seconds you will hear a short beep. After the beep, the clock will change to read “Response Time” and will begin to count down from 60 seconds (00:01:00). When the response time has ended, recording will stop and a new screen will appear alerting you that the response time has ended.

To answer this question, you might begin with a little background and mention that the United States did not have a common culture 100 years ago because people in different regions of the country did not communicate much with each other. Then you could say that the automobile and the radio changed this situation, and go on to summarize the information from the lecture that explains how they caused this change. For example, you could say that when automobiles became inexpensive, people from small towns could travel easily to cities or to other parts of the country, and that when they began to do this, they started acting like people from those other regions and started to dress and speak in the same way. As for the role that radio played in the emergence of a national culture, you could point out that when radio became popular, people from different parts of the country began listening to the same programs and the same news reports and began to speak alike and have similar experiences and ideas. If you have time, you could conclude by saying that these similar ways of speaking and dressing and thinking became the national culture of the United States. Remember that you do not need to repeat all of the details provided in the lecture. There is simply too much information in the lecture for you to do that. You should, however, convey enough information so that someone who has not heard the lecture would be able to form a clear idea of what the professor was explaining to the class.

Other lectures for question 6 could include topics such as how people learn, and the central concept might be that learning occurs when two events are associated in the brain. The professor would illustrate that concept by describing two different ways that events can be associated in the brain, and you would be asked to use points and examples from the lecture to explain how these ways of associating events result in learning. Or in a lecture about money, the professor might provide two different definitions of the concept and illustrate them with examples, and you would be asked in your response to explain the definitions, using the examples. The question that follows a lecture like this would typically ask you to use points and examples that you heard in the lecture to explain how people learn or what the definitions of money are.

## Speaking Scoring Rubric

### Independent Tasks (Questions 1 and 2)

Score	General Description	Delivery	Language Use	Topic Development
4	The response fulfills the demands of the task, with at most minor lapses in completeness. It is highly intelligible and exhibits sustained, coherent discourse. A response at this level is characterized by all of the following:	Generally well-paced flow (fluid expression). Speech is clear. It may include minor lapses, or minor difficulties with pronunciation or intonation patterns, which do not affect intelligibility.	The response demonstrates effective use of grammar and vocabulary. It exhibits a fairly high degree of automaticity with good control of basic and complex structures (as appropriate). Some minor (or systematic) errors are noticeable but do not obscure meaning.	Response is sustained and sufficient to the task. It is generally well developed and coherent; relationships between ideas are clear (or there is a clear progression of ideas).
3	The response addresses the task appropriately, but may fall short of being fully developed. It is generally intelligible and coherent, with some fluidity of expression, though it exhibits some noticeable lapses in the expression of ideas. A response at this level is characterized by at least two of the following:	Speech is generally clear, with some fluidity of expression, though minor difficulties with pronunciation, intonation, or pacing are noticeable and may require listener effort at times (though overall intelligibility is not significantly affected).	The response demonstrates fairly automatic and effective use of grammar and vocabulary and fairly coherent expression of relevant ideas. Response may exhibit some imprecise or inaccurate use of vocabulary or grammatical structures. This may affect overall fluency, but it does not seriously interfere with the communication of the message.	Response is mostly coherent and sustained and conveys relevant ideas/information. Overall development is somewhat limited, usually lacking elaboration or specificity. Relationships between ideas may at times not be immediately clear.



# Speaking Scoring Rubric

## Independent Tasks (Questions 1 and 2)

Score	General Description	Delivery	Language Use	Topic Development
2	The response addresses the task, but development of the topic is limited. It contains intelligible speech, although problems with delivery and/or overall coherence occur; meaning may be obscured in places. A response at this level is characterized by at least two of the following:	Speech is basically intelligible, though listener effort is needed because of unclear articulation, awkward intonation, or choppy rhythm/pace; meaning may be obscured in places.	The response demonstrates limited range and control of grammar and vocabulary. These limitations often prevent full expression of ideas. For the most part, only basic sentence structures are used successfully and spoken with fluidity. Structures and vocabulary may express mainly simple (short) and/or general propositions, with simple or unclear connections made among them (serial listing, conjunction, juxtaposition).	The response is connected to the task, though the number of ideas presented or the development of ideas is limited. Mostly basic ideas are expressed, with limited elaboration (details and support). At times relevant substance may be vaguely expressed or repetitious. Connections of ideas may be unclear.
1	The response is very limited in content and/or coherence or is only minimally connected to the task, or speech is largely unintelligible. A response at this level is characterized by at least two of the following:	Consistent pronunciation, stress, and intonation difficulties cause considerable listener effort; delivery is choppy, fragmented, or telegraphic; frequent pauses and hesitations.	Range and control of grammar and vocabulary severely limit (or prevent) expression of ideas and connections among ideas. Some low-level responses may rely heavily on practiced or formulaic expressions.	Limited relevant content expressed. The response generally lacks substance beyond expression of very basic ideas. Speaker may be unable to sustain speech to complete the task and may rely heavily on repetition of the prompt.
0	Speaker makes no attempt to respond OR response is unrelated to the topic.			

