

# WRITING

As I explain in Part II of this book, the Writing section score makes up half of your Structure score. In this chapter, I explain how the TOEFL essay is graded. Understanding how an essay is scored can help you determine how to tackle this section of the test.

Each essay question can receive a score between 0 and 6, with 0 being the lowest and 6 being the highest. Essay scoring is based on a checklist much like the one below. This checklist is adapted from the Writing Scoring Guide contained in the TOEFL test Information Bulletin.

How well

- does the essay address the topic?
- is the essay organized?
- does the essay provide appropriate details to support the thesis?
- does the essay display proper use of language?
- does the essay show variety and use of words?

In other words, to create a successful essay, you need to do the following:

- Write about the topic.
- Organize it.
- Give details.
- Use correct grammar.
- Use correct and varied vocabulary.

A separate score is given for each of these five aspects of your essay. Each separate score can range from 0 to 6, in half-point increments. All five scores are then averaged in order to determine the overall score for your essay. For example, you might receive a score like the following:

|                      |                  |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Addressing the topic | 5.5              |
| Organization         | 4                |
| Details              | 2.5              |
| Grammar              | 5                |
| Vocabulary           | 3.5              |
| Average              | $20.5 / 5 = 4.1$ |

Writing about the essay topic is fairly easy to do: Simply answer the question. Don't get carried away trying to use impressive vocabulary or display grammatical abilities and not end up addressing the question.

Use the scratch paper provided at the administration of the TOEFL test to outline your essay topic. You can use any kind of outline technique to organize your thoughts, but don't skip this part. Proper organization translates into a fifth of your writing score.

The particular position that you choose to take on the topic is not important. There isn't a right or wrong answer on this section of the test. However, make sure that you can justify your position with details or examples.

If you use a traditional outline form before you write your essay, it should look something like this:

**1.** Introduction

**2.** Major Topic

    a. Detail

    b. Detail

**3.** Major Topic

    a. Detail

    b. Detail

**4.** Major Topic

    a. Detail

    b. Detail

**5.** Conclusion

As the outline shows, try to supply at least two (preferably three) supporting details for each major topic.

Don't try to use grammar that you don't know well. Just make sure that the grammar that you use is correct. Likewise, don't try to use vocabulary that you don't know well. Use only vocabulary that is correct in the context.

## Practice Exercise

**Directions:** This section measures your ability to write in standard English, including your ability to organize ideas and support your thoughts with sufficient examples and evidence. Address the following topic by writing an essay in 30 minutes. You may make notes on a separate piece of paper. Type or hand-write the essay.

It has recently been announced that a large multi-purpose store, similar to those that offer a great number of different items and are open all the time, will be built near your neighborhood. Do you support or oppose this plan? Why? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.

First, create a major outline, such as the following. You may initially include items that you will later eliminate.

1. Introduction
2. Convenience for neighborhood
3. 24-hour shopping
4. More products
5. More jobs
6. Eliminate eyesores
7. Conclusion

Next, go back and work on the details. If you can't provide sufficient details for a topic, eliminate the topic or merge it into another. For example:

1. Introduction
2. Convenience for neighborhood
  - a. Close to home, whereas other stores are farther away
  - b. More products and several classes of products in one place (groceries, electronics, automotive, clothing, and so on)
  - c. Late-night shopping
3. More jobs
  - a. Increased number of jobs for older persons
  - b. Increased number of jobs for students
4. Eliminate eyesores
  - a. The property is currently vacant and unsafe
  - b. The owners don't keep up on weed and garbage cleanup
5. Conclusion

From this type of outline, you can successfully organize a logical, effective essay:

I support the idea of building a new large multi-purpose store near my neighborhood. It will provide convenience to me and my neighbors and additional jobs, as well as eliminating unattractive areas of the neighborhood.

Having such a store near our neighborhood will provide convenience. Currently we have to travel in one direction for a grocery store, another direction for clothing stores, and several other places for other types of stores. All of these stores are at least several miles from our neighborhood. We will have much less travel time to this one store. Because this store combines a number of different product classes, we can avoid going to different stores for everything we want to buy. We will be able to buy our groceries, clothing, electronic items and other products all at one time. And we will also have the added convenience of shopping at any hour of the day when we are too busy to shop during normal hours.

At the present time, there are students who would like to work after class, but there are not sufficient jobs available. In addition, there are retired people in our neighborhood who would like to supplement their meager income with some light work. A multi-purpose store like the one that is proposed for our neighborhood will provide a number of different job opportunities for these two classes of people as well as others in the community who need full-time jobs. This benefits the overall economic base of the community.

Now, there are two abandoned homes, one occupied home with junk cars and another with debris in the yard, and several overgrown vacant lots on the property where this store will be built. There is nothing beneficial about any of these properties. They contribute to rodent and insect growth, contain hiding places for criminals, and are dangerous for our young children. Replacing these lots with the contemplated store will eliminate these dangers.

Allowing this store to be built will be much more convenient for the people in my neighborhood than our current situation. Because it will provide additional jobs and clean up eyesores in the neighborhood, it has many benefits, and we should all support it.

The above essay certainly is not of the highest quality if you compare it to ones prepared for a writing class. But for purposes of the TOEFL test, in which you have a short time to create an essay and no opportunity to research issues, it will likely obtain a high score because it answers the question adequately. The introductory and conclusion paragraphs summarize the three major topics. Each major topic contains two or three subtopics or examples, and there are no major grammar, vocabulary, or spelling errors.