

TOEFL iBT Test 2

WRITING

This section measures your ability to write in English to communicate in an academic environment.

There are two writing questions in this section.

For question 1, you will read a passage and listen to a lecture about the same topic. You may take notes while you read and listen. Then you will write a response to a question based on what you have read and heard. You may look back at the passage when answering the question. You may use your notes to help you answer the question. You have 20 minutes to plan and write your response.

For question 2, you will write an essay based on your own knowledge and experience. You have 30 minutes to plan and complete your essay.

Directions: Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.


Reading Time: 3 minutes

The sea otter is a small mammal that lives in waters along the western coast of North America from California to Alaska. When some sea otter populations off the Alaskan coast started rapidly declining a few years ago, it caused much concern because sea otters play an important ecological role in the coastal ecosystem. Experts started investigating the cause of the decline and quickly realized that there were two possible explanations: environmental pollution or attacks by predators. Initially, the pollution hypothesis seemed the more likely of the two.

The first reason why pollution seemed the more likely cause was that there were known sources of it along the Alaskan coast, such as oil rigs and other sources of industrial chemical pollution. Water samples from the area revealed increased levels of chemicals that could decrease the otters' resistance to life-threatening infections and thus could indirectly cause their deaths.


Second, other sea mammals such as seals and sea lions along the Alaskan coast were also declining, indicating that whatever had endangered the otters was affecting other sea mammals as well. This fact again pointed to environmental pollution, since it usually affects the entire ecosystem rather than a single species. Only widely occurring predators, such as the orca (a large predatory whale), could have the same effect, but orcas prefer to hunt much larger prey, such as other whales.

Third, scientists believed that the pollution hypothesis could also explain the uneven pattern of otter decline: at some Alaskan locations the otter populations declined greatly, while at others they remained stable. Some experts explained these observations by suggesting that ocean currents or other environmental factors may have created uneven concentrations of pollutants along the coast.

Listen to Track 51. 



Directions: You have 20 minutes to plan and write your response. Your response will be judged on the basis of the quality of your writing and on how well your response presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage. Typically, an effective response will be 150 to 225 words.

Listen to Track 52. 

Response Time: 20 minutes

1. Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they respond to the specific points made in the reading passage.

Lined writing area with 25 horizontal lines.

Directions: Read the question below. You have 30 minutes to plan, write, and revise your essay. Typically, an effective response will contain a minimum of 300 words.

Response Time: 30 minutes

2. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Playing computer games is a waste of time. Children should not be allowed to play them.

Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

ANSWERS

Writing Section

Prompts, Topic Notes, and Sample Responses with Rater Comments

Use the sample Integrated and Independent Writing Rubrics in Appendix A to see how responses are scored.

This section includes topic notes that are guides to the kind of information raters expect to read in a high-level response.

This section also refers to sample responses, which can be found on the accompanying DVD. These responses were scored at the highest level. The responses are followed by comments from certified ETS raters.

Question 1

Prompt

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they respond to the specific points made in the reading passage.

Topic Notes

The reading discusses three reasons to believe it is because of pollution that there has been a decline of sea otters off of Alaska and California, while the lecture discusses why predation, especially by orcas, is a better explanation of the evidence presented in the reading.

Point made in the reading	Corresponding point from the lecture
The passage argues that increased levels of pollution detected along the Alaskan coast could cause the deaths of sea otters by making them vulnerable to infections.	No dead sea otters have been found washed up on shore; this weakens the pollution theory but supports the predator theory, since the predators would eat the otters as they caught them, leaving no remains.
The decline of other sea mammals (seals and sea lions) points to a systemic cause such as pollution; the orca, a predator that could conceivably hunt several sea mammal species, is not the likely cause because it prefers larger prey such as whales.	Since the population of whales that orcas prefer to hunt has declined, orcas started hunting smaller prey, such as otters, as well as seals and sea lions.
The decline of sea otter populations is greater in some locations than in others, which again seems consistent with the pollution theory since varying concentrations of pollutants could account for such an uneven pattern.	The uneven pattern of sea otter decline can be explained by the fact that some locations where sea otters live are accessible to orcas and some are not; the accessible areas experience decline, while the populations in the inaccessible areas remain steady.

