**Reading Section Preparation**

**Session Objectives**

**By the end of this session, the student should be familiar with:**

* The10 types of TOEFL® Reading questions
* How to recognize each Reading question type
* Tips for answering each Reading question type
* Strategies for preparing for the Reading section

The TOEFL iBT® Reading section includes three or four reading passages, each approximately 700 words long. There are 12 to 14 questions per passage. You have from 60 to 80 minutes to answer all questions in the section. In the Reading section, you may skip questions and come back to them later, but make sure to answer all the questions before time is up.

**Reading Passages**

The TOEFL iBT® reading passages are excerpts from college-level textbooks that would be used to introduced a discipline or topic. The passages cover a variety of subjects. Do not worry if you are unfamiliar with the topic of a passage. All the information needed to answer the questions is in the passage.

**Reading Questions**

There are 10 question types. The following chart summarizes the categories and types of the TOEFL iBT® Reading questions.

**TOEFL Reading Questions Types**

**Basic Information and Inferencing questions** (12 to 13 questions per set)

1. Factual Information questions (3 to 5 questions per set)
2. Negative Factual Information questions (0 to 2 questions per set)
3. Inference questions (1 to 2 questions per set)
4. Rhetorical Purpose questions (1 to 2 questions per set)
5. Vocabulary questions (3 to 4 questions per set)
6. Reference questions (0 to 2 questions per set)
7. Sentence Simplification question (0 or 1 question per set)
8. Insert Text question (1 question per set)

**Reading to Learn questions** (1 per set)

1. Prose Summary
2. Fill in a Table

The following sections will explain each of these question types. You will find out how to recognize each type and see examples of each type with explanations. You will also find tips that can help you answer each Reading question type.

**Basic Information and Inferencing Questions**

**Type 1: Factual Information Questions**

These questions ask you to identify factual information that is explicitly stated in the passage. Factual Information questions can focus on facts, details, definitions, or other information presented by the author. They ask you to identify specific information that is typically mentioned only in part of the passage. Often, the relevant information is in one or two sentences.

**How to Recognize Factual Information Questions**

Factual Information questions are often phrased in one of these ways:

* According to the paragraph, which of the following is true of X?
* The author’s description of X mentions which of the following?
* According to the paragraph, X occurred because . . .
* According to the paragraph, X did Y because . . .
* According to the paragraph, why did X do Y?
* The author’s description of X mentions which of the following?

**Tips for Factual Information Questions**

* You may need to refer back to the passage in order to know what exactly is said about the subject of the question. Since the question may be about a detail, you may not recall the detail from your first reading of the passage.
* Eliminate choices that present information that is contradicted in the passage.
* Do not select an answer just because it is mentioned in the passage. Your choice should answer the specific question that was asked.

**Example PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “. . . Sculptures must, for example, be stable, which requires an understanding of the properties of mass, weight distribution, and stress. Paintings must have rigid stretchers so that the canvas will be taut, and the paint must not deteriorate, crack, or discolor. These are problems that must be overcome by the artist because they tend to intrude upon his or her conception of the work. For example, in the early Italian Renaissance, bronze statues of horses with a raised foreleg usually had a cannonball under that hoof. This was done because the cannonball was needed to support the weight of the leg. In other words, the demands of the laws of physics, not the sculptor’s aesthetic intentions, placed the ball there. That this device was a necessary structural compromise is clear from the fact that the cannonball quickly disappeared when sculptors learned how to strengthen the internal structure of a statue with iron braces (iron being much stronger than bronze) . . . “

**According to paragraph 2, sculptors in the Italian Renaissance stopped using cannon- balls in bronze statues of horses because**

0 they began using a material that made the statues weigh less

0 they found a way to strengthen the statues internally

0 the aesthetic tastes of the public had changed over time

0 the cannonballs added too much weight to the statues

**Explanation**

The question tells you to look for the answer in the excerpted paragraph, which in this case is paragraph 2. You do not need to skim the entire passage to find the relevant information.

* Choice 1 says that sculptors stopped putting cannonballs under the raised legs of horses in statues because they learned how to make the statue weigh less and not require support for the leg. The passage does not mention making the statues weigh less; it says that sculptors learned a better way to support the weight.
* Choice 3 says that the change occurred only because people’s taste changed, meaning that the cannonballs were never structurally necessary. That directly contradicts the passage.
* Choice 4 says that the cannonballs weakened the structure of the statues. This choice also contradicts the passage.
* Choice 2 correctly identifies the reason the passage gives for the change: sculptors developed a way to strengthen the statue from the inside, making the cannonballs physically unnecessary.

**Type 2: Negative Factual Information Questions**

These questions ask you to verify what information is true and what information is NOT true or not included in the passage based on information that is explicitly stated in the passage. To answer this kind of question, first locate the relevant information in the passage. Then verify that three of the four answer choices are true and that the remaining choice is false. Remember, for this type of question, the correct answer is the one that is NOT true.

**How to Recognize Negative Factual Information Questions**

You can recognize negative fact questions because the word “NOT” or “EXCEPT” appears in the question in capital letters.

* According to the passage, which of the following is NOT true of X?
* The author’s description of X mentions all of the following EXCEPT . . .

**Tips for Negative Factual Information Questions**

* Usually a Negative Factual Information question requires you to check
* more of the passage than a Factual Information question. The three choices that are mentioned in the passage may be spread across a para- graph or several paragraphs.
* In Negative Factual Information questions, the correct answer either directly contradicts one or more statements in the passage or is not mentioned in the passage at all.
* After you finish a Negative Factual Information question, check your answer to make sure you have accurately understood the task.

