Using TOEFL® Scores in the Admissions Process

BCCIE 2014
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What We Will Cover Today

• *TOEFL®* Test Overview
• Focus on Quality
• General Guidelines for score use
• Guidelines for TOEFL Score Use
• Discussion
What is the TOEFL iBT® Test

• Measures the ability of nonnative speakers to understand and use English as it is spoken, written and heard in college and university settings

• Used primarily for admission into universities where English is the language of instruction
  – Accepted at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels

• Also used for immigration, licensing and scholarships
The TOEFL iBT® Test

- Represents 99% of all TOEFL® testing
- Covers all four language skills: Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing
- Content is 100% academic
- Test design emphasizes communicative English
  - How well students can use English, not just how much they know about it
- Uses integrated questions
  - Reading > Listening > Speaking
  - Reading > Listening > Writing
  - Listening > Speaking
Ensuring that any student anywhere in the world gains access to the *TOEFL®* test

![World map showing the availability of the TOEFL test in various countries.](image)

From Andorra to Iceland and almost every place in between, only the *TOEFL®* test brings students from 180 countries to your campus. With the TOEFL test being administered in nearly every country, you will get the most diverse pool of students from all over the world. Locations in the darker color are countries where the only major English-language test available is the TOEFL test.
### The TOEFL iBT® Test Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Testing Time</th>
<th>Score Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
<td>3–4 passages from academic texts; 12–14 questions per passage</td>
<td>60–80 min.</td>
<td>0–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
<td>4–6 lectures, some with classroom discussion, 6 questions each; 2–3 conversations, 5 questions each</td>
<td>60–90 min.</td>
<td>0–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Break</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10 min.</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking</strong></td>
<td>2 tasks to express an opinion; 4 tasks to speak based on reading and listening passages</td>
<td>20 min.</td>
<td>0–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>1 integrated task (write based on what is read and listened to); 1 independent task (support an opinion on a topic)</td>
<td>50 min.</td>
<td>0–30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0–120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*TOEFL iBT® test scores are valid for 2 years*
The **TOEFL®** Test Advantage

Built upon a solid foundation of research

- An ongoing, robust and rigorous research program, which includes 152 research reports and 56 external publications, supports the **TOEFL®** test.

- Research conducted by both ETS staff and external language testing academics in the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Japan, Canada and the U.S.

- "The TOEFL test is without a doubt the best-researched language test in the world."

  — Tim McNamara, Professor, Department of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, University of Melbourne, Australia
**TOEFL iBT® Test Development**

- **TOEFL® test questions go through an extensive and rigorous development and review process**
  - Takes 6 to 18 months for questions to be ready for use
- **Questions are pretested prior to use and statistically analyzed after the test prior to the release of scores**
- **All TOEFL iBT® test questions are reviewed by:**
  - At least four trained and qualified TOEFL test developers
  - An ETS editor
  - A fairness reviewer
  - A subject matter expert
Scoring Sets the TOEFL® Test Apart

Scoring process ensures fairness and integrity

• Rigorous rater training

• Daily Calibration for Speaking and Writing raters

• Multiple raters for Speaking and Writing
  – Three to six raters for Speaking responses
  – Four ratings for Writing responses

• Scoring is separate from the testing site to maintain score integrity
  – Raters see and hear worldwide responses, not just from one country
  – Anonymous raters do not know examinee
ETS takes test security extremely seriously and uses a 3-pronged approach to protect test integrity:

- **Prevention**
- **Communication**
- **Detection**
Security - Prevention

- Training and certification of test center supervisors
- Stringently enforced identification requirements
- Digital photograph taken on test day appears on score reports
- Test-taker photograph appears on assigned computer at the beginning of test and after break to verify identity
- State-of-the-art encryption software for delivery of test to the test center as well as return of test-taker responses to ETS
- Test design limits opportunities to memorize text to fit into responses
Official TOEFL iBT® Score Report
Security - Detection

- Handwriting sample and signature collected
- Unannounced test center audits
- Secret shoppers
- Extensive review and mining of data
- Surveillance in test center and post-test forensic analyses
Security - Communication

• When scores are cancelled, ETS contacts all institutions designated by the student to receive scores
• Communication from institutions with concerns about possible fraudulent scores helps our investigations
• Every concern is investigated by the Office of Testing Integrity (OTI)
• ETS will notify you with the results of any investigation
Biometric Voice Identification Software for TOEFL® Testing

- Uses statistical pattern-matching techniques, advanced voice classification methods and input from multiple systems to compare speech samples from TOEFL® test-takers
- Offers ability to create voice prints for detailed analysis to validate TOEFL test takers
- Introduced in 2012 for test security investigations
- **New!** Now used on all test takers worldwide before scores are released
- Voice identification system flags scores for review by human analysis
Biometric voice identification is used to detect impersonation in three ways

1. Repeat test takers
   - Compare voiceprints with speech samples across multiple administrations for the same test center

2. Potential impersonators within a test center
   - Compare voiceprints with speech samples for all candidates at a given test center

3. Known impersonators within a group
   - Compare voiceprints with speech samples of known impostors to all candidates within a suspect group
Additional Measures to Prevent and Detect Fraud

• **New!** Implementation of electronic wands at all test centers worldwide to detect electronic photographic, audio or recording devices

• New Techniques to ensure the authenticity of test-taker photographs

• Requirements of second generation government ID document in China
  – Contains an electronic chip read by an electronic scanner
  – Less susceptible to alternation

• Working with the Chinese government administrator of the TOEFL® test to implement facial recognition capabilities
General Guidelines for Good Score Use
General Guidelines for Good Score Use

