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Word Smart for the TOEFL

By Vanessa Coggshall

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Acknowledgments

Thanks to the entire staff of The Princeton Review, including Rob Franek, Seamus Mullarkey, and especially Rebecca Lessem. Thanks also to my friends and family for their unwavering support (you’ll see your names throughout this book). Finally, thanks to my head researcher and pivot table creator, Dan Coggshall.
At The Princeton Review, we’ve always tried to make the learning process as enjoyable and interesting as possible.

Theoretically, if you wanted to learn vocabulary, you could read a dictionary. However, that isn’t much fun, and it’s certainly not going to help you do well on a specific standardized test.

So, we figured out how to make learning enjoyable and approachable. We employ this method in our classes, and we write our books with the intention that learning shouldn’t be a chore.

Our first *Word Smart* book, which was published in 1988, showed that learning words can be a pleasant experience. The popularity of that book lead to many other *Word Smart* titles: *Word Smart II, Illustrated Word Smart, Word Smart for the GRE*, and so on. We also added *Grammar Smart, Writing Smart*, and *Math Smart* to the mix.

With this book, we’ve combined our *Word Smart* approach to learning with our *Illustrated Word Smart* philosophy: Creative sentences and memorable illustrations will help you to remember words that you need to know for the TOEFL.

This book contains 250 of the words most commonly seen on the TOEFL, each accompanied by its pronunciation, part of speech, definition, and a clever sentence to help you recall the word’s meaning when you’re taking the test. Many of the words are supplemented with an illustration to further aid your ability to remember the word’s definition.

**What Is the TOEFL?**

The TOEFL is a test that assesses your proficiency in the type of English used in an academic environment. The test is administered on the Internet.

The exam takes about four hours to complete and integrates four essential skills—reading, listening, writing, and speaking. This means that any given question or task may require you to use one or more of these skills. For example, before attempting a writing task on the TOEFL, you may first have to read a passage and listen to a lecture on the topic.

Fortunately, because it tests each of the four skills in fairly specific ways, the TOEFL is not as daunting as it may seem. To become more comfortable with the type of writing, speaking, reading, and listening skills that are required to get a good score on the exam, pick up a copy of *Cracking the TOEFL iBT*, which offers a thorough review of the entire test.
The Structure of the Test

The TOEFL is broken down into four distinct sections, one for each of the skills previously listed. However, each section may require you to use more than one of these four skills. The structure of the test is as follows:

- **One Reading** section, consisting of three to five passages that are roughly 700 words each—Each passage will be followed by 12 to 14 multiple-choice questions about the content of the passage. Most of these questions will be worth one point each, though a few questions, located toward the end of the section, may be worth more. You will have 60 to 100 minutes to complete the entire section.

- **One Listening** section, consisting of six to nine audio selections, each of which are three to five minutes long—The selections will consist of either academic lectures or casual conversations. After each selection, there will be five to six multiple-choice questions about the content of the lecture or conversation. You will have 60 to 90 minutes to complete the entire section.

- **One Speaking** section, consisting of approximately six speaking tasks—Most speaking tasks will also require some listening and some reading. You will have to speak for 45 or 60 seconds, depending on the task, and you will have 20 minutes to complete the entire section.

- **One Writing** section, consisting of two writing assignments—As with the Speaking section, the Writing section requires listening and some reading. You will have 50 minutes to complete the entire section.
How the Test Is Scored

After finishing the TOEFL, you will receive a score of from 0 to 30 for each of the four sections. You will also receive a total score on a scale of 0 to 120. Each score corresponds to a percentile ranking. This number shows how your score compares with the scores of other test takers. For example, a total score of 100 would put you in the 89th percentile, meaning that you scored higher than 89 out of 100 test takers, whereas a score of 50 would put you in the 26th percentile. The average TOEFL score is around 68.

