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# TOEFL Speaking 26+

TEMPLATES  
AND STRATEGIES





## TOEFL Speaking 26+ *Templates and Strategies*



## **TOEFL Speaking 26+ Templates and Strategies**

### Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide TOEFL takers with the structure and vocabulary needed to earn a high score in the TOEFL Speaking section. There is a ton of important and useful information packed into this document, so take it slow and be sure to experiment.

For TOEFL beginners, it is recommended that you stick to the basic templates and look through other sections for ideas. When starting out, you should try to keep your responses clear and simple, so stick to the basic templates at first.

For experienced TOEFL takers, if you have not yet reached your score, one of the reasons may be due to a lack of vocabulary, which the Advanced Words and Phrases section addresses. You may also be having some trouble linking words and sounds together, which you can learn more about in the Linking Phrases and Reduced Words section.

This is only advice. Reading this document alone will not improve your speaking score, which is why one of our principles states the following:

*Principle #2: Active thought and consistent practice are required.*

Be sure to take this information and use it when you practice. Through exercise, you will discover which words and phrases feel most comfortable.

### Basic Templates

There are four questions in the TOEFL Speaking section. This document will not discuss the structure of each question in the speaking section. If you would like to know about the speaking section, refer back to *TST Prep's TOEFL Quick Guide*. The purpose of this part is to share the basic templated response for each question, along with a time breakdown so you know how to pace yourself when you speak.



BASIC TEMPLATE: QUESTION 1		
Template	Content	Time
<i>To me, I definitely think that...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restate the question</li> <li>- Give your opinion</li> <li>- One specific reason for your opinion</li> </ul>	0 - 10 seconds
<i>I remember when...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A personal example or anecdote connected to your reason</li> </ul>	11 - 22 seconds
<i>*On top of that...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State the second reason for your opinion</li> </ul>	23 - 27 seconds
<i>*For example...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide a personal example or anecdote connected to the second reason</li> </ul>	28 - 40 seconds
<i>So, to sum up...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restate your opinion</li> <li>- Restate the question</li> </ul>	41-45 seconds

\*These rows are optional. You can respond with either two reasons and examples **or** just one.

BASIC TEMPLATE: QUESTION 2		
Template	Content	Time
<i>The reading passage (announces a change on campus/proposes a change to campus policy).</i> <i>In particular... (state the change or proposal).</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce the reading passage</li> <li>- State the change or proposal</li> </ul>	0 - 15 seconds
<i>The man/woman in the conversation is (in favor of/against) this idea.</i> <i>To start, he/she says that... (explain the 1st reason for his/her stance).</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transition to the conversation</li> <li>- State one speaker's opinion</li> <li>- State one specific reason</li> </ul>	16 - 35 seconds
<i>Secondly, he/she explains that (describe the 2nd reason for his/her stance).</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- State the second specific reason</li> </ul>	36 - 54 seconds
<i>As you can see, the man/woman in the listening clearly agrees/disagrees with this plan.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Restate the speaker's stance</li> </ul>	55 - 60 seconds



**BASIC TEMPLATE: QUESTION 3**

Template	Content	Time
<i>According to the reading, (topic) is (topic definition).</i>	- Introduce the reading topic - Define the topic	0 - 10 seconds
<i>In the lecture, the professor delves deeper into this subject by providing an example of/two examples of (topic).</i> <i>To start, the lecturer explains that (first example of topic).</i>	- Transition to the lecture - State first example - Expand on first example	11 - 32 seconds
<i>He/She goes on to say (second example of topic).</i>	- State second example - Expand on second example	33 - 54 seconds
<i>So, after listening, I now have a better understanding of what (topic) is.</i>	- Provide conclusion to topic	55 - 60 seconds

**BASIC TEMPLATE: QUESTION 4**

Template	Content	Time
<i>The professor goes into a ton of detail about (topic), which (detail/definition).</i>	- Introduce the topic - Elaborate on the topic	0 - 12 seconds
<i>After introducing the topic, the lecturer mentions that (example 1 including details).</i>	- Introduce first example - Give details about first example	13 - 34 seconds
<i>He/She goes on to say that (example 2 including details).</i>	- Introduce second example - Give details about second example	34 - 55 seconds
<i>So, after hearing this lecture, I now have a better understanding of (topic).</i>	- Wrap it up with a conclusion	56 - 60 seconds



Advanced Words and Phrases

Some TOEFL students need a 26 or higher in the TOEFL Speaking section for their career. If you earn a 26 or higher on the TOEFL, it implies that you are a proficient English speaker, so it is hard to earn (Papageorgiou, Tannenbaum, Bridgeman, & Cho, 2015). One way to help boost your score is to use a wide range of vocabulary. The following is a list of synonymous words and phrases you can use to start and finish each question type. These two tables are followed by phrases, adverbs, and idioms that you may consider including in your responses to help boost your score.