• Base evaluation of an applicant’s readiness to begin academic work on all available relevant information, not solely on TOEFL® scores
  – Use of multiple criteria is necessary to ensure fairness and to balance the limitations of any single measure of knowledge, skills or abilities

• Reconsider your score requirements regularly and adjust as needed
  – Look for other supporting evidence of English proficiency in the application
Avoid Cut Scores, Consider Section Scores

• Use score ranges rather than rigid cut scores on the TOEFL® test to help make admissions decisions

• Use of cut scores can lead to ruling out applicants that may have other abilities that are considered important for success in your program

• A combined score masks important information about applicants’ abilities that should be considered when making admissions decisions
General Guidelines for Using TOEFL® Test Scores
TOEFL® Score Requirements

• ETS does not determine which students must take the TOEFL® test, nor does ETS establish the TOEFL score requirements institutions should use in making their decisions

• Each institution sets its own policy about whether a TOEFL score is required as well as the minimum TOEFL score they will accept

• The TOEFL test measures different skills and can provide complimentary information to the SAT® and GRE® tests
The UBC Approach

- Use data whenever possible as a guide
- Requirement setting should be part of comprehensive review of English policies
  - What is being sought? What is driving the need for specific requirements?
- Things change. Iteration is useful.
  - Periodic reviews clarify shifts in your applicant pool
- Every review has limits. Use discretion.
  - Diversity of students makes it paramount to understand context.
  - Set up a process to review exceptional cases.
### The UBC Approach – TOEFL Scores

#### TOEFL “Band” definitions with ELAS criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOEFL Internet Pass “band”</th>
<th>Students included in band</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>Current ELAS criteria</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Pass</td>
<td>at least one component at current cut-off and total 87 – 90</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med. Pass</td>
<td>at least one component 2 or less above current cut-off and total 91 -98</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Pass</td>
<td>all components &gt;= 3 above cut-off and total &gt;=99</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The UBC Approach – TOEFL Scores

Initial Year Sessional performance, by TOEFL bands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pass Level</th>
<th>Domestic</th>
<th>International</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean Ses Avg</td>
<td>St Dev.</td>
<td>Mean Ses Avg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reconsider Your Score Requirements Regularly

• How much English is enough?
  – Different departments have different needs
  – What language skills are important for success in this program?

• Level of ESL support available on campus

• Competitive situation
  – Higher score requirements could reduce applications
  – Lower scores could result in student failure, need for ESL support, or slowing down the rest of the class
### Using TOEFL iBT® Section Scores

**TOEFL iBT® Section Scores** contain valuable information to help differentiate applicants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student 1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student 3</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All three students have a Total Score of 80, but they have different profiles of English skills.

Which student is best for your program?
Options to consider:

• Require a Total Score but review applicant’s Section Scores for the skills most important for your program

• Require a Total Score and a minimum Section Score for the most important skill(s)
  – i.e. Total Score 80 plus minimum Writing Score 20

• Require minimum Sections Scores for all skills (most restrictive and not generally recommended)

• Conduct a Standard Setting
Understanding Section Scores

• Scores in each section are not scaled against each other because they measure different skills

• A score of 22 in one skill does not represent the same level of ability as a score of 22 in another skill

• In 2013

  – Reading Score of 22 = 53rd percentile
  – Listening Score of 22 = 55th percentile
  – Speaking Score of 22 = 57th percentile
  – Writing Score of 22 = 54th percentile
Make Scores Work for Your Institution

Don’t automatically increase the Total Score

- Increasing the Total Score may not meet your needs
  - Applicants can reach your minimum via points in other skills
- Ask faculty and staff which skills are most critical to success
  - Routinely review the section score for that skill in the admissions process
  - Institute a minimum requirements
**TOEFL iBT ® Standard Setting**

Standard setting: A structured process using ETS materials to help institutions know what scores are appropriate to their needs

- Requires 12-15 individuals who are familiar with the level of English necessary for first-year students at your institution
- Typically includes admission, ESL staff and faculty teaching first-year students
- Takes half-day for each skill
- Determines the minimum level of English proficiency for each language skill necessary to succeed at your institution
- Materials available from ETS
Getting Additional TOEFL® Information

The TOEFL® Test and Score Data Summary

• Summarizes performance of TOEFL® test takers based on a variety of criteria, including mean scores and percentile data
• Provides guidance for interpreting test-taker performance
• Based on data from previous testing year
• Annual publication available for download from the Research section of the TOEFL website (www.ets.org/toefl/research)

TOEFL iBT® Research Insight Series

• Publication series that presents important TOEFL iBT® research in an easy-to-understand format for those who use TOEFL iBT test scores
### TOEFL iBT® Mean Scores

**Scaled Section and Total Score Means**

**Total Population - 2013**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>TOEFL iBT Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## TOEFL iBT® Mean Scores by Test-Taker Purpose

### Scaled Section and Mean Scores By Test-Taker Purpose - 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Non-Business</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Business</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Schools</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We Are Here to Assist You

• TOEFL® website for institutions: www.ets.org/toefl/institutions
• TOEFL® website for students: www.toeflgoanywhere.org
• Contact the TOEFL® program
  – Email: TOEFLNews@ets.org
  – Phone: 1-609-683-2008

Sign up today for TOEFL updates:
http://www.pages03.net/ets/toeflupdates/subscribe
Presenters

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• Sam Saini, Associate Director for International Undergraduate Admissions, University of British Columbia, Canada
  – sam.saini@ubc.ca
Discussion

How did your institution set its English proficiency requirements?

a. On what basis did you decide?

b. Who made the decision?

c. Are the requirements reviewed from time to time?

Has your institution ever changed its requirements?

a. If so, why?

b. How was that done?

c. Did you change the total score? Section scores?