Notice that the 0 to 30 scores are scaled scores, meaning that the 0 to 30 number doesn’t represent how many questions you answered correctly or how many points your essay was awarded. For example, the Reading and Listening sections each contain roughly 40 questions. You will get a point for each correct answer (some Reading section questions will be worth two points) and a penalty for each incorrect answer. At the end of the section, your raw score, which represents how many points you’ve earned, is tallied and converted to a number on the 0 to 30 scale.

The Writing and Speaking sections are scored somewhat differently. Each writing sample receives a score of between 0 and 5. These raw scores are then converted to the 0 to 30 scale. Similarly, each speaking task receives a score of from 0 to 4. The scores from all six speaking tasks are averaged and converted to the 0 to 30 scale.

How Are the Scores Used?

Colleges and universities will look at your TOEFL score when considering your application. Of course, your TOEFL score is not the only factor that affects your chance of admission. Colleges and universities also look at your academic performance, letters of recommendation, application essays, and scores on other standardized tests. Although a high TOEFL score will not guarantee admission to a particular program, a low test score could jeopardize your chances.

Some schools and programs may require students with TOEFL scores below a certain cutoff score to take supplemental English classes. Others may accept only those applicants who score above a particular cutoff score. Make sure you check with the programs to which you are applying for specific information.
The Computer-Based Format Used for Internet-Based Testing (iBT)

The TOEFL is a computer-based test that is delivered to testing centers via the Internet; therefore, the TOEFL can be offered at locations throughout the world. The test is administered by Educational Testing Service (ETS), the same testing organization that administers the GRE, SAT, and other standardized tests. According to ETS, Internet-based testing (iBT) is an easier and a fairer way to capture speech and to score responses. It also makes it possible for ETS to greatly expand access to test centers.

The iBT format will be new to the untrained eye and may be intimidating, especially if you have never taken a test on a computer. A brief tutorial is offered at the beginning of the TOEFL, in order to allow test takers time to familiarize themselves with the format. However, you should consider first taking a practice test at ETS’s TOEFL practice test website, http://toeflpractice.ets.org, so you’re not surprised by the Internet format on test day.

Clearly, you wouldn’t approach a computer-based TOEFL reading passage in the same way that you would approach a paper-based test. For one thing, you won’t be able to underline, circle, or otherwise make marks on the text. (Well, you could, but the testing center probably wouldn’t be happy if you ruined its computer screens!)

Also, on the computer-based TOEFL, you’ll have to take each portion of the test in its entirety. In other words, you cannot skip part of the Reading section, go on to the Listening section, and then return to the Reading section; however, you can skip questions within certain sections of the Reading section.

The audio portions of the test are also computer based, and the speaking portion will ask you to speak into a recording device.

Registering for the TOEFL

The easiest way to register for the TOEFL is online at www.ets.org/toefl/index.html. Because the test is Internet based, many testing times are available, although this isn’t necessarily true overseas. Make sure to register early so that you receive a testing time and location with which you are comfortable.

You may take the TOEFL as many times as you like. Many programs will simply take your best score, but don’t forget to check with admissions counselors from the schools to which you are applying for specific information.
Vocabulary and the TOEFL

Mastering vocabulary is an integral part of succeeding on the TOEFL. On the Reading section, it can aid in comprehension of the passage. It can also help you to identify the correct answer on vocabulary-in-context questions, which give you a word from a passage and ask you to select a synonym from four answer choices.

On the Listening section, mastering vocabulary will allow you to understand conversations and lectures more easily. Also, knowing the definition and spelling of words that you are writing down will help you to take notes quickly, as opposed to pondering every unknown word.

On the Speaking section, your response to the question will be more impressive if you correctly use these vocabulary words, including accurate pronunciation. You will be judged on your use of grammar and vocabulary, as well as other factors, such as delivery. Furthermore, parts of the Speaking section require you to read and understand a passage, for which vocabulary is essential.

On the Writing section, you will again have the luxury of impressing the graders with responses that are rich in vocabulary. And, as with the Speaking section, you will have to read and understand passages, which make learning vocabulary crucial.

As you can see, every section on the TOEFL is impacted by vocabulary. Therefore, mastering these words, their definitions, and the ways in which they are used and pronounced, is an essential step in TOEFL preparation.

