Speaking Section Directions

In the Speaking section of the TOEFL iBT test, you will be able to demonstrate your ability to speak in English about a variety of topics by answering four questions.

In the test, the first question is about a familiar topic. Your response is scored on your ability to speak clearly and coherently about the topic. In the next two questions, your responses are based on what you have read and heard. First you will read a short text, either about a campus-related change or an academic topic. The text will go away, and then you will listen to either a conversation about the campus-related change or a short lecture on the academic topic.

You will then be asked a question about what you have read and heard. You need to combine appropriate information from the text and the talk to provide a complete answer to the question. For the final question, you will listen to part of a lecture on an academic topic. You will then be asked to summarize the main points of what you heard. Your responses to these questions are scored on your ability to speak clearly and coherently and on your ability to accurately convey information about what you have read and/or heard.

During the test, you can take notes while you read and while you listen to the conversations and lectures, and you can use your notes to help prepare your response. Listen carefully to the directions for each question. The directions are not written on the screen. You will be given a short time to prepare your response (15 to 30 sections, depending on the question). A clock shows how much preparation time remains. When the preparation time is up, you will be told to begin your response. A clock shows how much response time remains. A message appears on the screen when the response time has ended.

In this practice test, you will not record your responses. Instead, you will read sample responses. If you wish to practice your responses, you may do so by setting a timer and recording yourself using your own device.

Speaking Set 1

Online or Classroom

State whether you agree or disagree with the following statement. Then explain your reasons, using specific details in your explanation.

Learning through online courses is more effective than learning in the traditional classroom setting.

If this were an actual test question, you would have 15 seconds to prepare your response and 45 seconds to record your response.

Preparation Time: 15 seconds
Record Time: 45 seconds

This is a high-level response.

Transcript: Learning through online courses more effect than learning the traditional classroom setting because of three reasons. The first is that you can take the courses wherever you are once you have the computer and uh internet and second is that a discussion on the classes could be more easily for some students who are very shy to discuss with the friends, classmates and professor face to face. They can talk whatever they like if they face a computer. What's more, it could be much easier for the students to hand in their assignment. They just could uh…they could just send the email to the professor and uh the professor can give the commen..uh commendator [unintelligible] of assignments in the email so I believe learning thorough…

Overall, this speaker provides a full response. She states her opinion and provides three different, well-developed reasons for it. For the most part, the speakers is clear and easy to understand. The major weakness, which prevents the response from scoring at the highest level, is the imprecise vocabulary and minor grammatical errors. She makes several minor errors of word choice, word form, verb tense, prepositions, and so on. However, these errors seldom obscure meaning for the listener. For example, she said, "…they can talk whatever they like if they face a computer…" but she should have said, "they can say whatever they like if they are facing a computer…" In her last sentence, she struggled to communicate the idea that the professor "could give comments on assignments by email."
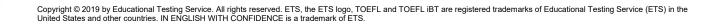
Speaking Set 2

Banning Bicycles

Narrator   Read the article from a university newspaper. You will have 50 seconds to read the article. Begin reading now.

Reading Time: 50 seconds

University to Prohibit Bicycles on Campus

Beginning next semester, the University will not allow the use of bicycles on campus. The campus sidewalks are intended for pedestrians and receive heavy pedestrian traffic. Several minor accidents have resulted from people on bicycles colliding with people walking, and although no one has been seriously hurt, University officials feel that bicycles pose a safety risk. Furthermore, the prohibition of bicycles will not be a problem for students, since the university currently operates a convenient alternative: the free campus bus system, which runs between all campus buildings.

