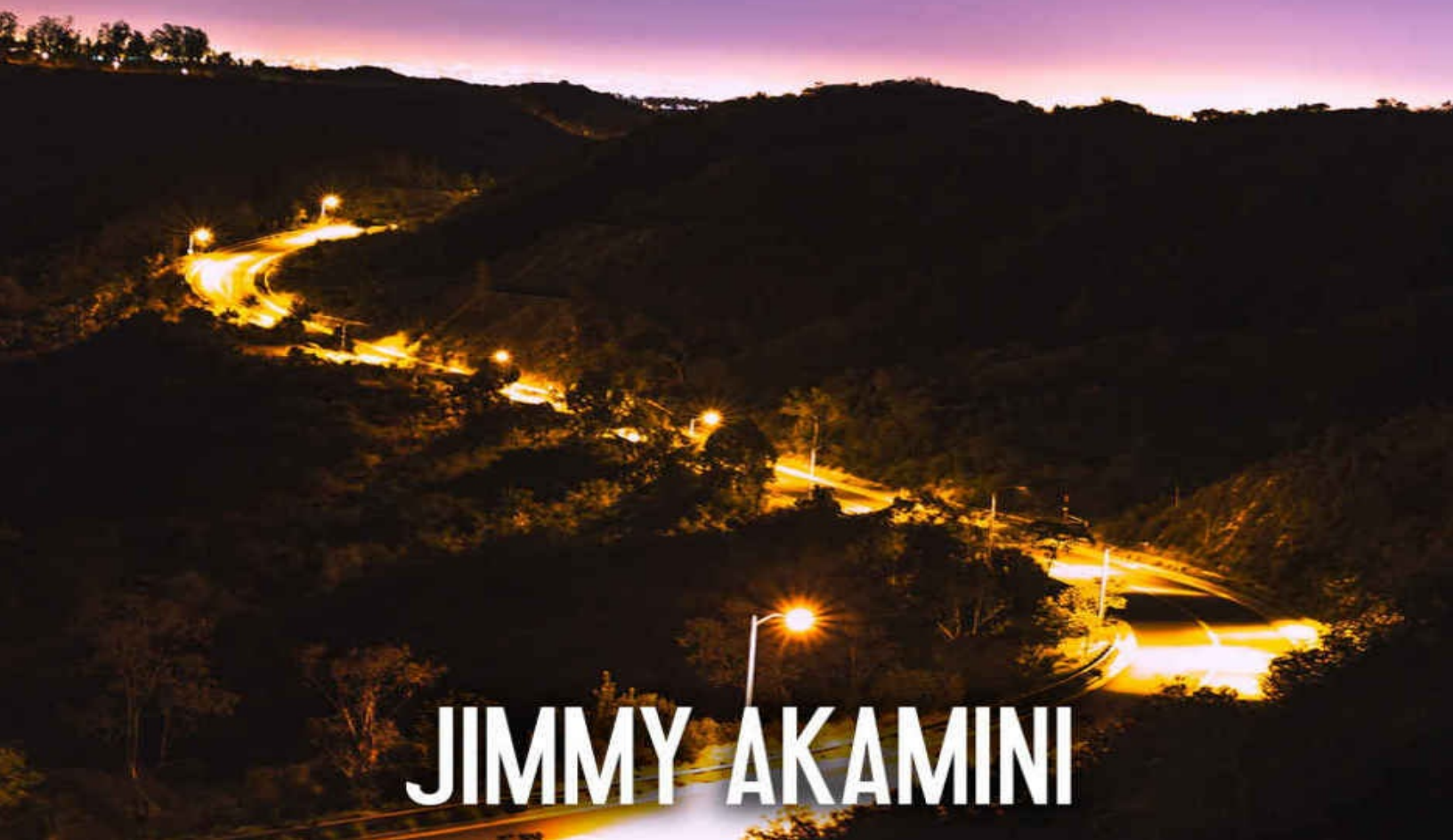
ESL: HACKING
TOEFL & IELTS IN 90 DAYS

THE ULTIMATE ESL GUIDE TO PASSING TOEFL & IELTS WITH PROVEN EASY TO FOLLOW HACKING TIPS FOR READING, WRITING, LISTENING AND SPEAKING



JIMMY AKAMINI

ESL: HACKING TOEFL & IELTS IN 90 DAYS



The Ultimate Guide to passing TOEFL & IELTS with proven hacking tips on reading, writing, listening and speaking

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Introduction

I want to thank and congratulate you for downloading the book, “ESL: Hacking TOEFL and IELTS in 90 days”.

Are you a non-native English speaker embarking on an English journey? Have you been preparing for your TOEFL and IELTS and plan to take the exams soon? Then this book is for you. This book contains proven steps and strategies on how to pass TOEFL and IELTS at your convenience in 90 days. I will take you through the basics of preparing for the exams, the tricks you need to learn and the practical guide and exercise for each module of the exams. This book is written in such a way that if you understand the book in its entirety, you are ready to take your exams.

Thank you again for downloading this book, I hope you enjoy it as much as I have enjoyed compiling it!



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Chapter 1: Getting Started

1.1 Why TOEFL or IELTS?

English is today the most widely spoken language in the world. It is the language of commerce and knowledge. Most employers today demand a minimum degree of familiarity with English because of our global community. Furthermore, world-renowned educational institutions also demand some degree of English familiarity from its staff and students. English-language skills are also part of the requirements of immigration and residences in many countries.

Various standardized English-language tests like TOEFL and IELTS give aspirants a chance to demonstrate their proficiency in the language. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), conducted by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) is accepted by some 8,500 colleges and universities in 130 countries around the world. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is conducted jointly by British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. This test also has wide acceptance and is recognized by over 9,000 organizations in 130 countries around the world.

1.2 Real-world English

TOEFL and IELTS are a little different from the English exams we took in school. Both TOEFL and IELTS test your language skills in four areas—speaking, listening, reading, and writing. But they do this in "integrated tasks" which is a combination of all the different skills within a test question. For instance, some test questions will require you to read, listen and then speak in response to a question, while in others you will have to read, listen and then write your answers. In TOEFL and IELTS the focus is more about applying your knowledge of the language in concrete, real-life situations. They want to know if you will be able to understand what is being taught in a classroom, complete your academic requirements, and have a friendly social life with people during your stay in the country. So, the main thing is they are not looking for textbook knowledge of the English language. The ultimate purpose of both the tests is the same, your functional ability to understand and communicate in English in its oral (speaking and listening) and written (reading and writing) forms.