**Example PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “The United States in the 1800s was full of practical, hardworking people who did not consider the arts—from theater to painting—useful occupations. In addition, the public’s attitude that European art was better than American art both discouraged and infuriated American artists. In the early 1900s there was a strong feeling among artists that the United States was long overdue in developing art that did not reproduce European traditions. Everybody agreed that the heart and soul of the new country should be reflected in its art. But opinions differed about what this art would be like and how it would develop.”

**According to paragraph 1, all of the following were true of American art in the late 1800s and early 1900s EXCEPT:**

0 Most Americans thought art was unimportant.

0 American art generally copied European styles and traditions.

0 Most Americans considered American art inferior to European art.

0 American art was very popular with European audiences.

**Explanation**

Sometimes in Negative Factual Information questions, it is necessary to check the entire passage in order to make sure that your choice is not mentioned. How- ever, in this example, the question is limited to one paragraph, so your answer should be based just on the information in that paragraph.

* Choice 1 is a restatement of the first sentence in the paragraph: since most Americans did not think that the arts were useful occupations, they considered them unimportant.
* Choice 2 makes the same point as the third sentence: “. . . the United States was long overdue in developing art that did not reproduce European traditions,” which means that up to this point in history, American art did reproduce European traditions.
* Choice 3 is a restatement of the second sentence in the paragraph: American artists were frustrated because of “the public’s attitude that European art was better than American art.”
* Choice 4 is not mentioned anywhere in the paragraph. Because you are asked to identify the choice that is NOT mentioned in the passage or that contradicts the passage, the right answer is choice 4.

**Type 3: Inference Questions**

These questions measure your ability to comprehend an argument or an idea that is strongly implied but not explicitly stated in the text. For example, if an effect is cited in the passage, an Inference question might ask about its cause. If a comparison is made, an Inference question might ask for the basis of the comparison. You should think about not only the explicit meaning of the author’s words but also the logical implications of those words.

**How to Recognize Inference Questions**

Inference questions will usually include the word *infer, suggest,* or *imply*.

* Which of the following can be inferred about X?
* The author of the passage implies that X . . .
* Which of the following can be inferred from paragraph 1 about X?

**Tips for Inference Questions**

* Make sure your answer does not contradict the main idea of the passage.
* Do not choose an answer just because it seems important or true. The correct answer must be inferable from the passage.
* You should be able to defend your choice by pointing to explicitly stated information in the passage that leads to the inference you have selected

**Example PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “. . . The nineteenth century brought with it a burst of new discoveries and inventions that revolutionized the candle industry and made lighting available to all. In the early-to-mid-nineteenth century, a process was developed to refine tallow (fat from animals) with alkali and sulfuric acid. The result was a product called stearin. Stearin is harder and burns longer than unrefined tallow. This breakthrough meant that it was possible to make tallow candles that would not produce the usual smoke and rancid odor. Stearins were also derived from palm oils, so vegetable waxes as well as animal fats could be used to make candles . . . “

**Which of the following can be inferred from paragraph 1 about candles before the nineteenth century?**

0 They did not smoke when they were burned.

0 They produced a pleasant odor as they burned.

0 They were not available to all.

0 They contained sulfuric acid.

**Explanation**

In the first sentence from the excerpt the author says that “new discoveries and inventions” made “lighting available to all.” The only kind of lighting discussed in the passage is candles. If the new discoveries were important because they made candles available to all, we can infer that before the discoveries, candles were not available to everyone.

* Therefore choice 3 is an inference about candles we can make from the passage.
* Choices 1 and 2 can be eliminated because they explicitly contradict the passage (“the usual smoke” and “rancid odor”).
* Choice 4 can be eliminated because sulfuric acid was first used to make stearin in the nineteenth century, not before the nineteenth century.

**Type 4: Rhetorical Purpose Questions**

*Rhetoric* is the art of speaking or writing effectively. In Factual Information questions you are asked *what* information an author has presented. In Rhetorical Purpose questions you are asked *why* the author has presented a particular piece of information in a particular place or manner. Rhetorical Purpose questions ask you to show that you understand the rhetorical function of a statement or paragraph as it relates to the rest of the passage.

A Rhetorical Purpose question may also ask why the author quotes a certain person or why the author mentions a particular piece of information (*Example:* Why does the author mention “the ability to grasp a pencil”? *Correct answer:* It is an example of a motor skill developed by children at 10 to 11 months of age.)

**How to Recognize Rhetorical Purpose Questions**

These are examples of the way Rhetorical Purpose questions are typically worded:

* The author discusses X in paragraph 2 in order to . . .
* Why does the author mention X?
* The author uses X as an example of . . .

**Tips for Rhetorical Purpose Questions**

* Know the definitions of these words or phrases, which are often used to describe different kinds of rhetorical purposes: “definition,” “example,” “to illustrate,” “to explain,” “to contrast,” “to refute,” “to note,” “to criticize,” “function of.”
* Rhetorical Purpose questions usually do not ask about the overall organization of the reading passage. Instead, they typically focus on the logical links between sentences and paragraphs.