Narrator	Now listen to a conversation between two students.
Male Student	Hey, Sue, did you see this article?
Female Student	Yeah, I did. I don't think that's a very good idea.
Male Student	Really? You don't think it's a safety hazard, like they said?
Female Student	No—at least not during the day. I'm pretty sure both of those accidents happened at night, when it's harder to see cyclists. They didn't say that in the article.
Male Student	Oh, that does make a difference.
Female Student	Sure it does. Maybe at night, with low visibility, there's a safety hazard. But I don't think there's any danger in the daytime...which is when most people need to move around and get to classes.
Male Student	Yeah, that makes sense.
Female Student	Besides, it's such a big campus, if they do this, it's going to be really hard to get around.
Male Student	Well, we can always take the bus I guess.
Female Student	But the buses only run once an hour.
Male Student	That's true. They're not very convenient.
Female Student	No, not at all. If people have to take the bus, we'll end up sitting around waiting for the next one all the time. And we're all too busy to waste our time doing that.

The woman expresses her opinion of the proposed policy change. State her opinion, and explain the reasons she gives for holding that opinion.

If this were an actual test question, you would have 30 seconds to prepare your response and 60 seconds to record your response.

| Preparation Time: 30 seconds |
| Record Time: 60 seconds |

This is a mid-level response.

Transcript: Well, the newspaper uh notice that uh the students cannot use bicycles because it is considered as a safe re…safe risk. But uh, the woman, the girl does not agree with it uh…she thinks that first uh [pause] the bus uh the bus cause accident uh mainly because when it's night people cannot see each other clearly and uh during daytime uh bike…a bicycle is very safe. And the second, she thinks that she thinks that the campus is quite big and not using bicycles causes very causes very inconvenience to uh get to classes. And finally although she thinks although the uh campus support provide bus but it's not..is…

The speaker seems to have understood some of the key points from the reading and the conversation. However, many important details are missing or incorrectly expressed in his response. For example, he incorrectly says that "the bus cause accident" but the reading suggested that accidents on sidewalks occurred when bicycles ran into pedestrians. Numerous vocabulary and grammar errors sometimes make it difficult to understand the speaker's intended message. For example, it is not clear what is meant by phrases such as "…very causes very inconvenience…", or "…campus support provide bus…" The speech is mostly clear and easy to understand, although the speaker repeats "uh" throughout the responses, which is often distracting to the listener.

Speaking Set 3

Behavior Modification

Narrator   Now read the passage from a psychology textbook. You have 45 seconds to read the passage. Begin reading now.

Reading Time: 45 seconds

Behavior Modification

Individuals often modify their behavior based on what they have learned about the possible consequences of their actions. When an individual learns through experience that a certain behavior results in pleasant consequences, that behavior is likely to be repeated. An unpleasant consequence, on the other hand, discourages further repetition of the behavior. While behavior modification can be observed in experiments, it also occurs frequently in everyday settings, when individuals change their behavior based on what they have learned about the consequences of that behavior.

Narrator   Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic in a psychology class.

Male Student   This happens all the time with kids, in schools. Say there's a little boy or girl who's just starting school. Well, they're not really used to the rules about proper behavior for a classroom, so at the beginning, they might, I don't know, interrupt the teacher, walk around the classroom when they're supposed to be sitting down. You know, just misbehaving in general. OK, but what happens? Well, the teacher gets angry with them when they act this way. They might get punished--they have to sit at their desks when everyone else is allowed to go outside and play. And they certainly don't like that. Soon they'll learn that this kind of behavior gets them in trouble. They'll also learn that when they raise their hand to talk to the teacher and sit quietly and pay attention during class... they're rewarded. The teacher tells them she's proud of them, and maybe puts little happy-face stickers on their homework. Now that their behavior gets a good reaction from the teacher, the kids learn to always act this way in class... and not behave the way they used to.

Using the example from the lecture, explain what behavior modification is and how it works.
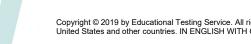
If this were an actual test question, you would have 30 seconds to prepare your response and 60 seconds to record your response.

| Preparation Time: 30 seconds |
| Record Time: 60 seconds |

This is a high-level response.