This also means that you can prepare for both the tests in much the same way. By studying smartly, you can easily make up for the minor differences between these two tests.

1.3 Some TOEFL and IELTS Basics

For first-time test-takers, the decision to take the test brings with it many overwhelming questions: How and where can I take TOEFL or IELTS? What questions will they ask? How do I use the marks for my college admissions or immigration application? This section will help you with the registration and testing procedure for these tests.

1.3.1 Registration

Both IELTS and TOEFL can be taken at over 9,000 centers across the world.

You should note this major difference –

(a) TOEFL can be taken in paper-based or computer-based format;
(b) IELTS can only be taken in written form.

IELTS allows you the option to choose between the Academic and General Training options—choose the former if you are applying for higher education and the later if it is for employment or immigration purposes. But there is only one TOEFL test, which tests the ability to communicate in academic settings.
The easiest way to register for these two tests is to do it online. The details for TOEFL registration are provided at www.ets.org/toefl while those taking IELTS can visit www.ielts.org. These websites will tell you everything you need to know about registration, fees, required documents, test centers and test dates in your country.

TOEFL and IELTS are held almost four times a month, which gives test-takers a lot of flexibility in their preparation schedule. But do remember that both tests need you to register at least seven days before the date of the test.

1.3.2 Test Format
Both TOEFL and IELTS are divided into four sections—speaking, listening, reading and writing. But as stated earlier, their test formats are slightly different.
TOEFL must be given in a single sitting. It takes about four hours to complete the test. The first section is Reading (60-80 minutes), followed by Listening (60-90 minutes), then Speaking (20 minutes) and finally, Writing (50 minutes). A compulsory 10-minute break must be taken after the Listening section. You cannot go back to a section after you have completed it, except in the Reading section where you can return to previous questions within the time allotted. Each section is allocated 30 marks, and the final mark is out of 120.

The IELTS format is a little more complicated. The Listening, Reading and Writing tests must be completed on the same day, one after the other, without any breaks in between. The Speaking test may be scheduled on a different day from the others. The Listening and Speaking sections are the same for both the Academic and General Training papers, but the Reading and Writing sections are different. The whole test takes approximately 2 hours 45 minutes to complete. Marks for each section are marked on a band between 1 to 9, and the overall mark is an average across the four skills.

Mark reports are sent by mail to candidates soon after the test. Both tests also allow candidates to have their marks sent automatically to a small number of institutions free of charge—TOEFL can send the candidates marks to four institutions while IELTS can send the results to five institutions. The marks for both tests are valid for two years.

1.3.3 Some Key Differences
As we saw in the previous section, both TOEFL and IELTS focus on the same skill areas but have slightly different test formats. As a result of this, different candidates have different experiences. These differences are mainly to do with the difference in testing conditions. Knowing what to expect will help you focus on possible problem areas and to prepare for the test situation more thoroughly. While some candidates find that the four-hour duration of TOEFL is very tiring, other candidates find that the gap between the Speaking and other sections in IELTS is a big distraction.

A significant difference in the Speaking test is:

(a) in TOEFL, you speak into a microphone that records your speech;
(b) in IELTS, you have to carry out a conversation with an examiner.

The voices in the TOEFL Listening Section all have an American accent, but if you appear for IELTS, you will have to get accustomed to a much wider range of accents and speech styles.

Finally, the Writing sections are different:

(a) in TOEFL, the answers must be typed out on a computer keyboard;
(b) in IELTS, the response must be handwritten.

This can be a very important factor: those appearing for TOEFL must improve their typing speed and accuracy to save time in the test, and IELTS candidates must focus on clear, mistake-free handwriting.

1.4 Getting Down to Business

By this time your registration should be completed, and you are ready to start your thorough preparation for the test of your choice. Over the next few chapters, this book will guide you through the various aspects of mastering English for TOEFL. The skills are essentially transferable if you are taking the IELTS test instead. Each chapter will lay out a systematic approach to Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing, with explanations, tricks, and strategies that will lead you to sure-shot success. Step-by-step, day by day and week-by-week, you will find yourself growing in ability and confidence. All it needs is some patience and discipline. At the end of 90 days, English will no longer be an obstacle to your dreams. For ease of reference, I will refer to both the exams as TOEFL



Chapter 2: Starting Early, Finishing Strong

At the end of the day, to succeed in TOEFL, you will have to improve your overall language skills; and this cannot happen overnight. The only way to do this is to practice regularly and systematically. In this chapter, we will look at some ways to build your skills and confidence. The tips in this chapter are aimed at improving your general language abilities. Start implementing these tricks early on in your preparation to get the greatest benefits.

2.1 Technology Tricks

Your Smartphone can be your biggest asset in preparing for TOEFL. It is multi-functional and can be used anytime and anywhere. There are some useful apps that are available for free.

Apps such as TOEFL Flashcards are useful in developing common vocabulary as well as technical words. TOEFL Pictionary is a great app that helps you memorize new words by connecting them to a picture. These two apps will also help in improving your spelling skills.

You should also download a voice recorder app on your Smartphone to add to your speaking practice. Record your voice during your speaking exercises and then replay it to take note of mistakes in your speech. Pay attention to mistakes in sentence construction, pronunciation, speech clarity and speaking speed.

Video-sharing sites such as YouTube are the best place to get some listening practice by watching short clips and complete videos of American films and television shows. This is very useful for two reasons:

(a) watching interviews, talk shows, lectures, etc. help develop your listening comprehension skills;

(b) It lets you get used to the style and pronunciation of American English.

YouTube channels such as Notefull also provide useful TOEFL preparation tips and tutorials.

2.2 Speak Up

One of the best ways to build confidence in your abilities is to improve your public speaking skills. If the reactions of other people make you uncomfortable at first, use the telephone—call a toll-free number and inquire about their products and services, then sustain the conversation for as long as you can, paying attention to your sentence construction, pronunciation and so on. With a little imagination, you will always find a way to practice.

2.3 Typing Troubles

If you are preparing for TOEFL, remember that you will have to type out your answers on a computer keyboard. Use your 90-day preparation period to get used to typing with speed and without mistakes. Websites such as www.learntyping.org and www.speedtypingonline.com provide free online tutorials on high-speed touch-typing.

2.4 Team Up!

One of the most effective ways to improve language skills is to work with a partner. Find someone who is also looking to improve their English. By doing exercises together, you can help point out

each others' mistakes. This is most useful when you are doing Speaking and Listening practice. It also makes study sessions more interesting—sometimes, sharing a joke is the best way to stay focused.

