

Establishing TOEFL iBT Test Score Requirements for Entrance to Universities

A standardized assessment can be a useful tool for evaluating university applicants from diverse educational backgrounds. A critical aspect of any assessment is determining what score should be required for acceptance to a particular university. A process for establishing score requirements for the TOEFL iBT test has been developed by Educational Testing Service to assist universities with this effort.

The TOEFL iBT test is a measure of academic English proficiency for speakers of other languages. The test provides information about a test taker's proficiency in Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing. In this paper, we provide a description of each section of the test and the language construct measured in each section. We then describe two methods for establishing score requirements: one for selected response sections (based on a modified Angoff approach, described in Zieky et al, 2008) and one for constructed response sections. We refer to a variety of recommended guidelines, such as those proposed by Cizek and Bunch, 2007, to support the rationale of the methodologies.

To set score requirements, a panel of faculty members, university administrators (e.g., admissions directors), and ESL instructors at a university is convened. The first step in the standard-setting process is to define the language skills of an applicant with minimally acceptable language ability. For the constructed response sections, the panel makes judgments on whether a test taker's actual responses provide evidence of minimally acceptable skills; for the selected response sections, the panel makes judgments about whether a person with minimally acceptable skills will answer each item correctly.

The panel's recommendations for score requirements are reviewed by university decision makers, utilizing current performance data. Universities are encouraged to review the score requirements periodically, as new performance data become available.

Cizek, G. J., & Bunch, M. B. (2007). *Standard setting: A guide to establishing and evaluating performance standards on tests*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zieky, M. J., Perie, M., & Livingston, S. (2008). *Cutscores: A manual for setting standards of performance on educational and occupational tests*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service.

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