

II-3. TOEFL Reading Task Types

People worldwide learn from academic texts and other academic materials in English. In their daily lives, people also need to navigate a wide range of reading material they encounter, from concise information like receipts, schedules, signs, and menus to more expanded informal texts such as webpages, news and magazine articles, emails, and text messages. The reading questions assess a test taker's ability to comprehend both academic and nonacademic texts from various English-speaking contexts. Reading skills are measured with the following task types: *Complete the Words* (C-test), *Read in Daily Life*, and *Read an Academic Passage*.

Complete the Words (C-test)

Reading—or more precisely, the ability to process written texts for meaning and form—is tested on the basis of the C-test format (see Figure 1). The C-test presents test takers with paragraph-length texts drawn from authentic sources. Following an intact first sentence, the second half of every second word is deleted, and the examinee must provide the missing letters. Each text contains 10 truncated words. Each text is a passage that presents a coherent and self-contained meaning unit. In other words, text meaning should not depend on information contained in other preceding or following passages. Texts are sampled and adapted from authentic, first-language sources. Texts should reflect common, widely accessible topics that are not highly specialized, do not rely on technical vocabulary or jargon, and do not feature excessive use of proper nouns. Texts should be based on standard, grammatically accurate written English, and not on hybridized forms of written communication (e.g., chat) or transcribed/reported dialogue.

Figure 1. Example of *Complete the Words* Task Type

Fill in the missing letters in the paragraph.

Elephants are social animals that live in groups called herds. They commu_____ using sou_____, gestures, a____ touch. These ani_____ are kn_____ for th_____ strong fam_____ bonds and of_____ help ea_____ other i_____ times of need. They can remember the locations of water sources and food, which helps them survive in their natural environment. These highly intelligent creatures play an important role in their ecosystems, shaping the landscape, creating access to moisture, and spreading seeds.

Source: TOEFL iBT® test, ETS

Read in Daily Life

The *Read in Daily Life* task includes short, nonacademic texts commonly encountered in daily life around the world (see Figures 2a and 2b). Examples of texts include a poster, sign, or notice; menu; social media post or webpage; schedule; email; chain of text messages; advertisements; news article; form; invoice; or receipt. The texts can be anywhere from 15 to 150 words and include two or three multiple-choice questions depending on the length of the text. The questions require test takers to

- understand information in common, nonlinear text formats;
- identify the main purpose of a written communication;
- understand informal language, including common idiomatic expressions;
- make inferences based on text;
- understand telegraphic language; and
- skim and scan for information.

Figure 2a. Example of *Read in Daily Life* Task Type: Read an Email

Read an email.

| | |
|----------|-------------------------------|
| To: | jhsigh36@gmail.com |
| From: | emmaj.onlinecourses@gmail.com |
| Date: | 08/17/2025 |
| Subject: | You're in! |

Dear Mr. Singh,

Your registration for the online coding course, which begins on October 5th at 9:00 AM, is complete. Login details will be sent a day before the course begins. If you would like to cancel your registration, let us know by October 3rd.

Best regards,

Emma Johnson

What is the main purpose of the email?

☐ To cancel registration for a course
☐ To confirm registration for a course
☐ To provide information about a course
☐ To request payment for a course

Source: TOEFL iBT® test, ETS

Figure 2b. Example of *Read in Daily Life* Task Type: Read a Poster

Read a poster.

Join the Annual Community Volunteer Day!

Date: April 22 | Time: 9:00 A.M. - 2:00 P.M.

Location: Central Park, Melbourne

Make a positive impact in your community by participating in our Annual Community Volunteer Day. Activities you can join:

- **Park Cleanup:**
Help us keep our park beautiful by picking up litter and maintaining green spaces.
- **Tree Planting:**
Contribute to the environment by planting trees and shrubs in designated areas.
- **Community Garden:**
Assist in preparing and planting the community garden, where residents can grow their own fruits and vegetables.
- **Educational Workshops:**
Attend workshops on sustainability, recycling, and conservation taught by local experts.

We encourage everyone, regardless of age or experience, to join in these activities.

All participants will receive a free T-shirt and refreshments.
Please wear comfortable clothing and bring gloves if you have them.

What is the main purpose of the poster?

☐ To recruit new members for a club
☐ To promote a community volunteer event
☐ To announce a new park initiative
☐ To advertise a gardening workshop

Source: TOEFL iBT® test, ETS

Read an Academic Passage

The *Read an Academic Passage* task includes short expository passages typical of those in secondary and higher education (see Figure 3). The task is designed so that background knowledge is not required. The passages cover topics drawn from subject areas such as history, art and music, business and economics, life science, physical science, and social science. The texts are approximately 200 words and are typically followed by five questions that may ask about factual information, vocabulary in context, inferences, relationships between ideas, and the purpose of part or all of the text. The questions require test takers to

- identify the main ideas and basic context of a short, linear text;
- understand the important details in a short text;
- understand the range of grammatical structures used by academic writers;
- infer meaning from information that is not explicitly stated;
- understand a broad range of academic vocabulary;
- understand a range of figurative and idiomatic expressions;
- understand ideas expressed with grammatical complexity;
- understand the relationship between ideas across sentences and paragraphs; and
- recognize the rhetorical structure of all or part of a written text.

Figure 3. Example of *Read an Academic Passage* Task Type

The Mirror Test

Very young children cannot recognize themselves in a mirror; they usually achieve this milestone around 18 months of age. The ability to recognize oneself in the mirror is considered to be a key component of self-awareness and consciousness for humans. But what about animals?

For many years, scientists have known that members of the great ape family could recognize themselves in mirrors. They measured this by the “mirror test,” which involved putting a colored mark on an ape’s body, and then showing the ape its reflection in a mirror. If the ape tried to remove the mark on its own body, the scientists knew that the ape was recognizing its reflection.

Apes are close relatives of humans, but in recent years, scientists have discovered that other animals also pass the “mirror test.” Elephants and dolphins have shown signs of self-recognition. These, like apes, are highly intelligent animals. But in a more recent experiment, a type of fish called the cleaner fish tried to scrape a mark off its body when it saw itself in the mirror. This suggests that even less intelligent animals may possess more self-awareness than previously suspected.

According to the passage, all of the following are true about elephants EXCEPT:

- ☐ They can recognize themselves in mirrors.
- ☐ They are highly intelligent animals.
- ☐ They possess qualities in common with apes.
- ☐ They understand certain signs from other animals.