2.5 A Daily Exercise

Here is a small exercise that will help you develop your reading, speaking and writing skills all at the same time. Take any good English newspaper, pick out a news article of about 150 words and set a timer/alarm for 20 minutes. First read the article carefully, underlining the key details and unfamiliar words you come across. Take 30 seconds to collect your thoughts and write out a few quick sentences to summarize what you learned from your reading. Now spend two minutes on thinking about the event, incident or person described in the article in your opinion.

Switch on your voice recorder and speak about it for 30 seconds. This whole exercise should not take more than seven to ten minutes. In the remaining time, you will analyze your responses. First make a list of the unfamiliar words you have underlined. Next, read your summary to see if you got the important information through "the WHs"—who, what, when, where, why and how. Finally, listen to your voice recording and make a note of problems in structure, pronunciation and clarity. Over time, you should move on to more complex texts such as short editorials in international English magazines, or technical encyclopedia entries.

This is a short daily exercise that can be done at any time of the day, as long as you concentrate for the duration of the exercise. This small investment of 20 minutes every day will produce great results by the end of your preparation.

2.6 Be Inspired!

Finally, in the middle of all the hard work, take the time to remember that what you are setting out to do is both challenging as well as rewarding. Motivate yourself by learning about inspirational stories of great historical personalities who struggled through hardship to achieve success and recognition. Think about the struggles of people like Nelson Mandela, Abraham Lincoln or Charlie Chaplin, and never lose heart!



Chapter 3: Reading

3.1 Introduction

The Reading section is meant to test your abilities in reading and absorbing university-level academic texts. The texts themselves are on many topics, but unfamiliarity with the subject need not bother you because the questions are based entirely on the passage.

The purpose of academic reading is three-fold:

(a) reading for information;
(b) reading for comprehension, and
(c) reading to learn.

Each of these abilities is tested in the Reading section. The Reading section normally contains between three and five passages, of approximately 700 words. Each passage is followed by 12-14 questions. The time allocated for the section varies between 60-100 minutes.

In this chapter, we will begin by learning how to identify the various types of passages and questions that may be asked based on them. Then we will apply this knowledge to develop a reading strategy that will ensure a high mark in the Reading section.

3.2 Types of Passages

The Reading section will test you with different types of passages. To succeed, you must be able to understand the relationships between the different parts of the text, and the role they play in presenting the author's ideas. While some complex passages may include many points of view and lines of arguments, most of them stick to one of the following types:

- **Classification:** This passage usually defines a category or an object and its main characteristics or functions. It may then go on to show this category to have many sub-categories, each with its features. Sometimes, these will be defined by examples.

- **Comparison/Contrast:** Such articles describe the characteristics of the object and place them alongside those of another. They will go on to show relations of similarities and differences between the two. They usually do this by showing the advantages or disadvantages of one over the other.

- **Cause/effect:** These passages will discuss the consequences of an action or the reasons for a particular action. The articles sometimes describe a process of some kind. In such cases, the idea of cause and effect is often used to connect various stages in the process.
- **Problem/Solution:** In such passages, a problem of some sort is first defined. Then reasons are given for the problems and finally a suggestion is made on how to rectify it. In this category, common topics are guns violence and social conflicts.

3.3 Types of Questions

The questions that follow the reading passage usually fall under some categories. In this section we will look at the various kinds of questions you can expect to be asked, and a few hints on how to

identify them.

3.3.1 Factual Information Questions

Factual questions ask for specific information that is usually found in one or two sentences within the passage. This is usually clear statements of fact that deal with names, dates, definitions, etc. They can be of two kinds: factual and negative factual questions. Factual questions are usually of the sort "which of the following are true?" or "according to the paragraph, X did Y because..." Negative factual questions can be identified almost immediately because they have the word "not" or "except" in them. You can expect between three and eight questions on such details of facts and negative facts.

3.3.2 Questions based on Inference

There are usually between one and three inference-based questions per passage. In these, you will be asked questions about something in the article that is not directly stated, but only indirectly hinted at. For these questions, you need to be able to follow the logic of the author's argument. They are usually framed as "the author of the passage implies that…" or "which of the following can be inferred from the paragraph…"

3.3.3 Rhetorical Purpose Questions

These are questions where you will be asked why the author has chosen to say something the way he/she has. You may be asked why the author has chosen to quote a particular author or referred to a particular source. Or you may be asked to explain the relationship between two paragraphs/ideas/lines in the passage. There are normally, at least, one or two rhetorical purpose questions after every passage.

3.3.4 Vocabulary Questions

These are questions that will test your knowledge of the words, phrases or expressions used in the passage. You may be asked synonyms, antonyms, or words "closest in meaning" to a particular word. These questions usually test unfamiliar or technical words that are nevertheless critical to the meaning of the passage. Expect between three to five vocabulary-based questions for every passage.

3.3.5 Reference Questions

These are questions that will test your grammar skills, particularly on the rules of reference. For instance, you may be required to identify the relation between a pronoun and the noun that it refers to. There may be up to two such questions in a set.

3.3.6 Sentence Simplification Questions

This type of question does not appear very frequently. In sentence simplification, you will need to select one out of the given options that contain the meaning of the quoted sentence. For example, "which of the following best expresses the information in the highlighted sentence?"

3.3.7 Text Insertion Questions

The passage usually contains one "insert text" type question. As you read the text, you will see black squares at some places within the passage. The question will provide you with a sentence, and will ask you to insert it in place of one of the four black squares in the passage.

Text insertion questions test your language skills at two levels:

(a) in understanding the content of the paragraph in question; and

(b) in understanding the grammatical structure of the sentence itself.

3.3.8 Prose Summary Questions

These questions test your grasp of the passage as a whole, and the organization of ideas within it. These questions will ask you to differentiate between major and minor points presented in the passage. Usually, you are presented with six statements about the passage. While each of them is true in itself, you will need to judge their relative importance in the author's argument and accordingly choose the three main points made in the passage.

3.3.9 Table-based Questions

This is another type of question that tests your ability to summarize and absorb the information in the passage. You must be able to judge the difference between essential and nonessential aspects of the argument presented by the author. This is a variation on the prose summary questions. The skills tested are the same, but here there are a lot more options that need to be placed correctly under the different subheads provided. Each passage contains one of either prose summary or table-based questions.

