

Description of the Next Generation TOEFL Listening Section

The next generation TOEFL Listening section consists of four to six lectures and two to three conversations that take place in an English-speaking academic setting. The time for this section is 60 to 90 minutes.

Academic Lectures

- Assess a test taker's ability to understand a self-contained portion of an academic lecture
- Can be either a monologue by the professor or an interactive lecture with one or two students participating (e.g., making comments, asking questions, answering questions)
- Last 4 to 6 minutes and are about 500-800 words long
- Are associated with six multiple-choice questions on the content of the lecture and the way the content is presented

Test takers will need to understand main ideas, supporting details, organizational features, and relationships between ideas. They will also need to be able to draw appropriate inferences and identify speaker purpose and attitude. Pictures on the computer screen are provided to indicate the setting and the role(s) of the speaker(s).

Conversations

- Assess a test taker's ability to understand conversations that take place in an English-speaking academic setting
- Involve two speakers, one of whom is a student
- Last about 3 minutes, with about 12 to 25 exchanges
- Are associated with five multiple-choice questions on the content and/or nature of the conversation

The conversation may take place during an office hour with a professor or teaching assistant, or it may be a "service encounter" with a librarian, registrar, departmental secretary, etc. The five questions assess the understanding of the main ideas and the relationship between ideas, important details, implications, and speaker purpose and attitude in the conversation.

Pictures are provided to indicate the specific setting and role of speakers.

The basic elements of the conversation are:

- One of the speakers introduces the situation by explaining a need, problem, or question of a concrete, practical nature.
- The other speaker's response leads to the development of the situation.
- The outcome of the situation is identified.

Lectures and Conversations

- Language in the lectures and conversation includes features that are typical of oral language; for example, [polite] interruptions, misunderstandings and clarifications, misspeaks, hesitations, sentence fragments

Scoring

The raw score on the Listening section is converted to a scaled score of 0 to 30.

Listening Question Types	Question Type Description
<p>Basic Understanding Questions</p>	<p><u>Basic Understanding questions</u> assess the main point and important details of a conversation or lecture. There are two types of Basic Understanding questions: main idea questions and supporting detail questions.</p> <p><u>Main idea questions</u> ask for the overall content or purpose of a conversation or lecture. This overall topic or purpose may have been stated explicitly or it may have been left implicit (not directly stated). If implicit, it should nonetheless have been clearly inferable. Understanding implicit information is often called “making an inference.”</p> <p>Examples of main idea questions and correct answer choices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the speakers mainly discussing? <u>Answer:</u> A research project on climate change • Why does the student go to see her professor? <u>Answer:</u> To talk about a report she is writing
<p><i>Supporting detail questions</i></p>	<p><u>Supporting detail questions</u> ask about the important details of a conversation or lecture. Although test takers may take notes while they listen to the lecture or conversation, they will hear it only once. So, if a detail is very small and not presented as a significant point, that detail should not be assessed. Supporting detail questions ask about important details, not minor ones. Examples of supporting detail questions and correct answers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the professor offer to do for the man? <u>Answer:</u> Review the first version of his paper • What does the woman want to know about the political science courses mentioned in the conversation? <u>Answer:</u> How many of them she will need to take <p>Some supporting detail questions have two answers, but this will be clearly indicated in the question, as shown in this example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the professor, what information should the student include in her statement of purpose? [Click on 2 answers.] <u>Answer 1:</u> Her academic motivation <u>Answer 2:</u> Some personal information
<p>Connecting Information Questions</p>	<p><u>Connecting Information questions</u> assess whether the test taker can understand connections between points made in a conversation or lecture, and integrate pieces of information. These questions assess the ability to draw together the parts of a single listening text so as to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recognize rhetorical organization 2. Identify connections 3. Integrate several pieces of information 4. Draw inferences and conclusions 5. Form generalizations 6. Make predictions based on what was heard <p>There are two basic types of Connecting Information questions: organization questions and content questions.</p>

Listening Question Types**Question Type Description***Organization questions*

Organization questions assess the ability to recognize the organization of what is said. Since conversations generally have less intentional organization than lectures, these particular types of questions are asked more frequently about lectures than about conversations.

