

MASTERING

THE NEW

TOEFL IBT

WRITING

***ACADEMIC DISCUSSION
TASK***

2024-2025

**WITH 93 REAL QUESTIONS &
SAMPLE RESPONSES**

DR. HIKMET SAHINER

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PREFACE

Mastering the new TOEFL iBT® Writing for an Academic Discussion is designed to give test takers an edge in responding to the independent task for an Academic Discussion on the TOEFL® iBT Writing Section, which was introduced on July 26, 2023.

This ebook features a total of 93 REAL “Writing for an Academic Discussion” questions and 4-5 sample responses for each of them. In addition to 93 authentic practice tests, it includes thorough review sections to walk test takers through everything they need to know to succeed on the Writing Section of the exam. Test takers will learn how to construct effective responses based on four individual templates.

Mastering the new TOEFL iBT® Writing for an Academic Discussion features:

- Test-taking strategies
- 4 Templates for high-score responses and Grammar Points
- 93 full-length practice TOEFL Writing for an Academic Discussion task

UNIT 1. OVERVIEW OF TOEFL IBT ACADEMIC DISCUSSION TASK

Starting on July 26th, 2023, the new TOEFL writing task REPLACED the independent writing task. This new task is called "**Writing for an Academic Discussion.**" You will encounter a simulated discussion board on a university website during the exam. The setup includes a question posted by a professor and two student responses. Your task is to read the entire discussion and then write your response.

The question will ask for your opinion. There will already be a couple of responses from other students, and you'll need to contribute your ideas to the discussion. You'll have a total of 10 minutes for the task.

Here's an example of what you'll see on your screen.

Your professor is teaching a class on education. Write a post responding to the professor's question.

In your response you should:

- express and support your opinion
- make a contribution to the discussion

An effective response will contain at least 100 words.



Doctor Smith

Next week, we're going to be discussing the use of technology in schools. I think most of us would agree that, generally speaking, technology enhances learning, but what about smartphones? In recent years, there's been a lot of debate around whether students should be allowed to use them in class. I'd like to know what you think. Should smartphones be permitted in school classrooms? Or are they an unnecessary distraction?



Omar

I think they should be allowed. I mean, they give students access to so much information that isn't covered in textbooks. I'm thinking of things like news and current affairs. If they don't have their smartphones, students have to rely on what the teacher brings into class. This means they don't learn to do their own research.



Sally

I take Omar's point, but I think smartphones usually end up being a major distraction in class. Most young people don't have the discipline to ignore notifications and stay off social media during class time. Their attention becomes divided between the lesson and their device, and that's not good for learning.

Cut

Paste

Undo

Word Count: 0

Hide

9:59

WRITING TASK FOR AN ACADEMIC DISCUSSION

The test taker is expected to

- * respond to or build on ideas expressed in other texts
- * clearly state or elaborate on a position or argument
- * show accurate and meaningful use of a range of grammatical structures and vocabulary in the academic context

ACADEMIC DISCUSSION SCORING RUBRIC

5 - A fully successful response

The response is a relevant and very clearly expressed contribution to the online discussion, and it demonstrates consistent facility in the use of language.

A typical response displays the following:

- Relevant and well-elaborated explanations, exemplifications and/or details
- Effective use of a variety of syntactic structures and precise idiomatic word choice
- Almost no lexical or grammatical errors other than those expected from a competent writer writing under timed conditions (e.g., common typos or common misspellings or substitutions like there/their)

4 - A generally successful response

The response is a relevant contribution to the online discussion and facility in the use of language allows the writer's ideas to be easily understood.

A typical response displays the following:

- Relevant and adequately elaborated explanations exemplifications and/or details
- A variety of syntactic structures and appropriate word choice

- Few lexical or grammatical errors

3 - A partially successful response

The response is a mostly relevant and mostly understandable contribution to the online discussion and there is some facility in the use of language.

A typical response displays the following

- Elaboration in which part of an explanation example or detail may be missing unclear or irrelevant
- Some variety in syntactic structures and a range of vocabulary
- Some noticeable lexical and grammatical errors in sentence structure, word form or use of idiomatic language

2 - A mostly unsuccessful response

The response reflects an attempt to contribute to the online discussion but limitations in the use of language may make ideas hard to follow.

A typical response displays the following:

- Ideas that may be poorly elaborated or only partially relevant
- A limited range of syntactic structures and vocabulary
- An accumulation of errors in sentence structure word forms or use

1 - An unsuccessful response

The response reflects an ineffective attempt to contribute to the online discussion, and limitations in the use of language may prevent

the expression of ideas.