3.4 How to Read

The reading skills for a test like TOEFL are different from those that we use in our daily lives. The strict time limitations in this section—five passages in 60-100 minutes—mean that it is impossible to do a close word-by-word reading of the text passages. In fact, the examiners don't expect you to read the whole passage! Success in the Reading section depends on your mastery of the skills of "skimming" and "scanning" through a given text.

Skimming is a fast-reading technique in which you read only the first and last sentences of the opening paragraph, and then the first sentence of each paragraph after that. The aim is to do an initial quick reading that will give you a gist of what it contains, not the details. As you skim, identify what type of passage it is. Also, you will get a good idea of what is contained in each of the paragraphs, and how each is linked to the other.

Skimming is important for two reasons: -

(a) it helps you grasp the whole passage, and
(b) it provides a guide to quickly locating the possible answers for the questions.

Scanning is a slower method in which you read from the beginning of the passage to find a specific answer you are looking for, and then stop when you find it. Then repeat for each question. As you go through more questions, you will get to know more about the details of the passage, so that by the end you will have a good idea of the structure as well as the details of the passage.

You can achieve the best results by combining skimming and scanning. First, do a quick skimming reading. In your notes, make an outline of the passage structure, with just a line of each paragraph given. For now, focus on the connections between paragraphs.

After this, read through all the questions once, identifying their types. Now begin with the first question and use the scanning method to find the answer in the text. Do this with each question. All the time keep adding key information to the outline. Now you can use these notes to answer the more complex "reading to learn" questions and tables at the end.

3.5 Some Tips for Practice

While the skimming and scanning skills are most important in the Reading section, there are other aspects of your reading abilities that you also need to pay attention to:

- Vocabulary: Having a strong vocabulary is essential to both understanding and speaking any language. Use Smartphone apps (as shown in Chapter 2) to improve your knowledge of words. Also, carry around a small notebook in which you write down new words to add to your word list. Read as widely as you can.
- Try “guess the meaning”. Pick up any reading material and look for words you do not understand. Now, instead of checking in a dictionary, try to guess the meaning from the lines before and after it (context). Doing this improves your vocabulary as well as skills of inference.
- Connect the pronouns. Take any sample reading passage and underline all the pronouns that occur in it. Now try to connect each pronoun used to the noun that it is referring to. Doing this will improve your skills in grammar and sentence construction.
- Practice paraphrasing. Take a passage from a magazine or textbook and skim through it, making notes along the way. Take 20 seconds to think about the article as a whole and then quickly try to capture the gist of the passage in seven or eight sentences. Practice this as frequently as possible and on all sorts of reading material.



Chapter 4: Listening

4.1 Introduction

The Listening section tests your skills in listening to classroom lectures as well as in understanding everyday conversation within the university and outside. The language you will encounter in these lectures will be of the standard you can expect to be exposed to in a university classroom.

You will need to listen to about four to six lectures of 500-800 words each, in a time limit of 60-90 minutes. Each lecture will be followed by six questions. Also, you will have to answer questions related to two or three conversations in a period of 60-90 minutes. The conversations are about three minutes in length with about 12-25 exchanges between the speakers. Each conversation will be followed by five questions.

4.2 Types of lectures

The lecture passages can be very demanding on the listener. You will need to absorb large amounts of information that is presented to you in a constant flow. Unlike reading, you cannot pause whenever you need to. You must catch as many words as you can. The lectures are usually of two types, those that feature only the professor speaking in a classroom scenario, and others in which the professor and students both speak. The lectures are usually from topics on the Arts, Physical Science, Life Science, and Social Science.

The conversation questions usually have either a personalized interaction between a professor and student, or a service encounter like making an inquiry in the library or completing class or exam registrations. Conversations test skills are different from listening skills. Conversations are usually shorter and can cover both academic and non-academic topics.

While the key skill in the lectures can follow the spoken content closely, the conversations are geared towards testing your skills at interpreting inferences, idiomatic usage of language and tones of voice/emotion in the voice. But on the downside, the conversation usually moves much faster than a lecture, and it requires you to know a more informal vocabulary that is usually not found in other TOEFL reading and listening sections.

4.3 Types of Questions

In this section, we will look at the main types of questions that may be asked in the Listening tasks. By learning to identify and categorize the questions, you will be in a better position to answer them correctly.

4.3.1 Questions on Gist-content

These are basic comprehension question that tests your ability to grasp the main point being discussed in the spoken passage. These questions deal with the overall content of the speech, and may require you to draw on both inferred as well as explicit meanings. Questions that ask for the “main problem,” “main topic,” and so on are often gist-content questions and should be answered accordingly.

4.3.2 Questions on Gist-purpose

The gist-purpose questions should not be confused with the gist-content type. Gist-purpose questions

are usually asked for conversations rather than lectures. Here, the questions are about the reason the conversation is being held, and about the content of what is being said in the conversation. These questions are usually in the form of “why does the professor say…” or “why does the student visit the admissions office?” etc. Gist-purpose questions can be tricky because sometimes the purpose of the conversation may not coincide with the main topic being discussed.

4.3.3 Questions on Details
In these questions, you will need to reproduce specific details from what you heard. Usually mentioned directly in the lecture/conversation, sometimes they may also be more implicit in nature. Often, if there is a long digression from the main topic of discussion, then you can expect a detail question to be asked from this.

4.3.4 Questions on the Function of ‘What is Said.'
These questions typically require you to listen to a part of the lecture or conversation again and then ask you about the significance of what is said. Here, you must pay attention to the functional aspect of what is said, rather than the exact content.

4.3.5 Questions about the Speaker’s Attitude
These are particularly tricky questions because they require you to develop a sense of the speaker’s personality itself. You must be able to make out the person’s opinions and attitudes to what is being discussed through little hints that are given in the discussion. They are sometimes in the form of short reactions to other people’s comments, or clear statements of one’s likes and dislikes. It is useful top pay close attention to the speaker’s tone of voice and volume to get clues to his attitudes.

4.3.6 Questions on Organization
These are questions that test your ability to consolidate and organize information. You will usually be asked about how the speaker has structured his/her lecture. Do they provide a historical account? Are they comparing and contrasting different examples? Are they describing a process? Sometimes you may be asked about how a particular statement functions within the organization of the lecture as a whole.

4.3.7 Connecting Content Questions
These questions require you to understand and infer the information provided in a lecture. They will then ask you to represent what you have learned in the form of tables and charts. At times, you will be required to clarify relationships, contradictions or cause and effect.