INTRODUCTORY PHRASES	
#1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think/believe/feel that...</li> <li>• Personally speaking...</li> <li>• To be honest...</li> <li>• I've never thought about this before, but...</li> <li>• I have to say that...</li> </ul>
#2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (introduce listening) Right off the bat, the man says that he doesn't like...</li> <li>• (introduce listening) The woman is perfectly fine with...</li> <li>• (introduce listening) The man isn't crazy about...</li> <li>• It looks like there is a change on the university campus. You see...</li> </ul>
#3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One interesting thing I learned from the reading is that...</li> <li>• The reading passage goes into detail about...</li> <li>• (introduce listening) The professor provides a crystal clear example of this.</li> </ul>
#4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I had never heard of (topic) until now, and it's kind of interesting.</li> <li>• Basically, the professor talks about...</li> <li>• In the lecture, the professor discusses...</li> </ul>

CONCLUSION PHRASES	
#1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So, that's why...</li> <li>• As you can see...</li> <li>• To make a long story short...</li> </ul>
#2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These are the main reasons why the woman...</li> <li>• So, just to sum up...</li> <li>• Right, well, on the whole, it looks like the man...</li> </ul>
#3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• And so, yeah, this is what the lecturer says about...</li> <li>• So, the main points of the lecture come down to...</li> <li>• Just to wrap things up, the lecturer clearly explains...</li> </ul>
#4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In conclusion, the professor clearly has a firm understanding of...</li> <li>• So, to conclude, the lecturer...</li> <li>• In a nutshell, the professor...</li> </ul>





TRANSITIONAL PHRASES	
<b>EXAMPLES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take ... as an example...</li> <li>• One example of this is...</li> <li>• I remember when...</li> <li>• I once heard about...</li> <li>• I will never forget when...</li> </ul>
<b>OPINIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In my opinion...</li> <li>• I do believe that...</li> <li>• I definitely think that...</li> <li>• If I were asked, I would say that...</li> <li>• To be honest...</li> </ul>
<b>THE READING PASSAGE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to the reading...</li> <li>• The reading passage starts off by saying that...</li> <li>• The author of the reading passage claims...</li> <li>• The short text mentions that...</li> <li>• In the reading...</li> </ul>
<b>THE LISTENING PASSAGE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The professor goes into a ton of detail about...</li> <li>• The listening passage provides an interesting example of...</li> <li>• According to the listening...</li> <li>• Towards the end of the talk, the lecturer says...</li> <li>• Right off the bat, the professor says that...</li> </ul>



POWERFUL ADVERBS		
	Usage	Examples
<b>pretty</b>	This adverb often comes before an adjective and emphasizes that it is accurate and truthful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is a <u>pretty</u> controversial topic nowadays.</li> <li>It was <u>pretty</u> scary to hear the professor say that...</li> </ul>
<b>honestly</b>	Often used in introductions, this adverb implies that the opinion or statement is truthful and accurate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I <u>honestly</u> believe that all high school students should wear school uniforms.</li> <li><u>Honestly</u>, I think it is much better for students to wear school uniforms.</li> </ul>
<b>just</b>	For TOEFL speaking, it sometimes means that it's exact and perfect. Other times it's used with negative expressions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I believe that high school uniforms are <u>just</u> what students need.</li> <li>It's not <u>just</u> the fact that high school uniforms are more convenient...</li> </ul>
<b>really</b>	Emphasizes that something is truthful, accurate, and should be taken seriously.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I <u>really</u> believe that high school uniforms are better for students.</li> <li><u>Really</u>, there is no doubt about it...</li> </ul>
<b>actually</b>	Often used in introductions, this adverb usually precedes surprising information. It also emphasizes the validity of a given statement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Believe it or not, I <u>actually</u> believe that all high school students...</li> <li>They are <u>actually</u> more comfortable than most other kinds of clothes.</li> </ul>
<b>probably</b>	It usually implies that the information that follows is almost certainly true. It is often used in a sentence with two contrasting clauses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's <u>probably</u> better for students to wear school uniforms because...</li> <li>I'm <u>probably</u> wrong about this, but I think all high school students should...</li> </ul>
<b>especially</b>	This adverb is often used to single out one specific person, situation, or object. It is also used to add emphasis, and when this is the case, it acts similarly to "really."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wearing school uniforms connects students, <u>especially</u> outside of class.</li> <li>I <u>especially</u> like the uniforms they wear in Italian schools.</li> </ul>
<b>definitely</b>	When you see this adverb, it usually adds emphasis, implying that something is almost 100% certain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I <u>definitely</u> believe that all high school students should wear school uniforms.</li> <li>It is <u>definitely</u> the case that uniforms are best for high school students.</li> </ul>
<b>basically</b>	Often used in introductions, this adverb is used to indicate that this is the most important or essential information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Basically</u>, wearing school uniforms is a better option when compared to not wearing uniforms.</li> <li>The issue <u>basically</u> started because of one incident.</li> </ul>