**Example PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “. . . Sensitivity to physical laws is thus an important consideration for the maker of applied-art objects. It is often taken for granted that this is also true for the maker of fine-art objects. This assumption misses a significant difference between the two disciplines. Fine-art objects are not constrained by the laws of physics in the same way that applied-art objects are. Because their primary purpose is not functional, they are only limited in terms of the materials used to make them. Sculptures must, for example, be stable, which requires an understanding of the properties of mass, weight distribution, and stress. Paintings must have rigid stretchers so that the canvas will be taut, and the paint must not deteriorate, crack, or discolor. These are problems that must be overcome by the artist because they tend to intrude upon his or her conception of the work. For example, in the early Italian Renaissance, bronze statues of horses with a raised foreleg usually had a cannonball under that hoof. This was done because the cannonball was needed to support the weight of the leg . . . “

**Why does the author discuss the “bronze statues of horses” created by artists in the early Italian Renaissance?**

0 To provide an example of a problem related to the laws of physics that a fine artist must overcome

0 To argue that fine artists are unconcerned with the laws of physics

0 To contrast the relative sophistication of modern artists in solving problems related to the laws of physics

0 To note an exceptional piece of art constructed without the aid of technology

**Explanation**

You should note that the sentence that first mentions “bronze statues of horses” begins “For example...” The author is giving an example of something that was introduced earlier in the paragraph. The paragraph overall contrasts how the constraints of physical laws affect the fine arts differently from applied arts or crafts.

* The fine artist is not concerned with making an object that is useful, so he or she is less constrained than the applied artist.
* However, because even a fine- arts object is made of some material, the artist must take into account the physical properties of the material.
* In the passage, the author uses the example of the bronze statues of horses to discuss how artists had to include some support for the raised foreleg of the horse because of the physical properties of the bronze. So, the correct answer is choice 1.

**Type 5: Vocabulary Questions**

These questions ask you to identify the meanings of individual words and phrases as they are used in the reading passage (a word might have more than one meaning, but *in the reading passage,* only one of those meanings is relevant). Vocabulary that is tested actually occurs in the passage; there is no “list of words” that must be tested. Usually a word or phrase is chosen to be tested as a vocabulary question because understanding that word or phrase is important to understanding a large or important part of the passage.

On the *TOEFL*® test, some words in the passage that are unusual, are technical, or have special meanings in the context of the topic are defined for you. If you click on the hyperlinked word in the passage, a definition will appear in a box. In this book, words of this type are defined at the end of the passage. Naturally, words that are tested as vocabulary questions are not defined for you.

**How to Recognize Vocabulary Questions**

Vocabulary questions are usually easy to identify. You will see one word or phrase highlighted in the passage. You are then asked a question like any of the following:

* The word “X” in the passage is closest in meaning to . . .
* The phrase “X” in the passage is closest in meaning to . . .
* In stating X, the author means that . . .

**Tips for Vocabulary Questions**

* Remember that the question is not just asking the meaning of a word;
* it is asking for the meaning as it is used in the passage. Do not choose
* an answer just because it can be a correct meaning of the word; under- stand which meaning the author is using in the passage.
* Reread the sentence in the passage, substituting the word or phrase you
* have chosen. Confirm that the sentence still makes sense in the context of the whole passage.

**Examples PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “In the animal world the task of moving about is fulfilled in many ways. For some animals locomotion is accomplished by changes in body shape . . .”

The word “locomotion” in the passage is closest in meaning to

0 evolution

0 movement

0 survival

0 escape

**Explanation**

Locomotion means “the ability to move from place to place.” In this example, it is a way of restating the phrase “the task of moving” in the preceding sentence. So, the correct answer is choice 2.

**Type 6: Reference Questions**

These questions ask you to identify referential relationships between the words in the passage. Often, the relationship is between a pronoun and its antecedent (the word to which the pronoun refers). Sometimes other kinds of grammatical reference are tested (like *which* or *this*).

**How to Recognize Reference Questions**

Reference questions look similar to vocabulary questions. In the passage, one word or phrase is highlighted. Usually the word is a pronoun. Then you are asked:

* The word “X” in the passage refers to . . .

The four answer choices will be words or phrases from the passage. The high- lighted word or phrase refers to only one of the choices.

**Tips for Reference Questions**

* If the Reference question is about a pronoun, make sure your answer is the same number (singular or plural) and case (first person, second person, third person) as the highlighted pronoun.
* Substitute your choice for the highlighted word or words in the sentence. Does it violate any grammar rules? Does it make sense?

**Examples PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “. . . These laws are universal in their application, regardless of cultural beliefs, geography, or climate. If pots have no bottoms or have large openings in their sides, they could hardly be considered containers in any traditional sense. Since the laws of physics, not some arbitrary decision, have determined the general form of applied-art objects, they follow basic patterns, so much so that functional forms can vary only within certain limits . . . “

The word “they” in the passage refers to

0 applied-art objects

0 the laws of physics

0 containers

0 the sides of pots

**Explanation**

This is an example of a simple pronoun-referent question. The highlighted word *they* refers to the phrase “applied-art objects,” which immediately precedes it, so choice 1 is the correct answer.

Often, the grammatical referent for a pronoun will be separated from the pro- noun. It may be located in a preceding clause or even in the preceding sentence.

**PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “. . . The first weekly newspaper in the colonies was the *Boston Gazette*, established in 1719, the same year that marked the appearance of Philadelphia’s first newspaper, the *American Mercury,* where the young Benjamin Franklin worked. By 1760 Boston had 4 newspapers and 5 other printing establishments; Philadelphia, 2 newspapers and 3 other presses; and New York, 3 newspapers. The distribution, if not the sale, of newspapers was assisted by the establishment of a postal service in 1710, which had a network of some 65 offices by 1770, serving all 13 colonies . . .”