4.3.8 Questions Based on Inference
Here you will be tested on your ability to draw conclusions and understand the implications of what you have heard in a lecture or conversation. You will have to draw from the facts presented to make logical predictions on the future course of action, or you may have to understand the implicit content of what is said.

4.4 How to Listen
The listening tasks can be very demanding because it tests both your language skills as well as abilities of inference and comprehension. The key to success is efficient note-taking. Note-taking for the Listening task is all about being able to take down the main points so that by the end, you have a basic flow of the conversation available in writing. But as you have already noted, the lecture and

conversation passages test slightly different aspects of your listening abilities. As a result, your style of note-taking will also be a little different for each of these.

In the lectures, you will be given a lot of detailed information. The trick is to focus on the content of the speech in these passages. So when you begin taking notes in a lecture, make three headings, “main idea”, “major points” and “minor points.” As you go through the lecture, all you need to do is fill in the various points under these three headings. By the end, you will have a condensed version of the lecture in a form that can be used to answer the questions that follow. Your table should look like this –

Main Idea	Major Point	Minor Point

In the conversations, the pace of talking is faster, there are more speakers. They draw on your abilities to catch implicit meanings. So when taking notes, it is more important to get the flow of the conversation than all the little details. To do this, first divide your page into two or three parts, depending on the number of speakers. Now as each person speaks, make notes in the appropriate column, maintaining the flow of question and answer, argument, and refutation. You can now easily see in a visual form the relationships between what the different people are saying. Here is an illustration –

Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3	Speaker 4

4.5 Some Tips for Practice

The Listening tasks, in fact, draw on some other skills that also need to be developed. Here are a few things you can practice improving your marks in this section:

(a) Summarize and paraphrase

Summarizing and paraphrasing are two of the most useful skills in the Listening section. While these skills are more important in the Reading and Speaking sections, the Listening section is unique because it does not allow a gap between receiving the information and summarizing it. Here, you have to use to draw an inference at the same time as you are listening.

(b) Note-taking system

In addition to developing an efficient note-taking system, you must pay attention to the speed at which you take notes. Over the course of these 90 days of preparation develop your shorthand code language through which you can make your notes shorter, quicker and clearer.

(c) Accents

One of the biggest obstacles to understanding English speech is the accents and styles of speech that native speakers use. The only way to get around is to become familiar with the different accents and pronunciations used by Americans in their speech. To prepare for the

lectures, you can watch American documentaries on various topics related to art, science and society. For the conversations, on the other, hand, it is better to watch television sitcoms and Hollywood films. These allow ample opportunity to understand the nuances of tone of voice and emotion in various conversational situations and also expose you to more a more informal language of communication. Video-sharing websites such as YouTube are the best place to find a wide range of videos that you can practice with.



Chapter 5: Speaking

5.1 Introduction

The Speaking sections test your ability in an academic environment to clearly and fluently converse in English. It tries to assess whether you will be able to engage fruitfully in discussions with fellow students and professors in an academic as well as a non-academic setting; to express your ideas and opinions; and your ability to carry out general social conversation.

Many candidates find the Speaking section challenging because it goes by so fast. It is over before you know it—it lasts just 20 minutes and quickly puts you through six tasks. There is very little time to recover from lapses in performances.

This chapter will give you an idea of what to expect in the Speaking section, and how best to prepare for it.

5.2 Types of Tasks

The Speaking section comprises of some tasks that fall under two types: independent and integrated.

The independent tasks are those in which you are simply given a topic, on which you must speak with minimal preparation time. These tasks are meant to test your opinions and thought on various familiar subjects, the clarity with which you organize your thoughts and your ability to think on your feet. Since the independent task requires you to speak on a familiar topic, it is the best opportunity to play to your strengths. In these tasks, you can be confident and must try to display your language abilities to the fullest.

The integrated task, on the other hand, is a more multimedia affair. In these, you will have to combine your listening, reading and speaking skills to understand and then express your thoughts on a given issue or situation. In some of the tasks, you will need first to listen to a lecture or conversation before you respond to what is said. In others, you will also need to read an additional passage before you provide an oral answer. These tasks test your skills in absorbing new information quickly, and in collating information from different information media. The integrated task challenges your skills in inferring meanings and, once again, you're summarizing skills.

5.3 Types of Questions

The Speaking section is comprised of:

(a) two independent tasks – For the independent tasks, you are required to speak for 45 seconds after a preparation time of only 15 seconds; and

(b) four integrated tasks – In the four integrated tasks in which you will have to read and listen, and then speak in response. You will be allowed 30 seconds of speaking time and 60 seconds of response time for the two reading-listening-speaking tasks. The two listening-speaking integrated tasks will give you a preparation time of 20 seconds and response time of 60 seconds.

For the test, you will have to speak into a microphone. Your voice will be digitally recorded and sent to certified examiners who will assess your responses using various criteria.

5.3.1 Independent Questions

Questions 1 and 2 are independent tasks. In Question 1 you will be asked to speak about a place, person, and event or object that you are personally familiar with. While there may be some variation in the specifics of the question, it will always require you to draw on your personal experience. In this question, you will be asked to answer the question in several parts. Your response is expected to include a description component and then its substantiation—you will have to describe something (your favorite teacher, your favorite holiday destination, etc.) and then provide reasons for your choice. You are expected to provide some detailed information and a coherent justification.

In Question 2, you will be presented with two possible courses of action in a given situation. You will have to compare and contrast the relative merits and demerits of the choices and explain which one you prefer and give your justification. The topics will either deal with something familiar to you in your everyday life or an issue of general interest to students.

5.3.2 Integrated Questions

Questions 3 and 4 are integrated reading-listening-speaking tasks. In Question 3 you will first read a short passage on some general issue related to campus life. This may be anything from an official notice to a newspaper article. You will also have to listen to a brief conversation between two people expressing their opinions on the same issue. You will then have to respond orally to a question that is based on the text and conversation provided. Question 4 is also a reading-listening-speaking task, the only difference being that here you will be dealing with an academic topic. You will first read an academic extract, followed by a professor's lecture on the same topic. You will then be asked a question based on what you have read and heard.

Questions 5 and 6 are listening-speaking tasks. In both of these, you will have to listen to a brief conversation/lecture before providing an oral response to the given question. Question 5 will typically be a conversation between two people about a problem faced by one of them. It will provide you with two possible solutions to the problem. You will be asked to summarize the discussion and provide your opinion on the solutions offered by the speakers. Question 6 will have you listen to a short excerpt from a professor's lecture on an academic subject. The lecture can be on anything from the arts, physical science, social science and natural science. You will then be asked to summarize what you heard in the lecture.