Example:

- In what order does the student tell his professor about the parts of his project?
Answer: From the most complete part to the least complete

Organization-rhetorical connection questions assess the ability to identify how a particular statement connects rhetorically with respect to the entire discourse. This includes assessing the ability to identify discourse elements such as

1. topic shifts
2. the relationship between main topic and subtopic
3. exemplification
4. digressions
5. introductory or concluding remarks

Example:

- Why does the professor tell the student about the appointment at the doctor's office?
Answer: To demonstrate a way of remembering things

Content questions

Identifying relationships questions assess the ability to identify relationships that have been stated or clearly implied in the conversation or lecture. For example, what is identified as cause and what is identified as effect? What is the order of the steps in the process described? What two things are being compared?

Example:

- What comparison does the professor make between Guatemala and Mexico?
Answer: The length of their coastlines

Linking questions ask the test taker to identify or recognize stated relationships between pieces of information and then to perform some action on the information in order to make such a relationship. Actions include:

1. drawing an inference
2. deducing cause and effect
3. predicting an outcome
4. making a generalization

These questions require test takers to link together information from more than one statement in the listening passage. (However, if a question asks the test taker to make an inference about an entire listening passage, it is a Main Idea question.)

Examples:

- What does the man imply about the reference books he has already looked at?
Answer: They do not list population by city.
(He never states this outright in the listening text, but it is clear that he is looking for city populations, and that he has looked at some books already, but they did not contain what he needed.)
- What does the professor imply about the people who admit students to graduate school?
Answer: They are influenced by the appearance of an application.
(This is not stated outright in the listening text, but it is strongly implied.)

Listening Question Types**Question Type Description****Pragmatic Understanding Questions**

Understanding meanings that go beyond the literal interpretation is an important aspect of language proficiency. For this reason, Pragmatic Understanding is closely tied with making inferences about a speaker's stance or attitude, or about the speaker's purpose or motivation. Unlike Supporting Detail questions, Pragmatic Understanding questions assess not only what is said, but also how it is said. Unlike Connecting Information questions, they focus not on how information is organized and integrated, but on the speaker's intentions and attitudes toward that information.

There are two basic types of Pragmatic Understanding questions: Stance questions and Function questions.

Stance questions

Stance questions assess the test taker's understanding of the speaker's attitude about something that has come up in the conversation and the speaker's degree of certainty about some fact or about the source of the speaker's information.

Example:

- What is the student's attitude toward the people he currently works with?
Answer: He likes them.

Other possible attitudes include amusement, anxiety, boredom, concern, and dislike, among many others.

Example:

- What does the woman imply about the money the man owes for his room?
Answer: She is not sure that it is due today.

Function questions

Function-purpose questions focus on what the speaker is trying to accomplish. For example, is a question rhetorical or is it actually asking for information? Can the listener tell from the conversation what is motivating the speaker to ask for that information? A wrong answer is often a possible interpretation of the utterance, but it is not the appropriate interpretation of this particular context.

Example:

- Why does the professor mention the XYZ Affair and the Jay Treaty?
Correct answer: To encourage the student to learn the relationships between events
Wrong answer: To emphasize the importance of international laws
Wrong answer: To find out if the student has read the textbook

Function-meaning questions: Often, the correct meaning of an utterance can only be determined by its context; the speaker gives clues to the correct meaning by using a certain tone of voice or by reinforcing the intended meaning in the speech surrounding that utterance. An utterance like "yeah, right" can have entirely opposite meanings, depending on how it is said.

Replay questions: Many Pragmatic Understanding questions rely at least in part on intonation and/or the use of very specific phrasings. Often they focus on the meaning or function of a relatively short utterance. Since they are not factual in their focus, they are generally not based on things that a listener would take notes on. Therefore, because Listening section questions are not meant to assess memory, Pragmatic Understanding is often best assessed in a format known as Replay. In a Replay question, a part of the listening text is repeated to focus the test taker's attention on the specific utterance to be assessed. Connecting information questions also use the replay format on occasion.

Sample Listening Questions From the Next Generation TOEFL Test

Below are examples of each of the question types in the Listening section of the next generation TOEFL test, along with related learning objectives for each. The correct answers are marked with a (✓).