## Speaking Scoring Rubric

### Integrated Tasks (Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6)

Score	General Description	Delivery	Language Use	Topic Development
4	The response fulfills the demands of the task, with at most minor lapses in completeness. It is highly intelligible and exhibits sustained, coherent discourse. A response at this level is characterized by all of the following:	Speech is generally clear, fluid, and sustained. It may include minor lapses or minor difficulties with pronunciation or intonation. Pace may vary at times as speaker attempts to recall information. Overall intelligibility remains high.	The response demonstrates good control of basic and complex grammatical structures that allow for coherent, efficient (automatic) expression of relevant ideas. Contains generally effective word choice. Though some minor (or systematic) errors or imprecise use may be noticeable, they do not require listener effort (or obscure meaning).	The response presents a clear progression of ideas and conveys the relevant information required by the task. It includes appropriate detail, though it may have minor errors or minor omissions.
3	The response addresses the task appropriately, but may fall short of being fully developed. It is generally intelligible and coherent, with some fluidity of expression, though it exhibits some noticeable lapses in the expression of ideas. A response at this level is characterized by at least two of the following:	Speech is generally clear, with some fluidity of expression, but it exhibits minor difficulties with pronunciation, intonation, or pacing and may require some listener effort at times. Overall intelligibility remains good, however.	The response demonstrates fairly automatic and effective use of grammar and vocabulary and fairly coherent expression of relevant ideas. Response may exhibit some imprecise or inaccurate use of vocabulary or grammatical structures or be somewhat limited in the range of structures used. Such limitations do not seriously interfere with the communication of the message.	The response is sustained and conveys relevant information required by the task. However, it exhibits some incompleteness, inaccuracy, lack of specificity with respect to content, or choppiness in the progression of ideas.

## Speaking Scoring Rubric

### Integrated Tasks (Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6)

Score	General Description	Delivery	Language Use	Topic Development
2	The response is connected to the task, though it may be missing some relevant information or contain inaccuracies. It contains some intelligible speech, but at times problems with intelligibility and/or overall coherence may obscure meaning. A response at this level is characterized by at least two of the following:	Speech is clear at times, though it exhibits problems with pronunciation, intonation, or pacing and so may require significant listener effort. Speech may not be sustained at a consistent level throughout. Problems with intelligibility may obscure meaning in places (but not throughout).	The response is limited in the range and control of vocabulary and grammar demonstrated (some complex structures may be used, but typically contain errors). This results in limited or inaccurate connections. Automaticity of expression may be evident only at the phrasal level.	The response conveys some relevant information but is clearly incomplete or inaccurate. It is incomplete if it omits key ideas, makes vague reference to key ideas, or demonstrates limited development of important information. An inaccurate response demonstrates misunderstanding of key ideas from the stimulus. Typically, ideas expressed may not be well connected or cohesive, so that familiarity with the stimulus is necessary in order to follow what is being discussed.
1	The response is very limited in content or coherence or is only minimally connected to the task. Speech may be largely unintelligible. A response at this level is characterized by at least two of the following:	Consistent pronunciation and intonation problems cause considerable listener effort and frequently obscure meaning. Delivery is choppy, fragmented, or telegraphic. Speech contains frequent pauses and hesitations.	Range and control of grammar and vocabulary severely limit (or prevent) expression of ideas and connections among ideas. Some very low-level responses may rely on isolated words or short utterances to communicate ideas.	The response fails to provide much relevant content. Ideas that are expressed are often inaccurate, or limited to vague utterances or repetitions (including repetition of prompt).
0	Speaker makes no attempt to respond OR response is unrelated to the topic.			

## Strategies for Preparing for and Taking the Speaking Section

### Preparing for the Speaking Section

- When you address the practice *TOEFL*<sup>®</sup> Speaking sections in the practice tests in this book, listen carefully to each of your recorded responses. Create a set of guiding questions to help you evaluate your performance. Here are some examples of the kind of questions you may want to include:
  - Did I complete the task?
  - Did I speak clearly?
  - Did I avoid grammatical errors?
  - Did I use words correctly?
  - Did I organize my ideas clearly and appropriately?
  - Did I provide a complete response?
  - Did I use the time effectively?

Once you have completed your evaluation, decide what changes you want to make to your response. Then try again, making a new recording. Compare the recordings and determine if any further revisions are necessary.

- Try to periodically analyze your strengths and weaknesses. Try to understand what you are and are not able to do well and why.
- When you monitor your speaking practice, try to evaluate the pace of your speech. After each practice, ask yourself the following questions:
  - Did I speak too fast?
  - Did I speak too slowly?
  - Did I pause too often?
- You may want to monitor your own progress by keeping an audio journal, which entails keeping samples of your speaking activities or practices. You can also ask for feedback from one or more friends, tutors, or teachers.