5.4 How to Speak

The best way to prepare for the Speaking section is to get an idea of how your responses will be evaluated. In accessing your performance in the Speaking section, the examiners adopt a holistic approach. They take in account various aspects of your speaking and will give a combined mark. This is because speaking is not as easily quantifiable as the other skills, and 'good speaking' combines different aspects in different measures. Most important among these are speech delivery, language use, and topic development.

Language delivery is concerned with how clearly you speak, and how easily you can be understood. This includes the use of clear diction and intonation; naturalness and ease of speaking; and, the naturalness of your speaking pace.

Language use parameters measure the correctness of the language you use while speaking. It deals with the range of your vocabulary and application of the rules of grammar, syntax and sentence

construction.

Finally, topic development is about the content of what you have said. It assesses your abilities in the presentation of ideas, logical progression and overall organization and structure.

When you practice your speaking sessions, it is beneficial to record yourself—you can easily use a Smartphone app to do this. Once you have a recorded sample, listen to it carefully and note down the mistakes you made in your delivery, language use and topic development. Now, repeat what you said but this time without the mistakes. Record your voice again. Analyze again.

This is a very useful exercise, for two reasons. First, repeating the same passage many times is more effective in fixing your mistakes than speaking on a different topic every time. Second, this exercise will give you a good idea of timing. Are you finishing too soon? Are you speaking too fast when the time is running out?

5.5 Tips for practice

The Speaking section requires regular practice, and your skills cannot be developed overnight. Here are a few tricks that can help you focus on improving your skills in a well-rounded manner.

- Improve your impromptu speaking. Speaking without preparation is a skill that will stand you in good stead for the TOEFL test. Pick any simple topic of your choice, take 30 seconds of preparation time, and then speak on the subject for a whole minute without interruption. Start initially with topics you are very comfortable with. As you become more fluent over time, move on to unfamiliar subject—pick up your daily newspaper, look at the topic for the main editorial article and do an impromptu speech on that topic. You can even replicate an integrated task for yourself: on any prominent news issue/controversy of the day; read an article and listen to a report on the same in evening news; now produce your impromptu summary of the issue at hand.

- Speaking is often marked by errors that are habitual in nature—peculiar pronunciations, repeated grammatical errors and confusing of similar to name a few. These mistakes can only be rectified through a systematic approach that consciously track your progress. It might be a useful idea to maintain an audio diary. An audio diary is essentially a collection of your speaking samples, built up over time. This can be done easily by making good use of a voice recording app on your Smartphone. Since it provides a long-term record, an audio diary helps you to get a good idea of the progress you are making in rectifying particular mistakes.

- One of the most distracting things about the Speaking test is that everyone is taking theirs at the same time. The voices of so many people talking together can be quite distracting, even though the noise-reduction headphones. The best way to get accustomed to this is to do some speaking practice drills in a public space such as a café, crowded park, or some other such bustling public place.



Chapter 6: Writing

6.1 Introduction

The Writing section is designed to test your skills in written expression. It will draw on the same powers of comprehension and inference that we're used in the other sections, but only in the written form.

It is easy to become complacent about the Writing section, as it is the last of the four skills tested. On the face of it, the writing section seems easy. There are only two tasks to be completed with almost an hour to spend. This leads many candidates to become complacent in this section. But as we shall see, the Writing section is where your time management skills are most important. The tasks require you to make use of your reading and listening skills along with your writing skills. Another reason the Writing section can be difficult is that this is where your deficiencies in grammar, spelling and punctuation become visible. It might have been possible to disguise these in the Speaking section, but the Writing tasks leave you with nowhere to hide.

For these reasons, the Writing section needs regular practice and close attention. In this chapter, you will learn about the format of the Writing section along with a few strategies and tips to get the maximum marks possible.

6.2 Types of Tasks

The Writing section is comprised of two tasks: the integrated task and the independent task. While the latter is solely a writing task, the former will also draw on other aspects of your linguistic abilities. Both will require essay-type responses, but with different emphasis.

6.2.1 Integrated task

The integrated task is a reading-listening-writing exercise and must be completed within 20 minutes. You will read a passage on an academic topic for 3 minutes than listen to a short lecture on the same subject. You will be asked to summarize the details provided in the lecture and explain how they relate to the points made in the excerpted text. The lecture may strengthen, refute or challenge the information given in the written passage. Keep in mind that you are not being asked for your opinion. You have to explain the relationships between the text and the lecture.

More often than not, the question itself gives a good idea of how you are supposed to understand the relationship. If there is contradiction/disparity, the question will usually ask you to show the ways in which the lecture “casts doubt” or “challenges” the reading passage. When the passage and the lecture are in agreement, the question will also require you to show how one “supports” or “strengthens” or “elaborates on” the agreed ideas.

The word count for responses is usually between 150 and 225 words. You will not be penalized for exceeding it, as long as the answer is coherent and complete.

6.2.2 Independent task

You will be given 30 minutes in which you will have to write a short essay on the given question. The question will ask you to give your opinion on a particular issue, which you will have to justify with suitable examples.

There is no upper word limit, but you should write a minimum of 300 words. According to experts, you will need to write at least this much to display the level of ideas and organization expected in the test. You need to strike a balance between the number of ideas you put down and the overall effectiveness of your communication.

6.3 How to write

The Writing section tests your skills in organization and written presentation of ideas, not your prior knowledge of the given subject. Your responses are evaluated on three criteria:

(a) development;
(b) organization; and
(c) language use.

Your essay should be well developed, using adequate and appropriate details, explanations and examples. It also needs to be well-organized with a clear line of thought and precise arguments. Finally, your language use should be proficient, with minimal errors in grammar and spellings. Small errors may be overlooked if they are not too frequent, and do not distort the intended meaning.

Note-taking is of paramount importance in this section. There needs to be a clear and parallel link between your draft notes and "final copy". You do not have enough time to prepare a detailed outline. You only need a rough outline of the major idea you will cover, along with at most three examples. Beyond this, you will need to "make up" the details as you go along. You should not underestimate the importance of good notes, but at the same time, you have to be flexible in your approach in the notes section.