IDIOMS AND PHRASES		
	Usage	Examples
<b>a piece of cake</b>	Usually used in independent speaking questions, this idiom implies that something is simple and easy.	This question is <u>a piece of cake</u> .
<b>to make a long story short</b>	This idiom has the same meaning as “to sum up” or “in conclusion.” It’s usually only used at the end of your response.	<u>To make a long story short</u> , I definitely believe that all high school students should wear school uniforms.
<b>right off the bat</b>	This idiom is useful when reporting on the reading or listening passage. It means “in the beginning” or “at first.”	<u>Right off the bat</u> , the woman says that she isn’t crazy about the announcement.
<b>(not) a big deal</b>	Usually used with (not), this idiom implies that the subject is important and meaningful.	It depends on who you ask, but many think that forcing students to wear school uniforms is <u>a big deal</u> .
<b>comes down to</b>	This phrasal verb precedes the most important or essential point.	Whether or not students should wear school uniforms <u>comes down to</u> the opinion of the students.
<b>on top of that</b>	This phrase is used to add another point or reason, similar to the expression “in addition to.”	<u>On top of that</u> , school uniforms do not take into account the different personalities of each student.
<b>a no brainer</b>	Similar to “a piece of cake,” this idiom is used to express that something is easy and simple.	For me, this question is <u>a no brainer</u> . Clearly, high school students should not wear school uniforms.
<b>believe it or not</b>	This is a useful expression to use before expressing an opinion that some might disagree with.	<u>Believe it or not</u> , I do think that high school students should wear school uniforms.
<b>(not) crazy about</b> <b>not a big fan of</b>	Both of these expressions have similar meanings and are used in similar contexts. If you “are not crazy about” or “not a big fan of” something, it is a polite way to imply that you do not really like it.	The man in the conversation <u>isn’t crazy about</u> the change on campus. <u>I’m not really a big fan of</u> uniforms, especially high school uniforms.
<b>to be honest</b>	This expression is usually used before expressing an opinion you truly believe.	<u>To be honest</u> , I think it is a great idea to have high school students wear school uniforms.



### Linking Phrases and Reduced Words

General American English is more relaxed when compared to other languages. Americans tend to bring words together and omit sounds in various words. This is a complicated subject that is beyond the scope of this handout, but there are some expressions that will be uttered on test day. Since speaking speed and word count are graded heavily in the TOEFL Speaking section, linking some phrases together will help you say more in less time while also sounding more natural (Chen et al., 2018).

LINKING PHRASES: QUESTION 1			
	Usage	Pronunciation	Examples
<b>a lot of</b>	A common phrase in place of "many."	<b>ALOTTA</b>	There are <b>a lot of</b> reasons why I feel this way, but the most important is that...
<b>tons of</b>	This is a less common way to say "a lot of."	<b>TONZA</b>	There are <b>tons of</b> reasons why I feel this way, but the most important is that...
<b>when I was</b>	Used when introducing personal examples for independent questions.	<b>WHE NAI WUZ</b>	<b>When I was</b> in high school, we didn't have to wear school uniforms.
<b>to be honest</b>	A phrase used to emphasize that an opinion is true, similar to the adverb "honestly."	<b>TA'BE ONEST</b>	<b>To be honest</b> , I really do think that uniforms are much better for high school students.
<b>that's why</b>	This expression could be used to introduce your conclusion.	<b>THA'TSWY</b>	<b>That's why</b> I think all high school students should wear school uniforms.
<b>to me/ for me</b>	Usually used to begin your speaking response or opinion.	<b>TA'ME Fr'ME</b>	<b>To me/For me</b> , all high school students should wear school uniforms.
<b>one of the</b>	When introducing the reasons for your opinion, use this popular phrase.	<b>WUNoFDA</b>	<b>One of the</b> reasons why I think high school students should wear school uniforms is...



LINKING PHRASES: QUESTIONS 2-4			
	Usage	Pronunciation	Examples
<b>talks about</b>	Often used when responding to questions with a listening passage.	<b>TALK SBOUT</b>	The professor in the lecture <b>talks about</b> the problems with school uniforms.
<b>types of</b>	Usually placed before a noun, indicating differences within the noun.	<b>TYPSA</b>	They are a little ugly, but there are many <b>types of</b> uniforms.
<b>in the</b>	These two words will come before you mention something from the listening or reading.	<b>INDA</b>	<b>In the</b> conversation... <b>In the</b> lecture... <b>In the</b> reading passage...
<b>to start</b>	Sometimes used to begin reporting on one of the passages or on your opinion.	<b>TA START</b>	<b>To start</b> , the student in the conversation explains that...
<b>goes on to</b>	This phrase is used to report on a second point from a conversation or lecture.	<b>GOZ ONDA</b>	The professor <b>goes on to</b> say that school uniforms are comfortable.
<b>examples of</b>	Used specifically for questions #3 and #4, when the professor in the listening provides examples of the reading.	<b>EXAMPLE-ZOF</b>	In the lecture, the professor provides two <b>examples of</b> school uniforms.

