



## TOEFL and IELTS

The TOEFL and IELTS tests are the most widely accepted tests used by host universities to ensure that students and staff contemplating a semester abroad (academic mobility) have an adequate level of English.

Before you decide on which test to take, check the website of your host university to see which tests they accept and what your score needs to be in these. Your decision will primarily be based on this information. However, these days many universities accept both. Here are some pointers that should help you decide if you have a choice:

### Level of difficulty

Both tests are challenging. The IELTS takes 2 hours 55 minutes, and the TOEFL test takes 3 hours. Each test contains its own degree of difficulty. Anyone investigating both tests will have their own opinion about which one is easier, largely based on their personal preferences and skills.

### Acceptance

**From the TOEFL website:** *“The TOEFL test is accepted at more than 11,500 universities worldwide.”*

**From the IELTS website:** *“IELTS is accepted by more than 8,000 organisations in over 135 countries, including all Ivy League colleges.”*

### Computer or pen-and-paper?

TOEFL iBT (internet-based test) is completed using a computer. In Switzerland, you can choose to take the computer-based or pen-and-paper version of the IELTS test. If you choose the computer-based version, the speaking part is taken face-to-face on the same day as the rest of the test. The computer-based IELTS will provide you with your test results faster (approx. 3-5 days) than the paper version. Think about which format you prefer and consider your keyboarding and handwriting skills.

### Microphone or examiner?

In the TOEFL iBT speaking section you have to speak into a microphone, while in the IELTS speaking section you have a face-to-face interview with an examiner. This can make a significant difference to your success, depending on your personal preference.

### Scoring

The tests do not have a pass/fail. You get a score that shows your level of English, in TOEFL the maximum is 120 points, in IELTS 1-9 points (with half points). Your host university will state the number of points you need to achieve in which test.

### Spelling

TOEFL iBT uses multiple-choice questions in the reading and listening sections. You do not have to write words, so if your spelling is very weak, this might be an advantage over IELTS, where some tasks require you to write words.

### Listening language

These days, both tests use a variety of accents in the listening tasks. However, as a general rule, TOEFL is based in the US, while IELTS is British. Traditionally, if you're going to the US or Canada, you would tend towards TOEFL, while for the UK, Australia, and New Zealand you would choose IELTS; however, these days, this is no longer as clear cut.

### Disabilities and health related needs

Both tests are set up to provide assistance to test takers with disabilities and health-related needs. Make sure you include a precise description of your needs at registration.

**On the next page you will find a more detailed comparison of the two tests**

## General comparison

	TOEFL iBT	IELTS (Academic and General)
Validity	2 years	2 years
English	Tends towards US English	Tends towards UK English
Length	3 hours	2 hours 55 minutes
Format	One sitting (plan for a full day)	One or two sittings: Listening (1), Reading (2), Writing (3): All on the same day Speaking: Either on the same day, or up to 7 days before or after the other sections
Type of test	It tests English for academic study	There are two options: <i>Academic</i> (for academic study: 75% of test takers) <i>General</i> (for immigration, work: 25% of test takers) NB: Listening and speaking sections are the same for both options NB: The General IELTS is slightly easier than the Academic IELTS but is not valid for academic mobility
Mode, location	Computer-based, at a test center	Pen-and-paper at a test center Computer-based at home (IELTS online) or at a test center
Cost	In Switzerland US\$ 360 as of February 2023	Paper-based test: CHF 370 Computer-delivered test: CHF 390
Scores	0-24 (below basic) – 120 (C2)	2 (A1) – 9 (C2) with half points possible
Further support	Sample exams, TV channel, video library, online practice on the website; additional tools for ongoing learning, e.g. reading list for your level	Sample exams and additional information on website
Information	<a href="http://www.ets.org/toefl">www.ets.org/toefl</a>	<a href="http://www.ielts.org">www.ielts.org</a> , <a href="http://www.ielts.ch">www.ielts.ch</a>

## Comparison of sections

	TOEFL iBT	IELTS Academic
Reading	54-72 mins*	60 mins
	3-4 passages, 10 questions each All answers are multiple choice or a variation thereof *NB: The long version of this section will include a test question that TOEFL want to pilot. Candidates who receive this option are randomly selected. Most candidates will have just 3 passages.	3 passages, totaling 2000-2750 words 12-14 questions per passage, 40 questions in all Various question types (you must familiarize yourself with, and practice, these types of questions before the exam)
Listening	41-57 mins	30 mins, plus 10 mins transfer time
	2 main topic areas: Campus conversations and academic lectures You listen first, then answer questions All answers are multiple choice	You listen and write at the same time Various question types (e.g. gap filling, matching, multiple choice) Spelling must be correct
Speaking	17 mins	11-14 mins
	You speak into a microphone 4 speaking tasks For each task, you talk for 45-60 seconds	You sit face-to-face with an examiner The test is recorded 3 stages: 1. Warm-up task (speaking about yourself) 2. You are given a task (monologue, "Speaking for 2 minutes") 3. Examiner asks you questions that elaborate on the previous task
Writing	50 mins (30 + 20 mins)	60 mins (20 mins + 40 mins)
	<b>Task 1 – Integrated task (20 mins)</b> 150-225 words (no penalty for more) You read a short academic passage of 230-300 words (3 minutes reading time), then listen to a short lecture (230-300 words, 2 mins listening time) on the same topic (supporting or contradicting the reading) and take notes. You then integrate information from	<b>Task 1 – Description of a visual (20 mins)</b> At least 150 words You are given a table, graph, or chart and describe the information given in 2-3 paragraphs <b>Task 2 – Argumentative essay (40 mins)</b> At least 250 words, 3-4 paragraphs 1 topic given (no choice)

	<p>the passage and the listening, answering a question that is given</p> <p><b>Task 2 – Individual task (30 mins)</b> 300 words (minimum) 1 topic given (no choice)</p>	
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