A good essay requires a clear and concise thesis statement. Usually, this can be generated out of the question itself. All you need to do is take the main words from the original question and rephrase them into a strong statement of your opinion. Also, make sure to include in your response details and examples that can give substance to your argument.

Editing is essential to check for structure and flow of ideas in your essay. Keep at least 3 minutes in the integrated task and 5 minutes in the independent task for rechecking and editing.

One thing to remember in the Writing section is that you must focus on the quality of writing, not the quantity. Your writing needs to be clear and precise. This can be achieved only through a balancing of the note-taking, writing and editing steps of the process. Sometimes writing long essays can even be counter-productive, since the more time you spend on writing, the less time you spend on editing and improving the writing.

6.4 Tips for Practice

Here are a few ways in which you can make the most effective use of your Writing Practice:

- Practice timed writing. Writing for TOEFL is not the same as writing an essay for your college assignment. Time management is crucial. Some people cannot handle the pressure and end up writing almost nothing. Others are unable to finish their essays on time. While practicing for the Writing section, always use an alarm and finish everything within the given time.

- It is useful to prepare some basic sentence patterns and transition words for use in your writing. Learn to use phrases like "for example," "also," "furthermore," "on the contrary," and "at the same time." These are useful for the following three reasons:
    (a) they allow you to exhibit your advanced sentence construction skills;
    (b) they help you to fill in a surprisingly large amount of information even in a small paragraph; and
    (c) they give a clear organization to your writing.

- Read widely and be well-informed about current events, people and trends in the world. The Writing questions offer no options, so whatever you are asked will come as a surprise. The only way to prepare for this is to be informed on a wide range of topics so that you have something substantive to write in your response.

- Stay on the subject! Remember that TOEFL markers are always expecting pre-prepared answers, which are only vaguely related to the topic given in the question. To avoid giving this impression, stay on topic. In trying to do this, you may sometimes end up writing a little less when confronted with a difficult or unfamiliar topic. But even this is fine because those few lines will have something important to say.

- Practice typing skills. Though it may be called the “writing” section, your response needs to be typed on a keyboard for TOEFL. You can end up wasting a lot of time and making many mistakes if you are not proficient in typing.

- Practice paraphrasing sentences/ideas. You will be given zero if your written response only contains words and phrases copied down from the reading passage. You need to include all the information but written down in your words. Practice paraphrasing to make your expression direct and informative.



Chapter 7: Schedule Planning

7.1 How to Prepare

By this point, you have a clear idea of what to expect in each section of the test and how to handle it. But this is only half the work done—without proper planning and preparation, all the strategies you have learned may well go to waste. With 90 days in hand, you can afford the luxury of focusing on quality. You can prepare for each section at a pace comfortable for you. Starting your preparations early is especially useful when you cannot devote a lot of time, due to the demands of your job or other studies.

Starting early gives you three advantages:

(a) regular practice improves your speed and familiarity with the test;
(b) you can pay adequate attention to rectifying your mistakes, and
(c) you will have time to work further on improving your already strong areas.

7.2 Extra Material

If you want to succeed in TOEFL, you have to get as much practice as you can. For free TOEFL practice questions and tests, take a look at the "TOEFL iBT Interactive Sampler", "TOEFL iBT Test Questions" and "TOEFL iBT Quick Prep" packages that are provided on the official TOEFL website, www.ets.org. Most successful candidates also recommend you buy some tests designed by reputed agencies such as ETS. You can buy the "Official Guide to the TOEFL," "Official TOEFL iBT Tests with Audio," and "TOEFL Practice Online" modules. While these are not free, they offer the closest experience to real test situations, with audio clippings and computer-based interface.

7.3 Plan Your Study

How much time do you need to study every week? It is better to do a little work every day than to leave it all for the weekend. While a daily session of about two hours is advisable, you can comfortably start off with shorter 45–minute sessions and taking a one-day break during the week.

You should divide your 90-day preparation period into three stages, each period, being a month long. Over the course of these three months, you will gradually develop your relevant skills and by the end, you will be a master at each of the four sections of the TOEFL test.

Stage I

This period will cover your first four weeks of preparation. In this time, you will spend up to a week of study time on each of the sections, Reading, Speaking, Listening, and Writing. Proceed slowly, and try and master each of the strategies outlined in the previous chapters. This is the stage where you lay the foundations for your process of learning a new language. Don't try and rush through the basics.

Stage II.

From week 5 till week 8, continue doing one section per week. But now, you must move from just

studying to practicing. Start taking, at least, two section tests every week, for instance, on Wednesdays and Fridays. Also, try to have a two-hour session on at least one day every week, preferably Thursdays. Finally, at the end of week 6 and week 8 (Saturdays), you should attempt a full-length practice test from the PBT set. Try and increase the complexity of your study material—read more difficult passages, speak for longer, and start listening to academic lectures on YouTube.

Stage III
The period from week 9 to week 11—is the most intensive of the three. You should frequently put yourself through sample tests so as to become familiar with the testing environment and you need to integrate your knowledge with extended periods of concentration. In this period, you should continue doing more section tests, but at intermediate and advanced levels. In week 10 and 11, try and extend your study sessions to a maximum of 2 hours 30 minutes, so that you can start preparing for the long sessions you will have to sit through on the day of the test. Finally, on each Saturday for these three weeks, you must attempt a full-length test.

7.4 Evaluate Yourself
Apart from regular practice, it is important also to undertake self-evaluation. After a few full-length tests, critically study the results and identify strong and weak areas. This section will give a rough guide to interpreting your marks.

Reading section
For the Reading section, a mark above 22 is considered good, while anything below 14 requires serious attention. The key to improvement in this section is to pay attention to the concepts and structure of argument in the passages. Become an expert at the “skimming” technique discussed in Chapter 3 and use it to identify the main components in a given passage. Start with articles of general interest and graduate to more technical, academic passages as your mark improves.

Listening section
For the Listening section, a mark between 15 and 21 is considered average. To improve your marks in this section, work on your note-taking skills. Strike a balance between detail and selective focus. Your notes are the building blocks on which you can develop a summary of the conversation. The difference between a good and a poor mark often depends on the effort you put into making notes.

Speaking section
In the Speaking section, a mark above 22 is considered to be very good. If your mark is below 12, you should pay attention to impromptu speaking. Try speaking at length first about familiar topics and gradually move on to speaking for longer intervals about more difficult academic subjects.