How We Chose These Words

We chose the 250 words most commonly seen on the TOEFL. In some cases, these are not the hardest words that you will find on the TOEFL; this is intentional. Studying a hard word that was used on only one TOEFL exam and may never be used again will not help you to do better on the test. In fact, you can find endless lists online that contain incredibly difficult words that appeared on only one TOEFL exam; however, you will most likely not see any of these words when you take the test. We want you to learn words that appear often, so that when you see them, you immediately know them. Why bother learning words that won’t appear on the exam? Spend your studying time and energy wisely.

Furthermore, when the test writers use an incredibly difficult word, often they will add its definition (either in parentheses or after a comma). If you have the definition in front of you, there is no need to master the word ahead of time. When ETS doesn’t define difficult words, they are not often included in the questions and are, thus, unimportant for doing well on the exam. Therefore, studying those endless lists of incredibly challenging words will be a waste of your time as far as doing well on the test goes.
However, studying medium-level words that have been used on more than one TOEFL, and will very likely be used again, will help you do better on the test.

As you flip through this book, you may notice that some of these medium-level words look familiar; you may even believe that you know the meaning. However, before crossing off the word as “learned,” you will want to be sure that you can define the word, know which part of speech it is, how to pronounce it, and how to use it in a sentence.

For instance, you’ve most likely seen the word “advice.” But make sure that you have truly mastered it, and that you know how it differs from the word “advise.” The spelling is the same, except for one letter, but the parts of speech and the meanings are different.

Truly mastering each word in this book, no matter how easy some may look, will make you more prepared for all four sections of the TOEFL on test day.

What we’re saying is that if some of the words in this book sound simple, it’s intentional. Not only are these the words that you will encounter on the test, they are also trickier than they may seem. Though they may sound simple, these words are often unknowingly used incorrectly by test takers.

We have made the definitions as fundamental as possible: There’s no sense in learning a word if the definition is too hard to understand and remember. You can find more complex definitions in a dictionary, but we find that this simple and straightforward approach is best, and that it makes the words easier to remember.

Most words have second and third definitions. For the words in this book, we picked one definition—the definition that is most commonly used on the TOEFL. While you can learn additional definitions by referencing a dictionary, we have saved you time, because the main definitions that we present are the ones you will need to know for the test.

Finally, most words have multiple forms; “reduce” can be “reducing,” “reduced,” and “reduces.” This book presents the forms that are most commonly found on the TOEFL. If “reduced” is repeatedly used on the test, we test you on this form of the word.
How to Use This Book

This book is divided into 17 chapters of related words. For example, the chapter titled “Change Your Tune” is about words that have to do with changing and being different, while the chapter titled “Express Yourself” is about words that relate to giving your opinion and winning an argument. Each chapter represents one manageable set of words that can be learned as a chunk.

If you try to memorize all of these words in one sitting, it won’t work. It takes time to transfer knowledge from your short-term memory to your long-term memory, so take at least three to four days to let your mind absorb the words before moving on to a new chapter. Occasionally, come back to chapters you’ve already read to test your memory and review these words.

At the end of each chapter, you will find drills that quiz you on every word in the chapter. After doing the drills, you can consult the answer key to check your work.

Some chapters have drills that will help you practice your speaking and writing skills. These chapters will ask you to answer a question (either by speaking or writing) using every word in the chapter. While there are many possible answers to these questions, an answer key with sample responses has been provided for you. Another way to practice your speaking skills is to read the sample responses aloud. The more you practice using these words, the more confident you are going to feel about them on test day.

Many of the chapters contain illustrations, which will help you to remember the meaning of the vocabulary words presented. We hope you will find some of these illustrations amusing, which will further help you to remember each word’s connotation.

Please note that because of the way the chapters are divided, they do not have to be read in order. You can choose the chapter that you find most appealing and start there!
Using Notations

As we discussed in the previous section, your mission is to review these words until you know them by heart.