The word “which” in the passage refers to

0 distribution

0 sale

0 newspaper

0 postal service

**Explanation**

In this example, the highlighted word is a relative pronoun, the grammatical subject of the relative clause “which had a network of some 65 offices . . .” The relative clause is describing the postal service, so choice 4 is the correct answer.

**PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “. . . Roots anchor the plant in one of two ways or sometimes by a combination of the two. The first is by occupying a large volume of shallow soil around the plant’s base with a *fibrous root system,* one consisting of many thin, profusely branched roots. Since these kinds of roots grow relatively close to the soil surface, they effectively control soil erosion. Grass roots are especially well suited to this purpose. Fibrous roots capture water as it begins to percolate into the ground and so must draw their mineral supplies from the surface soil before the nutrients are leached to lower levels . . .”

The phrase “this purpose” in the passage refers to

0 combining two root systems

0 feeding the plant

0 preventing soil erosion

0 leaching nutrients

**Explanation**

In the example, the highlighted words are a phrase containing a demonstrative adjective (this) and a noun (purpose). Because a fibrous root system can keep soil in place, it can be used to stop erosion, and grass roots are a fibrous root system. The sentence could be reworded as “Grass roots are especially well suited to pre- venting soil erosion,” so choice 3 is the correct answer.

**Type 7: Sentence Simplification Questions**

In this type of question, you are asked to choose a sentence that has the same essential meaning as a sentence that occurs in the passage. Not every reading set includes a Sentence Simplification question. There is never more than one in a set.

**How to Recognize Sentence Simplification Questions**

Sentence Simplification questions always look the same. A single sentence in the passage is highlighted. You are then asked: *Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence?* Incorrect answer choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

**Tips for Sentence Simplification Questions**

* Make sure you understand both ways a choice can be incorrect:
* It contradicts something in the highlighted sentence.
* It leaves out something important from the highlighted sentence.
* Make sure your answer does not contradict the main argument of the paragraph in which the sentence occurs, or the passage as a whole.

**Example PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “. . . Although we now tend to refer to the various crafts according to the materials used to construct them—clay, glass, wood, fiber, and metal—it was once common to think of crafts in terms of function, which led to their being known as the “applied arts.” Approaching crafts from the point of view of function, we can divide them into simple categories: containers, shelters, and supports. There is no way around the fact that containers, shelters, and supports must be functional. The applied arts are thus bound by the laws of physics, which pertain to both the materials used in their making and the substances and things to be contained, supported, and sheltered. These laws are universal in their application, regardless of cultural beliefs, geography, or climate. If a pot has no bottom or has large openings in its sides, it could hardly be considered a container in any traditional sense. Since the laws of physics, not some arbitrary decision, have determined the general form of applied-art objects, they follow basic patterns, so much so that functional forms can vary only within certain limits. Buildings without roofs, for example, are unusual because they depart from the norm. However, not all functional objects are exactly alike; that is why we recognize a Shang Dynasty vase as being different from an Inca vase. What varies is not the basic form but the incidental details that do not obstruct the object’s primary function . . .”

**Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence? Incorrect answer choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.**

0 Functional applied-art objects cannot vary much from the basic patterns deter- mined by the laws of physics.

0 The function of applied-art objects is determined by basic patterns in the laws of physics.

0 Since functional applied-art objects vary only within certain limits, arbitrary decisions cannot have determined their general form.

0 The general form of applied-art objects is limited by some arbitrary decision that is not determined by the laws of physics.

**Explanation**

It is important to note that the question says that incorrect answers change the original meaning of the sentence or leave out essential information.

* In this example, choice 4 changes the meaning of the sentence to its opposite; it says that the form of functional objects is arbitrary, when the highlighted sentence says that the forms of functional objects are never arbitrary.
* Choice 2 also changes the meaning. It says that the functions of applied-art objects are determined by physical laws. The highlighted sentence says that the form of the object is determined by physical laws but the function is determined by people.
* Choice 3 leaves out an important idea from the highlighted sentence. Like the highlighted sentence, it says that the form of functional objects is not arbitrary, but it does not say that it is physical laws that determine basic form.
* Only choice 1 makes the same point as the highlighted sentence and includes all the essential meaning.

**Type 8: Insert Text Questions**

In this type of question, you are given a new sentence and are asked where in the passage it would best fit. You need to understand the logic of the passage as well as the grammatical connections (like pronoun references) between sentences. Every set includes an Insert Text question. There is never more than one in a set.