Writing section
In the writing section, give equal attention to the integrated and independent tasks. If you are consistently getting a self-assessment mark of less than 14, the problem can usually be traced to difficulties in expression. Take every opportunity to write a brief response to something you may have read, seen or heard. Pay close attention to sentence construction, grammar, and spellings—marks are deducted for such mistakes.

7.5 Modify as Required
The schedule detailed in this chapter is meant to work as a rough guide for you to follow when

planning your exam preparation. It gives you a broad idea of how to organize your work but leaves it flexible enough for you to change for your convenience. Through constant practice and self-evaluation, you will get a better idea of how you can tweak some aspects of this program to suit your individual requirements. So, be disciplined, be determined and be creative! TOEFL success is just days away.



Chapter 8: The Final Week

You have come a long way in these 90 days. You have covered each section of the test thoroughly, and evaluated yourself through practice exercises. Entering the last week of your TOEFL preparation, the most important thing is confidence. In the last few days, Lighten your study load. It is too late to learn something entirely new or to improve even your skills significantly. At this point, focus only on the revision of your word lists, rules of sentence construction and pronunciation.

Get good rest in these last few days. Try and exercise a little, or go out for a long walk. This will help you withstand the physical strain of the four-hour test and boost your general morale.

The Big Day

Here are a few things to keep in mind on the final day so that you are calm and relaxed for the test.

- Wake up early, so that you don't have to rush through on the morning of your test. Start early, do some light stretching exercises and stay in a good mood by doing something that helps you relax—listen to some music, or water your potted plants.
- Have a good breakfast before leaving home. The test is long and tiring. Also, take along a small snack like a sandwich or some biscuits and a sugared drink, just in case your feel low on energy.
- Dress comfortably. It is a good idea to dress in multiple layers—the temperature in the testing area may be higher or lower than what you are comfortable with.
- Leave home well in time and reach the test center at least 30-45 minutes ahead of your test. If possible, try and visit the test center a few days before so that you won't have to take the stress of locating it on the morning of the test.
- Carry proper identification proof and your registration documents. They will be checked and verified before you are allowed to sit for the test.
- You will also be photographed before your test. So make sure your look smart and confident! After all, this photo will be on you marked test report as well.
- Keep in mind that you will not be allowed to take any electronic devices inside the testing area. So it might be a good idea to leave your mobile phone, music player, etc. at home.
- In the test itself, pace yourself. Don't go too fast or too slow, and attempt each question carefully since you cannot go back to a section once it is completed. Since there is no negative marking for incorrect responses, make sure you answer every question to the best of your ability.
- And finally, no matter what happens, don't panic. Remind yourself that you will be at your best only if you are calm. There is always scope to make up for a few bad questions later in the section.



Supplement A: Some Additional Online Sources

This book has tried to emphasize the importance of adequate practice and self-evaluation of results and skills. Given below are a few online resources that are available to you free of cost. These websites are all designed specifically to cater to the needs of those who are learning English as a Second Language. While some of these websites provide resources such as tutorials, videos, worksheets and flashcards to help in your learning of the language, others provide you with sample questions and timed tests that will familiarize you with the demands of the TOEFL test itself.

English as Second Language Resources

- www.rong-change.com is an excellent place for practice tests and exercises in listening, speaking, writing, grammar, vocabulary.
- www.mes-english.com is a good place for resources like flashcards and language worksheets.
- www.online-utility.org is another site that provides tips and exercises on reading, vocabulary, usage and writing.
- Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab—www.esl-lab.com— is a great resource for a large bank of listening and speaking samples of all kinds
- ESLPod—www.eslpod.com—is a very useful site that allows you to listen to its vast database of conversations that can be played back at slower speeds. Those with weak listening skills would find this source to be particularly beneficial.

Practice Tests and Sample Questions

- www.etsglobal.org is the official resource website for TOEFL preparation. It has a large number of sample questions and practice tests. Questions from previous years' papers are also available.
- These sites also provide excellent free tests and question banks that will aid greatly in your preparation for all the four sections, i.e. Reading, Listening, Speaking and Writing: www.4tests.com; www.testden.com; www.magoosh.com; www.examenglish.com; www.graduateshotline.com; www.englishclub.com



Supplement B: Checklist

It would be amply clear to you by now that TOEFL preparation is not just about knowing English. It requires systematic planning and dedicated preparation. In many ways, it needs you to keep in mind your final goal, even as you are trying to improve and work on your specific skills sets.
According to an old Indian proverb, "the pitcher is filled up drop by drop". TOEFL preparation is also like that. Small gains made over a long period will eventually lead to a high mark on the test. All it needs is discipline and passion.
Here is a quick checklist of the main things you should have learned from the book.

Refer to this list at any point during your preparation to periodically check on the progress you have made.

- The format of the test: the details about the various sections, their duration, their order, and the number of questions;

- Mastery of the skills of skimming and scanning;
- The ability to paraphrase and summarize effectively and precisely;
- A degree of comfort with impromptu speaking on familiar as well as academic subjects;
- A writing style that is based on precise arguments and coherent organization;
- A systematic way to approach integrated tasks in both Speaking as well as Writing sections;
- A realistic idea of the kind of test conditions to expect;
- Guidelines on how to plan your preparation;
- Some strategies to effectively monitor and analyze your progress; and
- The nifty ways in which technology can be used to enhance your preparation, through the effective use of the internet and Smartphone apps



Conclusion

TOEFL and IELTS are more often than not, required for international trade, tertiary institution admissions and immigration purposes. Anyone can learn and master these skills as I have shown in this book but this can only be achieved with commitment from you.

With confidence and perseverance from you, coupled with the use of flashcards, group work and practice, practice practice, you will be able to attain your goal in 90 days. The book is divided into specific chapters for reading, listening, speaking and writing.

When you know the purpose of academic reading which is for information gathering, comprehension and learning, it will be a piece of cake once you're confronted with it during the exams. Similarly with listening, knowing the number of speakers and their main points and ideas and distinguishing different accents will hasten the process of your listening skills. As to speaking, there is no better teacher than practicing and finally your writing skills. Your writing skills and its clarity can be seen only if you know how to develop an idea, how to organise your idea and the langauge that you use. Once you master these 4 skills, you should be on your way to sucessfully hacking TOEFL and IELTS in 90 days.
Finally, setting a consistent time for your studies will set up apart from others. Congratulations for making it this far so now, use this guide on a daily basis and start your 90 day journey. Remember you will only be able to successfully reach your goal if you follow this book to the letter.

Good luck



Finally, please tell us what you think about this book by leaving a review on Amazon.