Transcript: Behavior modification is defined as uh people's, uh chan-people's changing their behavior based on their experiences about the consequences of the behaviors. And according to reading too, the patt-um, behavior modification can be observed both in experiments and in real life. The professor gives a example of-of observation of the modification in real life about kids. First when kids first moved in school, they do not know the rules, so they do things like, uh, walking around when they're not supposed to or talking, uh, when teacher's speaking. This behaviors will result in punishments like um, the teacher's, uh, reproaching them about how inappropriate that is. And soon-soon--soon they learn to behave better, um, because uh if they learn to raise hands, um, and or keeps out in the class is more pleasant, teachers praise them, through this they learned, um, this behavior is better for them.

Overall, the speaker is clear and easy to understand. His pronunciation is generally good and he uses intonation effectively to express meaning. He is able to use a range of simple and complex grammatical structures and vocabulary to express his ideas, although he makes several minor errors such as errors in agreement ("this behaviors") and dropping pronouns and articles ("learn to raise [their] hands"). These errors don't obscure meaning for the listener. His vocabulary use is often very precise and effective ("…reproaching them about how inappropriate that is…"). His definition of behavior modification is clear and accurate. He is able to summarize key points from the lecture to support the definitions. Overall, this is a mostly coherent and accurate synthesis of the reading and listening material.

Speaking Set 4

Reliability vs Features

Narrator	Listen to part of a lecture in a business class.
Female Professor	If a consumer has to choose between two products, what determines the choice? Assume that someone, a purchaser, is choosing between two products that cost the same. OK? If people have a choice between two identically priced products, which one will they choose? They choose the one they think is of higher quality, of course. But what does it mean for a product to be a high-quality product? Well, business analysts usually speak of two major factors of quality—one factor is reliability, and the other is what we call features.

So, reliability. What's reliability? Well, a product is reliable if it works the way we expect it to work, if it can go a reasonable amount of time without needing repairs. If a product, a car for example, doesn't work the way it should and needs repairs too soon, we say it's [stress on the first syllable] unreliable. So, product reliability means, basically, the absence of defects or problems that you weren't expecting. [pause] It used to be that when people thought about product quality, they thought mainly about reliability. Today it's different. People do still care about reliability, don't get me wrong. It's just that manufacturing standards are so now so high that, take cars for example, today, today's cars all very reliable. So reliability is important, but it's not gonna be the deciding factor.

So, if reliability isn't the deciding factor any more, what is? Features—all those extras, the things a product has that aren't really necessary but that make it easier to use or that make it cool: for example, new cars today are loaded with features like electric windows, sun roofs, air conditioning, stereos, and so forth. When people are comparing products today, they look at features—because reliability's pretty much equal cross the board. And that's why manufacturers include so many features in their products.

Using points and examples from the lecture, explain the two major factors of product quality and how their role in consumer decision making has changed.

If this were an actual test question, you would have 20 seconds to prepare your response and 60 seconds to record your response.

| Preparation Time: 20 seconds |
| Record Time: 60 seconds |

This is a mid-level response.

Transcript: For example, you're going to purchase something which has the same price, so the choices, or the things that you have to look on is, uh, the quality, since they have the same price. So what do you mean by, uh, quality? So we're looking the reliability as well as the features. So when is it reliable, it should work the way it should work, while with the features, what are present in the product. Now normally, if, uh, people purchase things now, they look more in the features rather than the reliability of the product. They, they look more on the things that the present and not on its use, which is actually not necessary. So, people tend to, or the consumers tend to focus more on the features rather than the reliability.

While the speaker's pronunciation is clear and intonation is effective, the content is very vague and incomplete. Listeners who are not familiar with the lecture she is describing, would not be able to understand it from her response. Her response captures a few key ideas from the lecture. However, she does not connect her ideas by using helpful transitional expressions, and as a result, the content is often difficult for the listener to follow. She also does not include any specific details such as the information about buying a car to help explain her ideas. So while she attempts to explain two aspects of quality, reliability and features, her explanation is vague and not complete.