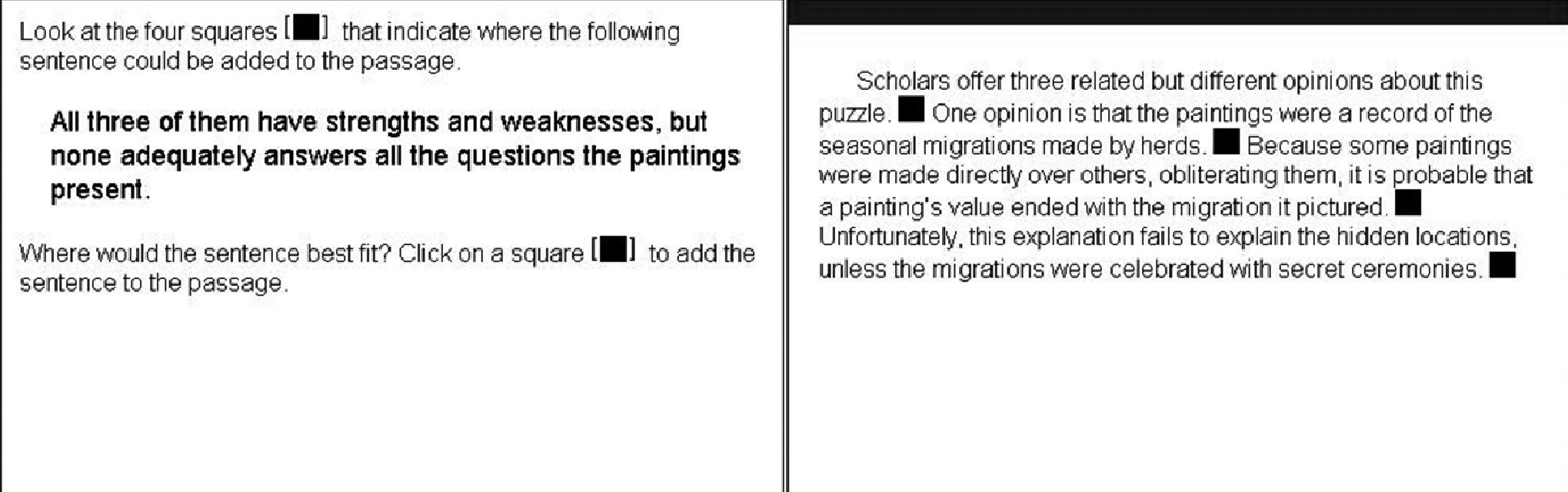
**How to Recognize Insert Text Questions**

Insert Text questions are easy to identify when taking the *TOEFL iBT* ® test. In the passage, you will see four black squares. The squares are located at the beginnings or ends of sentences. Sometimes all four squares appear in one paragraph. Sometimes they are spread across the end of one paragraph and the beginning of another. You are then asked this question: *Look at the four squares [7] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.*

**[You will see a sentence in bold.]**

*Where would the sentence best fit? Click on a square [7] to add the sentence to the passage.*

Your job is to click on one of the squares and insert the sentence in the text. The following is an example of how this question displays on the TOEFL iBT test.



**Tips for Insert Text Questions**

* When taking the TOEFL iBT ® test, try the sentence in each of the places indicated by the squares. You can place and replace the sentence as many times as you want.
* Look at the structure of the sentence you are inserting. Pay special attention to connecting words; they can provide important information about where the sentence should be placed.
* Frequently used connecting words: On the other hand, For example, On the contrary, As a result, Further, or furthermore, therefore, In other words, Similarly In contrast Finally
* Make sure that the inserted sentence connects logically to both the sentence before it and the sentence after it, and that any pronouns agree with the nouns they refer to.

**Example PASSAGE EXCERPT:** “Scholars offer three related but different opinions about this puzzle. **(1)** One opinion is that the paintings were a record of the seasonal migrations made by herds. **(2)** Because some paintings were made directly over others, obliterating them, it is probable that a painting’s value ended with the migration it pictured.

**(3)** Unfortunately, this explanation fails to explain the hidden locations, unless the migrations were celebrated with secret ceremonies. **(4)**”

**Directions:** Look at the part of the passage that is displayed above. The numbers **(1)**, **(2)**, **(3)**, and **(4)** indicate where the following sentence could be added.

**All three of them have strengths and weaknesses, but none adequately answers all of the questions the paintings present.**

Where would the sentence best fit?

0 Choice 1

0 Choice 2

0 Choice 3

0 Choice 4

**Explanation**

In this example, choice 1 is the correct answer. The new sentence makes sense only if it occurs in the first position, after the first sentence. In that place, “All three of them” refers back to “three related but different opinions.” The information in the sentence is a commentary on all three of the “opinions”; the opinions are related, but none is a complete explanation. Logically, this evaluation of all three opinions must come either as an introduction to the three opinions, or as a conclusion about all three. Only the introductory position is available, because the paragraph does not include all three opinions.

**Reading to Learn Questions**

There are two types of Reading to Learn questions: “Prose Summary” and “Fill in a Table.” Reading to Learn questions require you to do more than the Basic Information questions. As you have seen, the Basic Information questions focus on your ability to understand or locate specific points in a passage at the sentence level. The Reading to Learn questions also involve:

* recognizing the organization and purpose of the passage
* organizing the information in the passage into a mental framework
* distinguishing major from minor ideas and essential from non-essential information
* understanding rhetorical functions such as cause-effect relationships,
* compare-contrast relationships, arguments, etc.

In other words, these questions require you to demonstrate an understanding of the passage as a whole, not just specific information within it.

Reading to Learn questions require you to show that you are able not only to comprehend individual points, but also to place the major ideas and supporting information from the passage into an organizational framework or structure such as a prose summary or a table. By answering correctly, you will demonstrate that you can recognize the major points of a text, how and why the text has been organized, and the nature of the relationships within the text. Having an organized mental representation of a text is critical to learning because it allows you to remember important information from the text and apply it in new situations. If you have such a mental framework, you should be able to reconstruct the major ideas and supporting information from the text. By doing so, you will demonstrate a global understanding of the text as a whole. On the TOEFL test, each reading passage will have one Reading to Learn question. It will be either a *Prose Summary* or a *Fill in a Table question*, never both.

