The Next Generation iBT: A really new TOEFL® Test!

The Next Generation iBT (internet-Based TOEFL) is a new and really different version of the TOEFL® Test. If you are used to the paper or CBT versions of the TOEFL® Test and you are thinking that the iBT version of the test is similar to the paper or CBT versions, then you are going to have quite a surprise when you see the iBT.

"Just how is the iBT different from the paper and CBT versions of the test?," you might wonder. It is different in a lot of ways, but some of the main ways that it differs are the following: **(1) a change in the sections of the test, (2) the addition of integrated skills, (3) new kinds of passages, and (4) new kinds of questions.**

The sections of the test

One dramatic change in the Next Generation iBT is a change in the sections included in the test. The Structure section that is a permanent part of the paper TOEFL® Test and the CBT does not exist on the iBT; instead, on the iBT a Speaking section has been added in place of the Structure section, to create a test with four sections: Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing. Grammar will be tested based on how correct the grammar is in the Writing and speaking responses rather than in a section of its own.

Integrated skills

Another dramatic change in the Next Generation iBT is the inclusion of tasks that integrate several language skills. Whereas the paper and CBT versions of the TOEFL® Test cover only one language skill per section, the new iBT includes tasks that incorporate several language skills together. On the iBT, there will be tasks that require the test-taker to listen to a passage and then speak about the passage; there will be tasks that require the test-taker to read a passage, listen to a related passage, and then speak about how the ideas in the two passages are related; there will be tasks that require the test-taker to read a passage, listen to a related passage, and then write about how the ideas in the two passages are related.

New kinds of passages

The kinds of passages on the Next Generation iBT have also changed. There are still reading passages on academic topics, just like on the paper and CBT versions of the TOEFL® Test, but the passages on the iBT are much longer. The reading passages on the paper and CBT tests are around 350 to 400 words in length, while the reading passages on the iBT are 600 to 700 words in length.

The listening passages are also much longer, but that is not the only change in the listening passages: the listening passages have more natural language, with Australian and British accents in addition to American accents, pauses and stammering, errs and umms, and misspeaks and corrections.

New kinds of questions

On top of all of these changes, there are also quite a few new kinds of questions on the Next Generation iBT. In Reading, there will be new kinds of questions on rhetorical purpose, paraphrasing, overall inferences, and overall organization of ideas, in addition to the more familiar questions on main ideas, details, vocabulary, and reference. In Listening, there will be new kinds of questions on function and stance in addition to the familiar questions on main ideas, details, inferences, and overall organization. In Writing, there is a new integrated task in addition to the familiar 30-minute essay. In Speaking, all the questions are new, with two independent tasks and four integrated tasks.

Here is the probable organization of the Next Generation iBT.

SECTION 1: Reading

Part 1 1 passage 13 questions 20 minutes
Part 2 2 passages 26 questions 40 minutes

Total 3 passages 39 questions 60 minutes

SECTION 2: Listening

Part 1 1 conversation
And 2 lectures 17 questions 30 minutes
Part 2 1 conversation
And 2 lectures 17 questions 30 minutes

Total 2 conversations
And 4 lectures 34 questions 60 minutes

SECTION 3: Speaking

Part 1 2 independent tasks 2 questions 4 minutes
Part 2 4 integrated tasks 4 questions 16 minutes

Total 6 tasks 6 questions 20 minutes

SECTION 3: Writing

Part 1 1 integrated task 1 question 30 minutes
Part 2 1 independent task 1 question 30 minutes

Total 2 tasks 2 questions 60 minutes