One device that can help you identify the words you’ve mastered and the words you still need to learn is the use of notations. Every time you encounter a word in this book, you can make a mark to indicate your familiarity with its pronunciation, its part of speech, and its meaning; all parts are equally important. If you know a word’s meaning but can’t pronounce it, that will affect your score on the Speaking section. Likewise, if you know a word’s part of speech but not its meaning, you run the risk of using it incorrectly and losing points on the Writing section.

So, to remind yourself of your familiarity with each of these factors, you can make marks next to each word. For instance:

✓ means “Without a doubt, I know the pronunciation, part of speech, and meaning.”
?
means “I don’t know this word or any of its other parts.”
○ means “I know one or two things, such as the pronunciation or part of speech, but I don’t know other parts.”

You can consider the words with check marks as words you’ve mastered, and you’ll only need to review those words once or twice before the test. However, you’ll need to continue to drill the other two categories until they fall into the check mark category. This process will save you time because the majority of your studying will be restricted to the words that you still need to learn.
Pronunciation

We don’t use standard dictionary phonetics in our *Word Smart* books, for the simple reason that many people don’t understand phonetics. Instead, we use a modified phonetic approach that we believe is largely intuitive. The pronunciation key below should clear up any questions you may have about how to use our pronunciation guide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The letter(s)</th>
<th>is (are) pronounced like the letter(s)</th>
<th>in the word(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>bat, can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ah</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>con, on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aw</td>
<td>aw</td>
<td>paw, straw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ay</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>skate, rake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>stem, hem, err</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ee</td>
<td>ea</td>
<td>steam, clean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>rim, chin, hint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ing</td>
<td>ing</td>
<td>sing, ring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oh</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>row, tow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oo</td>
<td>oo</td>
<td>room, boom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ow</td>
<td>ow</td>
<td>cow, brow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oy</td>
<td>oy</td>
<td>boy, toy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u, uh</td>
<td>u</td>
<td>run, bun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>y (ye, eye)</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>climb, time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ch</td>
<td>ch</td>
<td>chair, chin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>f, ph</td>
<td>film, phony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>go, goon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j</td>
<td>j</td>
<td>join, jungle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>cool, cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>solid, wisp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sh</td>
<td>sh</td>
<td>shoe, wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>z</td>
<td>z</td>
<td>zoo, razor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zh</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>measure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All other consonants are pronounced as you would expect. Capitalized letters are the part of the word that you pronounce with emphasis, or accent.
Other Ways to Boost Your Vocabulary

In addition to working with this book, there are other ways that you can enhance your vocabulary on a daily basis; learning new words and using them correctly will be beneficial to you on every section of the TOEFL (and in real life!).

Here are some other ways you can boost your vocabulary:

- Read magazines such as *Time*, *Discover*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *Sports Illustrated*, and newspapers such as *USA Today* or *The New York Times*. This will help your comprehension as well as your vocabulary.
- Watch television and listen to the radio. These are enjoyable ways to learn the language! Almost any show or program will be helpful.
- Do a quick search on the Internet to find a number of helpful websites which are devoted to helping people learn English. You can even find online dictionaries with audio that will demonstrate how to pronounce new words.
- Make an effort to engage in conversation using words that you are still in the process of learning. You can even chat with people online to try out your new vocabulary.
- When you hear a word that you don’t know, write it down immediately. Come back to it later and do three things:
  1. Look up the word in the dictionary and write down on a flashcard its pronunciation, part of speech, and definition.
  2. Make a sentence using that word.
  3. Continue to review the flashcard until you know all the parts of your new word and can use it in a sentence.

What Is the Princeton Review?

The Princeton Review is the premier test-preparation company; we prepare tens of thousands of students each year for tests such as the TOEFL, SAT, GMAT, GRE, LSAT, and MCAT. At The Princeton Review, we spend countless hours researching tests and figuring out exactly how to crack them. We offer students proven, high-powered strategies and techniques that help them beat the tests and achieve their best scores.

In addition to our books, we offer both live classroom instruction and online courses. If you would like more information about our programs, visit us at PrincetonReview.com.

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