**Type 9: Prose Summary Questions**

These questions measure your ability to understand and recognize the major ideas and the relative importance of information in a passage. You will be asked to select the major ideas in the passage by distinguishing them from minor ideas or ideas that are not in the passage. The correct answer choice will synthesize major ideas in the passage. Because the correct answer represents a synthesis of ideas, it will not match any particular sentence from the passage. To select the correct answer, you will need to create a mental framework to organize and remember major ideas and other important information. Understanding the relative importance of information in a passage is critical to this ability.

In a Prose Summary question, you will be given six answer choices and asked to pick the three that express the most important ideas in the passage. Unlike the Basic Information questions, each of which is worth just 1 point, a Prose Summary question is worth 2 points. You can earn 0 to 2 points depending on how many correct answers you choose. If you choose no correct answers or just one correct answer, you will earn no points. If you choose two correct answers, you will earn 1 point. If you choose all three correct answers, you will earn 2 points. The order in which you choose your answers does not matter for scoring purposes.

**Example** Because the Prose Summary question asks you to show an understanding of the different parts of the passage, it is necessary to read the entire passage. Parts of the following passage have already been used to illustrate other question types.

## APPLIED ARTS AND FINE ARTS

Although we now tend to refer to the various crafts according to the materials used to construct them—clay, glass, wood, fiber, and metal—it was once common to think of crafts in terms of function, which led to their being known as the “applied arts.” Approaching crafts from the point of view of function, we can divide them into simple categories: containers, shelters, and supports. There is no way around the fact that containers, shelters, and supports must be functional. The applied arts are thus bound by the laws of physics, which pertain to both the materials used in their making and the substances and things to be contained, supported, and sheltered. These laws are universal in their application, regardless of cultural beliefs, geography, or climate. If a pot has no bottom or has large openings in its sides, it could hardly be considered a container in any traditional sense. Since the laws of physics, not some arbitrary decision, have determined the general form of applied-art objects, they follow basic patterns, so much so that functional forms can vary only within certain limits. Buildings without roofs, for example, are unusual because they depart from the norm. However, not all functional objects are exactly alike; that is why we recognize a Shang Dynasty vase as being different from an Inca vase. What varies is not the basic form but the incidental details that do not obstruct the object’s primary function.

Sensitivity to physical laws is thus an important consideration for the maker of applied-art objects. It is often taken for granted that this is also true for the maker of fine-art objects. This assumption misses a significant difference between the two disciplines. Fine-art objects are not constrained by the laws of physics in the same way that applied-art objects are. Because their primary purpose is not functional, they are only limited in terms of the materials used to make them. Sculptures must, for example, be stable, which requires an understanding of the properties of mass, weight distribution, and stress. Paintings must have rigid stretchers so that the canvas will be taut, and the paint must not deteriorate, crack, or discolor. These are problems that must be overcome by the artist because they tend to intrude upon his or her conception of the work. For example, in the early Italian Renaissance, bronze statues of horses with a raised foreleg usually had a cannonball under that hoof. This was done because the cannonball was needed to support the weight of the leg. In other words, the demands of the laws of physics, not the sculptor’s aesthetic intentions, placed the ball there. That this device was a necessary structural compromise is clear from the fact that the cannonball quickly disappeared when sculptors learned how to strengthen the internal structure of a statue with iron braces (iron being much stronger than bronze).

Even though the fine arts in the twentieth century often treat materials in new ways, the basic difference in attitude of artists in relation to their materials in the fine arts and the applied arts remains relatively constant. It would therefore not be too great an exaggeration to say that practitioners of the fine arts work to overcome the limitations of their materials, whereas those engaged in the applied arts work in con- cert with their materials.

An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. **This question is worth 2 points.**

**This passage discusses fundamental differences between applied-art objects and fine-art objects.**

b

b

b

**Answer Choices**

1. Applied-art objects fulfill functions, such as containing or sheltering, and objects with the same function have similar characteristics because they are constrained by their purpose.
2. It is easy to recognize that Shang Dynasty vases are different from Inca vases.
3. Fine-art objects are not functional, so they are limited only by the proper- ties of the materials used.
4. Renaissance sculptors learned to use iron braces to strengthen the internal structures of bronze statues.
5. In the twentieth century, fine artists and applied artists became more similar to one another in their atti- tudes toward their materials.
6. In all periods, fine artists tend to challenge the physical limitations of their materials while applied artists tend to cooperate with the physical properties of their materials.

**Explanation**

**Correct Choices**

Choice 1: Applied-art objects fulfill functions, such as containing or sheltering, and objects with the same function have similar characteristics because they are constrained by their purpose.

* Explanation: As the introductory sentence states, the passage is mainly a contrast of applied-art objects and fine-art objects. The main point of contrast is functionality: applied-art objects are functional, whereas fine-art objects are not. The first part of the passage explains the consequences of functionality for the materials and “basic forms” of applied-art objects. The second part of the passage explains the consequences of not being functional to the materials and forms of fine-art objects. A good summary of the passage must include the definition of “applied-art objects” and the major consequence (objects with the same function will follow similar patterns), so choice 1 should be included.

Choice 3: Fine-art objects are not functional, so they are limited only by the properties of the materials used.