Words in English can be divided into two different types: *function words* and *content words*. Function words are put in place to ensure grammatical correctness and show the relationship between content words. Here are the most common **function words**:

- prepositions: *in, at, from, by*
- articles: *a, an, the*
- auxiliary verbs: *be, have, do*
- modals: *could, should, must*
- conjunctions: *and, but, however*
- pronouns: *he, she, they, his, hers, theirs*
- demonstratives: *this, that, these, those*



Do *not* try to memorize all of these words. Keep in mind that these types of words, function words, usually show the relationship between nouns and verbs. They are useful, but on the TOEFL, much of the information you are looking for will be found in **content words**:

- nouns: *cat, table, school*
- adjectives: *lazy, wooden, big*
- adverbs: *quickly, suddenly, timely*
- main verb (not a helping verb): *jump, shake, listen*

Focus most of your attention on nouns and verbs when you speak and reduce function words.

REDUCED WORDS			
	Usage	Pronunciation	Examples
<b>it</b>	When not located at the end of the sentence, it is often reduced to a "d" sound.	<b>He did i'DIN the library.</b>	He did <b>it</b> in the library.
<b>for</b>	The "o" in "for" is usually reduced.	<b>FRDAMAN, he thinks...</b>	<b>For</b> the man, he thinks...
<b>in</b>	Usually, the "i" is reduced and it just sounds like an "n."	<b>i'NDA the lecture...</b>	<b>In</b> the lecture...
<b>and</b>	In many instances, it is completely reduced to an "n" sound that links two words together.	<b>I slept for OWRS-N-OWRS...</b>	I slept for hours <b>and</b> hours...
<b>one</b>	"One" is often used within a phrase, like "one of," where it sounds more like "wun."	<b>WUNoFDA students...</b>	<b>One</b> of the students...
<b>the</b>	In many instances, it is reduced to a "da" or "d" sound. However, this word is common and this is not always the case.	<b>OUDDA ALLDA students...</b>	Out of all <b>the</b> students...
<b>of</b>	Often used with other phrases, this word is often reduced to an "uh" or schwa sound.	<b>I agree that ALLuhDA...</b>	I agree that all <b>of</b> the students...
<b>some</b>	This is hardly ever stressed, but instead, reduced to "s'm."	<b>It's better to have S'M help when you move.</b>	It's better to have <b>some</b> help when you move.
<b>a/an</b>	"A/an" are combined with the word that follows or precedes.	<b>He went TOA school...</b>	He went to <b>a</b> school...



## The TOEFL Speaking Section

There are four different questions in the TOEFL Speaking section. Each is unique in its own way, but according to [ETS' grading criteria](#), these four questions are separated into two types: independent questions and integrated questions. Question one is an independent question, and questions two through four are integrated questions.

Independent Speaking Checklist	
Questions	Notes
1. Did I speak for 42-45 seconds?	
2. Was my introduction 12 seconds or less?	
3. Did I have enough time to include a short conclusion (7 seconds or less)?	
4. Did I look at the clock to monitor my time at least twice?	
5. Did I include at least two transitional words or phrases?	
6. Did I speak at a smooth and even pace for the majority of my response?	
7. Did I speak in a natural and conversational tone (no robot voice)?	
8. Did I elaborate on the topic with a well developed personal example or anecdote?	

Note that there are no numerical score values. The point of this exercise is not for you to assess yourself with a TOEFL-like score, but instead, to identify strengths and weaknesses so you have a better idea of what you need to improve.



The grading criteria is similar for both the independent and integrated speaking responses, with **just a few small changes**.

Integrated Speaking Checklist	
Questions	Notes
1. Did I speak for 57-60 seconds?	
2. Was my introduction 15 seconds or less?	
3. Did I have enough time to include a short conclusion (7 seconds or less)?	
4. Did I look at the clock to monitor my time at least twice?	
5. Did I include at least two transitional words or phrases?	
6. Did I speak at a smooth and even pace for the majority of my response?	
7. Did I speak in a natural and conversational tone (no robot voice)?	
8. Did I include all of the essential information from the reading and listening?	

\*\*\*Note that this criteria is the same for all integrated speaking questions (2, 3, and 4).







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