TOEFL iBT Writing Rubric (2026): Write an Email & Academic Discussion

Each response gets one 0–5 score against ETS's published scoring guide for that task, which describes what a typical response looks like at every level. Official TOEFL materials emphasize these are evaluated as first drafts. Minor errors are expected and will not prevent a high score.

Build a Sentence: Each of the 10 questions is scored correct or incorrect. There is no partial credit and no rubric — accuracy is binary.

TOEFL Email Writing Rubric Explained

The Email Writing rubric describes how well your email achieves its purpose. Each score level below is our plain-English paraphrase of ETS's Write an Email scoring guide: the wording is ours, the levels and what they cover are ETS's.

5 — Fully successful	• Effective and clearly expressed, with consistent command of language • Elaboration that effectively serves the purpose of the email • Varied sentence structures and precise, idiomatic word choice • Social conventions handled consistently well: politeness, register, how the information is organised, and how requests or refusals are phrased • Almost no errors beyond the slips a competent writer makes under time pressure, such as a common typo or there/their
4 — Generally successful	• Mostly effective and easy to understand; the language is adequate for the task • Enough elaboration to support the purpose • Some variety in sentence structure and appropriate word choice • Social conventions that are mostly appropriate • Few errors in grammar or word use
3 — Partially successful	• Generally gets the task done, but weaker language can leave parts of the message unclear • Elaboration that only partly supports the purpose • A moderate range of sentence structures and vocabulary • Some noticeable errors in structure, word forms, idiomatic language or social conventions
2 — Mostly unsuccessful	• An attempt at the task that is mostly ineffective; the message may be limited or hard to interpret • Little elaboration, or elaboration that is off the point • Some connected sentences, but a narrow range of structures and vocabulary • Errors in sentence structure and language use that pile up
1 — Unsuccessful	• An ineffective attempt; the message may be too limited to understand • Very little elaboration, if any • Short, disconnected phrases with very limited vocabulary • Serious and frequent language errors • Little original language: most of the coherent wording is borrowed from the prompt
0 — No score (Email)	• Blank, rejects the topic, not in English, copied entirely from the prompt, unconnected to the prompt, or random keystrokes

TOEFL Academic Discussion Rubric Explained

The Academic Discussion rubric describes how well you contribute to an online class discussion. It shares the 0–5 scale with Email Writing but has no social-conventions criterion. Each level below paraphrases ETS's Write for an Academic Discussion scoring guide in our own words.

5 — Fully successful	• A relevant, very clearly expressed contribution to the online discussion, with consistent command of language • Relevant explanations, examples or details that are well elaborated • A variety of sentence structures used effectively, with precise, idiomatic word choice • Almost no errors beyond the slips a competent writer makes under time pressure
4 — Generally successful	• A relevant contribution whose ideas are easy to understand • Relevant explanations, examples or details, adequately elaborated • A variety of sentence structures and appropriate word choice • Few errors in grammar or word use
3 — Partially successful	• A mostly relevant, mostly understandable contribution, with some command of language • Part of an explanation, example or detail may be missing, unclear or off the point • Some variety in sentence structure and a range of vocabulary • Some noticeable errors in sentence structure, word forms or idiomatic language
2 — Mostly unsuccessful	• An attempt to contribute, but language problems can make the ideas hard to follow • Ideas that are poorly elaborated or only partly relevant • A limited range of sentence structures and vocabulary • Errors in sentence structure, word forms or usage that pile up
1 — Unsuccessful	• An ineffective attempt; language problems may stop the ideas from coming through • Words and phrases that show an attempt at the task, with few or no coherent ideas • A severely limited range of sentence structures and vocabulary • Serious and frequent language errors • Little original language: most of the coherent wording is borrowed from the prompt
0 — No score (Academic Discussion)	• Blank, rejects the topic, not in English, copied entirely from the prompt, unconnected to the prompt, or random keystrokes

From a 0–5 Rubric Score to Your 1–6 Writing Score

The rubric gives each Write an Email and Academic Discussion response a task score from 0 to 5. Your score report shows a different number: a Writing section score on the 2026 band scale of 1 to 6, in half-band steps, which also reflects your Build a Sentence accuracy.

ETS publishes both scales but has not published how raw writing performance is converted into a band, so any table that turns a rubric score into an exact band is an estimate. LingoLeap's practice reports use their own conversion; the method and its limits are set out in lingoleap.ai/toefl/writing-feedback-explained.

When you practise, track your 0–5 criterion scores rather than the band. A half-point gain on the rubric can stay inside the same band, so the rubric shows progress the band hides.

How to Use the Rubrics in Practice

1. **Self-Evaluate After Every Practice Response.** After writing a timed response, re-read it and score yourself against the rubric dimensions. Be honest about which areas are strong and which need work.
2. **Focus on Your Weakest Dimension First.** If your content is strong but your organization is weak, prioritize structure in your next practice sessions. Targeted improvement is faster than general practice.
3. **Compare Your Work to Score Band Descriptions.** Ask yourself: does this response look more like a 3 or a 4? Identify specifically what's missing to reach the next level.
4. **Practice the First-Draft Mindset.** Don't aim for perfection — aim for clear, complete, well-organized communication. Spending time polishing every sentence can cost you time better spent on development.
5. **Get External Feedback.** Self-evaluation has limits. Use AI-powered tools, a tutor, or a study partner to get objective rubric-aligned feedback on your responses.

Plain-English paraphrase of ETS's published TOEFL iBT scoring guides for Write an Email and Writing for an Academic Discussion; not an official ETS document. TOEFL is a registered trademark of ETS. Full guide, scored examples and a free email checker: lingoleap.ai/toefl/writing-rubrics