* Explanation: Because the passage contrasts applied-art objects and fine-art objects, a good summary should include the basic difference. Including choice 3 in the summary provides the basic contrast discussed in the passage: applied art objects are functional; fine-art objects are not. Fine-art objects are not as constrained as applied-art objects because they do not have to perform a function.

Choice 6: In all periods, fine artists tend to challenge the physical limitations of their materials, while applied artists tend to cooperate with the physical properties of their materials.

* Explanation: The last paragraph of the passage presents a further consequence of the basic contrast between applied-art objects and fine-art objects. This is the difference between the attitude of fine artists toward their materials and the attitude of applied artists toward their materials. A good summary will include this last contrast.

**Incorrect Choices**

Choice 2*:* It is easy to recognize that Shang Dynasty vases are different from Inca vases.

* *Explanation:* Although this statement is true, it is not the main point of the first paragraph or of the passage. In fact, it contrasts with the main point of the paragraph: objects that have the same function are all similar. The last sentence of the first paragraph says that the Shang Dynasty vase and the Inca vase are different in “incidental details,” but the “basic form” is the same. Including choice 2 in the summary misrepresents the passage.

Choice 4:Renaissance sculptors learned to use iron braces to strengthen the internal structures of bronze statues.

* *Explanation:* Choice 4 summarizes the information in sentences 9, 10, and 11 of paragraph 2. Within the context of the passage, this information helps you understand the meaning of the limitations that materials can impose on fine artists. However, remember that the directions say to choose the statements that express *the most important ideas in the passage.* The example is less important than the general statements of difference. If choice 4 is included, then choice 1 or 3 or 6 would be left out, and the summary would be missing an essential point of contrast between fine arts and applied arts.

Choice 5:In the twentieth century, fine artists and applied artists became more similar to one another in their attitudes toward their materials.

* *Explanation:* This choice should be excluded because it is not supported by the passage. It is a misreading of paragraph 3, which says that the difference in attitude between fine artists and applied artists has not changed. Obviously, a choice that contradicts the information or argument in the passage should not be part of your summary.

**Type 10: Fill in a Table Questions**

In this kind of question, you will be given a partially completed table based on information in the passage. Your job is to complete the table by clicking on correct answer choices and dragging them to their correct locations in the table.

Fill in a Table questions measure your ability to conceptualize and organize major ideas and other important information from across the passage and then to place them in appropriate categories. This means that you must first recognize and identify the major points from the passage and then place those points in their proper context.

Just as for Prose Summary questions, the able reader will create a mental framework to organize and remember major ideas and other important information. Doing so requires the ability to understand rhetorical functions such as cause- effect relationships, compare-contrast relationships, arguments, and the like.

When building your mental framework, keep in mind that the major ideas in the passage are the ones you would include if you were making a fairly high-level outline of the passage. The correct answer choices are usually ideas that would be included in a slightly more detailed outline. Minor details and examples are generally not included in such an outline because they are used only to support the more important, higher-level themes. The distinction between major ideas/ important information and less important information can also be thought of as a distinction between essential and nonessential information.

*Passages* used with Fill in a Table questions have more than one focus of development in that they include more than one point of view or perspective. Typical passages have the following types of organization: compare/contrast, problem/ solution, cause/effect, alternative arguments (such as theories, hypotheses), and the like.

*Correct answers* represent major ideas and important supporting information in the passage. Generally, these answers will not match specific phrases in the passage. They are more likely to be abstract concepts based on passage information or paraphrases of passage information. Correct answers will be easy to con- firm by able readers who can remember or easily locate relevant text information.

*Incorrect answers* may include information about the topic that is not mentioned in the passage or that is not directly relevant to the classification categories in the table. They may also be obviously incorrect generalizations or conclusions based on what is stated in the passage. Be aware that incorrect answers may include words and phrases that match or resemble words or phrases in the passage.

**Table Rules**

Tables can have two or three columns/rows containing bullets representing five correct answer choices.

There will always be more answer choices than there are correct answers. Some answer choices will not be used. An answer choice can be used only once in the table. If an answer choice applies to more than one answer category, or to no category in a table, a row or column labeled “both” or “neither” will be available in the table for placement of that answer choice.

**Scoring**

To earn points, you must not only select correct answer choices, but also organize them correctly in the table. You may receive partial credit, depending on how many correct answers you choose.

You can earn up to a total of 3 points, depending on how many correct answers you select and correctly place. For zero, one, or two correct answers you will receive no points. For three correct answers you will receive 1 point; for four correct answers you will receive 2 points; and for all five correct answers you will receive the entire 3 points.

**Example** Note: The passage used for this example is the same one that was used above for the Prose Summary example question. In an actual test, you will not receive both a Prose Summary question and a Fill in a Table question about the same passage.

**Directions:** Complete the table below to summarize information about the two types of art discussed in the passage. Match the appropriate statements to the types of art with which they are associated. **This question is worth 3 points.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TYPES OF ART** | **STATEMENTS** |
| The Applied Arts | **Select 3** |
|  | b |
|  | b |
|  | b |
| The Fine Arts | **Select 2** |
|  | b |
|  | b |

**Statements**

* An object’s purpose is primarily aesthetic. Objects serve a functional purpose.
* The incidental details of objects do not vary.
* Artists work to overcome the limitations of their materials. The basic form of objects varies little across cultures.
* Artists work in concert with their materials.
* An object’s place of origin is difficult to determine.

Drag your answer choices to the spaces where they belong. (This question type fills the computer screen. To see the passage, click on **View Text**.)