### Tips for the Day of the Test

- Remember that taking notes on the reading and listening material in the Integrated Speaking tasks on the *TOEFL iBT*<sup>®</sup> test is allowed.
- Listen to the item directions carefully to understand exactly what you are being asked to do.
- Use your preparation time as effectively as possible. Plan your response by thinking about the important ideas you want to convey in a simple, organized way.
- Do not begin speaking until you are told to do so.
- Answer each question as completely as possible in the time allowed.
- Make sure to adjust your microphone and volume carefully.
- Speak into the microphone at an appropriate volume. Do not put your mouth directly onto the microphone. If you touch your mouth to the microphone, scorers may find it difficult to understand what you are saying.
- Avoid whispering. If you whisper, scorers may find it difficult to understand what you are saying.

## Frequently Asked Questions About the TOEFL® Speaking Section

### **1. Why does the TOEFL iBT® test include a Speaking section?**

The focus of the test is on communicative competence and encompasses your ability to use English to communicate effectively in an academic setting. Speaking is a key communication skill, along with listening, reading, and writing.

### **2. Why are some of the questions in the Speaking section based on reading passages and/or dialogues or lectures?**

Speaking tasks that combine reading passages and/or dialogues or lectures with speaking are called integrated tasks. They are included in the TOEFL iBT® test in recognition of the fact that to succeed academically in English-speaking colleges and universities, students need to be able to combine all their English language skills—in reading, listening, and speaking, as well as writing—inside and outside the classroom.

### **3. How much reading and listening will I have to do for the Speaking section?**

The reading and listening materials that are associated with the integrated tasks vary in length but are all quite brief. Reading passages range from approximately 80 to 110 words, and the dialogues or lectures are generally between 60 and 90 seconds long. In addition to being short, the reading passages, dialogues, and lectures are not intended to be difficult. They are designed to provide you with clear and accessible information to use in answering the questions.

### **4. May I take notes at all times during the Speaking section?**

Yes. You may take notes at any time during the Speaking section—while reading the written passages, listening to the spoken dialogues or lectures, and preparing your responses. While you listen to the dialogues or lectures and take notes, you should not try to write down word for word everything you hear. If you try to do this, you will probably miss hearing important information. Similarly, while preparing your spoken response, do not try to write out an answer that you will then try to speak. You will not have enough time to write out a full response, and raters will be rating you on your ability to speak, not on your ability to read aloud from a text that you have written. Instead, you should use your preparation time to review whatever notes you have taken and to organize your ideas.

### **5. How will my responses be rated?**

Each of the six tasks in the Speaking section is rated by human scorers who will assign ratings ranging from 0 to 4 for each response. The scorers will evaluate your responses for topic development, delivery, and language use, and assign an overall score for each response, based on these factors. See the Speaking rubrics on pages 188–191 for more information on how your responses will be rated.

### **6. How will the total Speaking section score be determined?**

The scores on your individual speaking tasks are added up, with each individual task score carrying the same weight. The sum of these individual scores is converted into a scaled score of 0 to 30, and that is the Speaking section score that will be reported to the institutions you request.

### **7. How will mistakes affect my score?**

Raters will not focus on the number of errors you make. They will score the response based on the overall performance. A response that contains minor or occasional errors may still be scored at the highest level.

### **8. What happens if I do not have time to finish my answer?**

You may find that for some tasks, you are not able to include in your answer all the information you would like to. The time allotted for each speaking response is considered sufficient for you to give a complete answer, and you should try to give as thorough an answer as possible. However, the raters who evaluate your responses recognize that it may not always be possible for you to anticipate precisely how much of what you want to say will fit into the amount of time provided. Keep in mind that how clearly and coherently you convey information is as important as how much information you convey. Therefore you should avoid speaking at an unnaturally rapid pace if you see that time is going to run out before you say everything you have planned to say. You may find it useful to time yourself when practicing the speaking tasks. This will help you get an idea of how much can be said in the allotted time.

### **9. What happens if I finish my response before time runs out?**

If you finish your answer before time runs out, you may want to consider what additional information you could add that would make your answer more complete. If you have extra time, it may not be a good idea for you to merely repeat what you have already said. Rather, ask yourself what else you could say to clarify, elaborate on, or otherwise develop your response more fully. Timing yourself when practicing the speaking tasks should help you get accustomed to the time allowances.

### **10. May I go back and change an answer?**

No. Each of your spoken responses is recorded, and it is not possible to go back and rerecord what you have said. For each question, you will be given some time to prepare your answer, and this should help you plan ahead of time what you want to say. You should also remember that your speaking responses are not expected to be perfect. If in the course of giving your spoken response, you realize that you should have said something differently, you should feel free to correct your mistake if you wish, just as you would if you had made a mistake while speaking in your native language and wanted to correct it. Otherwise you may want to simply ignore an error and continue with your response, making sure that the remainder of what you say is as intelligible, coherent, and accurate as possible.

### **11. How will my accent and pronunciation affect my score?**

All *TOEFL iBT*<sup>®</sup> test takers speak with an accent to some degree or another, and your score will not be affected by your accent, unless your accent interferes with the intelligibility of your response. Minor and/or occasional pronunciation mistakes are also expected, even among the most proficient test takers, and, here again, as long as pronunciation mistakes do not interfere with the intelligibility of your response, they will not count against your score.