Listening Question Types	Sample Questions	Related Learning Objectives
<p>Basic Understanding:</p> <p><i>Main idea questions</i></p>	<p>What is the talk mainly about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A comparison of two approaches to decision making. ● A formula for evaluating business plans. ✓ A process for improving decision-making. ● A method for gaining consensus within groups. 	<p>Understand the main idea or purpose of a conversation or lecture</p> <p>Make inferences about the entire lecture or conversation based on what is implied</p>
<p>Basic Understanding:</p> <p><i>Supporting detail questions</i></p>	<p>According to the professor, what is one important result of using AHP?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● People can make decisions more quickly. ● People are provided with several different outcomes. ● People can take advantage of the latest technology. ✓ People can better understand the decision they make. 	<p>Understand the important details of a conversation or lecture</p> <p>Take notes on major points and important details</p>
<p>Connecting Information:</p> <p><i>Organization questions</i></p>	<p>Why does the professor mention the expansion of the railroad in the nineteenth century?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To emphasize the importance of the railroad to the development of farming in the Southwest. ● To explain the increased mobility of Native American peoples. ✓ To provide background for a discussion of Southwestern tourism. ● To give an example of the dangers tourists faced in the Southwest. 	<p>Recognize the organization of the information presented</p> <p>Recognize topic changes, exemplifications, digressions, or aside statements in lectures and conversations</p>
<p>Connecting Information:</p> <p><i>Content questions</i></p>	<p>According to the professor, what does the Hopi House demonstrate?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Two Native American groups share control of the Grand Canyon tourist industry. ● The history portrayed by the tourist industry is not always accurate. ● Native American art and culture have not been influenced by tourism. ● The Grand Canyon Railway has benefited many Native American groups. 	<p>Understand relationships between information presented (e.g., cause-effect, compare-contrast, steps in a process)</p> <p>Make connections between or among the pieces of information in a conversation or lecture</p> <p>Make inferences, form generalizations, predict an outcome, and draw conclusions about a statement made in the lecture or conversation based on what is implied</p>

Listening Question Types	Sample Questions	Related Learning Objectives
<p>Pragmatic Understanding: <i>Stance questions</i></p>	<p>Example 1: What does the woman mean when she says this: “All of Europe. Hmm...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● She knows which book the man needs. ● She is too busy to find the information for the man. ● She is not sure she has heard the man correctly. ✓ She is not sure she can find the information for the man. <p>Example 2: Replay:</p> <p>Speaker 1 Hm, well... I'd still call it a planet. Like I said before... it may be small, but it's got an atmosphere and a moon, it orbits the Sun and...</p> <p>Speaker 2 Come on... it's obviously a KBO. I mean, it's in the Kuiper belt, it's made of the same materials, it orbits the same way and it's way smaller than any other planet. I think it's clear.</p> <p>What can be inferred about the students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● They both disagree with the professor's conclusion. ● The woman has not yet reached a conclusion about Pluto. ● The man easily convinced the woman to change her mind. ✓ They have come to different conclusions about Pluto. 	<p>Recognize a speaker's attitude</p> <p>Recognize a speaker's degree of certainty</p> <p>Recognize how stress and intonation help convey the speaker's intended meaning</p> <p>Make inferences, form generalizations, and draw conclusions about a speaker's attitude and degree of certainty</p>
<p>Pragmatic Understanding: <i>Function questions</i></p>	<p>What does the professor mean when he says this: [This text will only be heard.]</p> <p>Professor Now there's some AHP software out there that lets you do the math, but I'm not gonna get into that level of detail now. The important thing that I want to talk about is not the mathematics of it so much as the concept.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● He wants the students to use the AHP software for an assignment. ● He does not think the AHP software is useful. ✓ He wants to give only a general explanation of AHP. ● He thinks the students can understand the mathematics without his help. 	<p>Recognize a speaker's purpose or motivation (e.g., apologizing, complaining, suggesting)</p> <p>Recognize how stress and intonation help convey the speaker's intended meaning</p> <p>Make inferences, form generalizations, and draw conclusions about a speaker's purpose or motivation</p>