Responses with scores of 4 and 5 typically discuss all three points in the table with good accuracy.

Sample Response

The topic discussed here is the investigation of the causes of the disappearance of the sea otter, which is a small mammal that lives in waters along the western coast of North America from California to Alaska. The woman in the lecture argues that the cause of their disappearance is the presence of the predators, especially orcas, and not pollution as the reading says.

Firstly, she argues that one of the proofs of their being attacked by the predators is the fact that no one can find any dead sea otters. If the cause was the pollution, many dead sea otters would be found along the shores. In addition, a predator will immediately eat its prey so this is why no dead sea otters were found.

Secondly, the woman in the lecture argues there is another explanation than pollution why smaller sea mammals are all disappearing.

She says that, since the whales tend to disappear because of the humans hunting them, the orcas had to adapt their food habits to the sea conditions and as a result they have started eating the smaller sea animals available among them sea otters being included.

Thirdly, she argues that the orcas cannot access the shallow locations. This is why there are some areas where the sea otters are numerous. It's not because of uneven concentrations of pollutants.

Rater Comments

This response earns a score of 5. The response clearly conveys the three points from the lecture showing why predation by orcas is a better explanation than pollution for why no remains of the sea otters are found, for why a number of small animals including the sea otter started declining at the same time, and for why sea otter decline seems to have occurred to a lesser extent or not at all in some places, and to a greater extent in others. Grammatical errors are few and minor.

Question 2

Prompt

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Playing computer games is a waste of time. Children should not be allowed to play them.

Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.

Topic Notes

This topic asks you whether children should be banned from playing computer games. Successful responses can agree with the statement, disagree with the statement, or show the merits of both positions. No matter which position you take, it is important to support your opinion with details and examples.

If you agree with the statement, you might discuss why alternative activities, for example, playing physical games and getting exercise, are better for children rather than sitting at a computer or you might talk about social skills that can be obtained only by interacting face-to-face with other children. You could also talk about negative aspects of some computer games, such as addiction to game playing or the violence depicted in some games, and how some might worry about fantasy transferring to real life.

On the other side, you might want to argue that games are a positive way to train children to analyze events and organize their reactions. For example, computer games can be good for learning logic and practicing certain academic or athletic skills. Skill at computer games can also be a source of pride for children who might not be recognized for their achievements at school or on sports teams.

Sample Response

I disagree with statement that children should not be allowed to play computer games; it is not a waste of time. Lots of new skills and ideas can be developed through games and children should be encouraged to play games throughout their life. These days computer games can really enhance learning, help the

development of manual and physical skills and even promote bonding people together.

I see computer games as new tools of learning for children. With development of computer games industry, more and more games are focused on mental development of children. Through computer games children can learn new languages by using games that understand and produce voice and text. And most importantly, they can interact with the computer game at their convenience at home. Therefore they can spend a lot more time using and developing language skills through computer games than just learning them during school time.

Computer and tablet games can also be very helpful for learning math and algebra. There are many math games for preschoolers that capture kids' attentions because they are very attractive using sound and graphics and never get tired of teaching. And then there're higher level stand alone games and websites that have games that help students to absorb much more complex ideas like algebra and geometry, in a fun way.

Another good thing about some games is they can be used to develop manual and physical skills for children. By using different computer equipment and game programs, children can learn to, for example, drive a vehicle or even fly a plane. Other games and advance equipment let children practice sport moves just like they were playing sport for real. So these games can help develop movement, coordination, and ability to see and react to things in motion.

And finally, children can play games online in real time with chat. They can do this with other children located at a distance in their country or even anywhere in the world. As they play these online games with chat, they can talk to each other about almost anything. This can lead them to develop new kinds of friendships and international understanding and make their existing relations stronger.

Of course as in everything, games should have their limits. But from all I have argued

above, computer games are and should be part of children's daily life.

Rater Comments

This 5-level response disagrees with the statement. The writer talks about ways in which computer games are valuable, providing two nicely developed examples of games that enhance learning. The response also shows how games can promote development

of motor skills and how some games, via chat and online connection, can promote friendship and international understanding. In the last paragraph, the writer mentions that games should have their limits, but then does not elaborate on this remark. This is an acceptable strategy for ending this response, which overall is a well-developed explanation of the value of computer games.