A typical response may display the following:

- Words and phrases that indicate an attempt to address the task but with few or no coherent ideas
- Severely limited range of syntactic structures and vocabulary
- Serious and frequent errors in the use of language
- Minimal original language; any coherent language is mostly borrowed from the stimulus

0 - The response is blank, or the topic

- is not in English
- is entirely copied from the prompt
- is entirely unconnected to the prompt or
- consists of arbitrary keystrokes.

SAMPLE QUESTION

Your professor is teaching a class on political science. Write a post responding to the professor's question.

In your response you should:

- * express and support your opinion
- * make a contribution to the discussion

An effective response will contain at least 100 words. You will have 10 minutes to write it.

Dr. Gupta

As I mentioned in class, governments make public policies to describe their responses to various problems that affect a community. Part of this process involves setting and defending priorities about which issues deserve the most attention and resources. For example, governments need to decide whether they should spend more money on education or on environmental protections. If you were a policy maker, which issue would you argue is more important: education or environmental protections? Why?

Kelly

We all live on planet Earth, and it is the only planet we have. Therefore, we must take care of it. Clearly, protecting the environment should be the government's priority over education. I think the REAL question is which approach to protecting the environment-restricting pollution regulating population promoting clean energy, or something else-should be the governments' priority.

Andrew

I disagree with Kelly that that the environment is more important than

education. Education is actually the best way to protect the environment. Educated people can see how their decisions affect the world around them. Also, with better science and technology education, we can develop solutions to environmental problems. Therefore, I think the government should spend more money on education.

RESPONSE TIPS

To earn a top score, you should state and support your opinion about whether education or environmental protections should be the priority for governments to spend money on. Your response is a contribution to the other two students' posts in an online discussion for the class. Be sure to add your own perspective to the discussion, not merely repeat ideas that have already been stated.

Typically, an effective response will contain a minimum of 100 words. You might agree with Kelly that environmental protections should be the priority. You will need to add your own support for this viewpoint. For example, you could argue that environmental protections are a more important investment to sustain our economies. You could point out that governments currently spend a great deal of money compensating for climate change catastrophes such as increased flooding, wind damage, or ruined crops. Investing more in environmental protections now could actually save governments money later on—which could then be used for more education funding. This would differ from the support Kelly gave for her opinion.

If you agree with Andrew that education should be the bigger priority, you could add to his argument by pointing out the amount of research that universities conduct not only on solving environmental problems, which Andrew alluded to, but also on treating diseases, creating useful technology, and developing sustainable agriculture. Therefore, education funding has a bigger overall impact on improving human lives than investment in environmental protections only. This would be a meaningful addition to the support Andrew provided for his opinion.

You may find you agree with a point Kelly made about the environment even though you think education is more important. Or you might even find

that your opinion about government priorities depends on certain factors-that education should be a priority in some circumstances environmental protections in others. This is perfectly acceptable as long as you explain and support your reasoning. There is no correct answer to the question. The important part of this task is to make sure that you state your opinion and provide reasonable, relevant support for it in a way that makes a meaningful contribution to the online discussion. Try to develop your opinion as well as you can within the time limit. A well-developed response will contain clearly appropriate reasons, examples and details - ones that do a good job supporting or illustrating your own viewpoint.

The quality and accuracy of the sentence structure and vocabulary you use to express your ideas is also very important and part of what is considered when your response is scored. The task context-a post to an online discussion group-is not quite as informal as you might think. While the task asks you to contribute to a discussion with fellow students imagine that the professor would also be reading your post. It is true that your tone might be more casual than what you would use in an academic paper but you should still follow standard grammar rules. Also, if disagreeing with another student post be sure to express your disagreement in a respectful way as you would in a real online discussion.

UNIT 2. SAMPLE QUESTIONS & SCORING OF SAMPLE RESPONSES

SAMPLE QUESTION 1

Your professor is teaching a class on sociology. Write a post responding to the professor's question.

In your response you should:

- express and support your opinion
- make a contribution to the discussion

An effective response will contain at least 100 words.

Dr. Diaz

Over the next few weeks, we are going to look at lots of different materials about the role of television programs and television watching in people's lives but first, I want to know what you think about this topic. So here is a

question for the class discussion board: What do you think is the most significant effect that watching television has on people? Why do you think television has this effect?