**Completed Table**

**Directions:** Complete the table below to summarize information about the two types of art discussed in the passage. Match the appropriate statements to the types of art with which they are associated. **This question is worth 3 points.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TYPES OF ART** | **STATEMENTS** |
| The Applied Arts | **Select 3**  b Objects serve a functional purpose.  b The basic form of objects varies little across cultures.  b Artists work in concert with their materials. |
| The Fine Arts | **Select 2**  b An object’s purpose is primarily aesthetic.  b Artists work to overcome the limitations of their materials. |

**Explanation**

**Correct Choices**

##### Choice 1:An object’s purpose is primarily aesthetic. (Fine Arts)

* *Explanation:* This is an example of a correct answer that requires you to identify an abstract concept based on text information and paraphrases of text information. In paragraph 2, sentence 5, the passage states that the primary purpose of Fine Arts is not function. Then, in paragraph 2, sentence 11, the passage mentions a situation in which a sculptor had to sacrifice an aesthetic purpose due to the laws of physics. Putting these statements together, the reader can infer that fine artists, such as sculptors, are primarily concerned with aesthetics.

##### Choice 2: Objects serve a functional purpose. (Applied Arts)

##### Explanation: This is stated more directly than the previous correct answer. In paragraph 1, sentences 1, 2, and 3 make it clear how important function is in the applied arts. At the same time, paragraph 2 states that Fine Arts are not concerned with function, so the only correct place for this statement is in the Applied Arts category.

##### Choice 4: Artists work to overcome the limitations of their materials. (Fine Arts)

##### Explanation: This is stated explicitly in the last paragraph of the passage. In that paragraph, it is made clear that this applies only to practitioners of the fine arts.

##### Choice 5: The basic form of objects varies little across cultures. (Applied Arts)

##### Explanation: In paragraph 1, sentence 5, the passage states that certain laws of physics are universal. Then in sentence 7, that idea is further developed with the statement that functional forms can vary only within limits. From these two sentences, you can conclude that because of the laws of physics and the need for functionality, the basic forms of applied-art objects will vary little across cultures.

Choice 6:Artists work in concert with their materials. (Applied Arts)

* *Explanation:* This is stated explicitly in the last paragraph of the passage. In that paragraph, it is made clear that this applies only to practitioners of the applied arts.

**Incorrect Choices**

##### Choice 3: The incidental details of objects do not vary.

##### Explanation: This idea is explicitly refuted by the last sentence of paragraph 1 in reference to the applied arts. That sentence (referring only to applied arts) states that the incidental details of such objects do vary, so this answer can- not be placed in the Applied Arts category. This subject is not discussed at all in reference to fine-art objects, so it cannot be correctly placed in that category either.

##### Choice 7: An object’s place of origin is difficult to determine.

##### Explanation: This answer choice is implicitly refuted in reference to applied arts in the next-to-last sentence of paragraph 1. That sentence notes that both Shang Dynasty and Inca vases are identifiable as such based upon differences in detail. By inference, then, it seems that it is not difficult to determine an applied-art object’s place of origin. Like the previous incorrect answer, this idea is not discussed at all in reference to fine-art objects, so it cannot be correctly placed in that category either.

**Conclusions**

Now that you are familiar with the 10 question types that are used in the TOEFL® Reading section, you are ready to sharpen your skills by working on whole reading sets. In the following pages, you can practice on six reading sets created by ETS for the TOEFL iBT ® test. The question types are not labeled, but you should be able to identify them and understand what you need to do to answer each correctly. After each passage and question set you will find answers and explanations for each question.

In addition to practicing on these sets, here are some other suggestions for improving the skills that will help you perform well on the Reading section:

Here are some suggestions for ways to build skills for the three reading purposes covered by the TOEFL iBT test.

**Reading to find information**

* Scan passages to find and highlight key facts (dates, numbers, terms) and information.
* Practice this frequently to increase reading rate and fluency.

**Reading for basic comprehension**

* Increase your vocabulary knowledge, perhaps by using flash cards.
* Rather than carefully reading each word and each sentence, practice skimming a passage quickly to get a general impression of the main idea.
* Build up your ability to skim quickly and to identify the major points.
* After skimming a passage, read it again more carefully and write down the main idea, major points, and important facts.
* Choose some unfamiliar words in a passage and guess the meaning from the context (surrounding sentences).
* Select all the pronouns (*he, him, they, them*, and others) and identify which nouns they refer to in a passage.
* Practice making inferences and drawing conclusions based on what is implied in the passage as a whole.

## Reading to Learn

Identify the passage type (classification, cause/effect, compare/contrast, problem/solution, description, narration, and so on). Do the following to organize the information in the passage:

Create an outline of the passage to distinguish between major and minor points.

If the passage categorizes information, create a chart and place the information in appropriate categories. (Remember: on the test, you do not have to create such a chart. Instead, a chart with possible answer choices is provided for you, and you must fill in the chart with the correct choices.) Practicing this skill will help you think about categorizing information and be able to do so with ease.

If the passage describes the steps in a process, create an outline of the steps in their correct order.

Create a summary of the passage using the charts and outlines.

Paraphrase individual sentences in a passage, and then progress to paraphrasing an entire paragraph. Note: the *TOEFL iBT* ® Reading section measures the ability to recognize paraphrases. The ability to paraphrase is also important for the integrated tasks in the Writing and Speaking sections of the test.