Kelly

I know that one way that television influences people's behavior is that when you are watching television, you are not moving around or exercising. This is especially true for children. The American Academy of Pediatrics says that when children spend a lot of time watching television, they have a greater tendency to be overweight.

Paul

I think the main effect that television has on people is to broaden their experience. There are so many programs devoted to nature and travel. Think of all the different places in the world you can experience through television! Last night I watched a program about life in Antarctica and it was fascinating!

SAMPLE RESPONSES

Score of 3 - This is a mid-level response.

In my opinion television makes the life more interesting and fun There are so many interesting channels and programs and they make people laugh during watching TV. I think this is a big effect that television on people's time is passing by. Especially these days, people live with the serious problems and accidents. People need something fresh and can entertain. Televisions do this kind of works very well. Through Music program people can have relaxing time through comedy program, people can laugh and so on. Therefore, the television influences people's feeling much better, and I think this is very important effect!!

Rationale:

This essay is in the medium writing proficiency range. It would probably earn the score of 3 based on the Academic Discussion Scoring Rubric. It is a mostly understandable contribution to the discussion. The writer provides a different point of view than either Kelly or Paul, arguing that TV makes the life more interesting." (But including the article "the" in the life" is a mistake. The correct phrase is "makes life more interesting") The writer then explains why people welcome a bit of TV fun: they "lives with the serious problems and accidents (the correct phrasing would be "they live with serious problems or experience accidents), and "through Music program (should be "when watching music programs) they can relax through comedy program (should be when watching comedy programs) they can laugh, and so on. But there is quite of bit of repetition of the same idea: TV is fun and makes people laugh. Also some ideas are unclear: what does the writer mean by "pastime is passing by" in the third sentence? The writer seems unable to provide many

clearly expressed details or to elaborate on the basic ideas and so the contribution to the discussion feels only partly successful. There are noticeable errors in almost every sentence. In addition to the ones indicated above there is "a big effect that television on people "which should read "a big effect that television has on people) "People need something fresh and can entertain (which should read "People need something fresh and entertaining and others. However most of the meaning is still understandable despite the errors.

Score of 5 - This is a high-level response.

In my opinion, Paul is right when he says that watching television might broaden your experience. By watching for example science programs you can gain valuable insights into new topics. On the other hand, I think that a high percentage of people don't watch TV to increase their knowledge I am of the opinion that many people watch TV in order to get distracted from their real lives. They watch films or series to be entertained and to forget problems they have at work or in their private lives. At least for me this works well-for instance if I am sad, I watch a comedy or a funny soap opera and afterwards, am in a better mood. Therefore, I think that being entertained and distracted is the most significant effect of TV.

Rationale:

This response is in the high writing proficiency range. It would probably earn the score of 5 based on the Academic Discussion Scoring Rubric. The writer conveys complex and well-argued ideas that contribute nicely to the discussion. While the writer mentions Paul's point of view the writer does not just repeat it. Instead, the writer takes Paul's ideas as the starting point and goes on to present a different point of view, arguing that watching TV is not mainly educational but rather a relaxing experience. The writer then goes on to develop this point of view explaining why people need to relax and providing the writer's own personal experiences: why the writer usually watches Tv which programs, and so on. The language the writer uses has a nice variety, both in how the sentences are formed and in the range of the vocabulary used. There are almost no errors; the word "valuable" in the second sentence is misspelled but that may be expected from even competent

writers writing under timed conditions as the Scoring Rubric explains.

SAMPLE QUESTION 2

Your professor is teaching a class on economics. Write a post responding to the professor's question.

In your response you should:

- express and support your opinion
- make a contribution to the discussion

An effective response will contain at least 100 words. You will have 10 minutes to write it.

Dr. Achebe

When people are asked about the most important discoveries or inventions made in the last two hundred years, they usually mention something very obvious, like the computer or the cell phone. But there are thousands of other discoveries or inventions that have had a huge impact on how we live today. What scientific discovery or technological invention from the last two hundred years - other than computers and cell phones - would you choose as being important? Why?

Paul

I mean, were so used to science and technology that we are not even aware of all the things we use in our daily lives. I would probably choose space satellites. This technology happened in the last hundred years and it has become important for so many things. just think about navigation or telecommunications or even the military.

Claire

I am thinking about medical progress. Like for example when scientists

discovered things about healthy nutrition. I am thinking of identifying all the vitamins we need to stay healthy. I am not sure exactly when the vitamin discoveries happened, but I know they are very important. Our health is much better than it was 200 years ago.