

# Timed Writing 1

## Expectations

Timed writing can take many forms, but the clear requirement of this type of writing is a time limit to complete it. A time limit most commonly occurs in an exam situation, where the tester is evaluating how well you understand a topic and/or can explain your thoughts without any help (ex. teacher, peer review, spell check, translator, etc). The amount of time and the expected length of your writing will depend on the instructions.

You could expect to find a timed writing portion of a test or quiz in any subject. It doesn't matter if you plan to study business, engineering, music, or linguistics. Timed essays are used frequently to get you to analyze, argue, or create something with what you have learned. Essays push you to show more than just recognizing a correct answer.

## Timed Writing Expectations

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The first strategy for timed writing is to fully understand the expectations. This means that when you encounter a timed writing prompt, you should first think about the context.

## Questions to think about for timed writing

- How much time do you have?
- Who will be reading your answer and why are they reading it?
- What length of a response does the teacher expect?
- What aspect of my writing is most important to the teacher?
- Are there other sections of the test (like multiple choice questions) that you need to complete in the time that is given?
- Does the testing format provide spell check?
- Is this test more focused on language accuracy or comprehension of the topic accuracy?

Usually you will know in advance that there will be a timed writing component to an assessment, so you can think about these questions beforehand. This will help you prioritize your time.

## Examples of timed writing prompts & expectations

- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between food in the United States and in your home country. Choose at least three aspects in your comparison.
  - Time: 30 minutes
  - Audience: ELC writing teacher; evaluating thesis and topic sentences
  - Length: 4 paragraphs
  - Focus: Organization
  - Other sections: No
  - Help: No spell check, no dictionary/translator, no peer review, no help from teacher
  - Purpose: Accuracy in structure, not accuracy in grammar
- Read this opinion article from a newspaper. Respond to it by agreeing or disagreeing and supporting your position.
  - Time: 10 minutes to read; 20 minutes to write
  - Audience: ELC writing teacher & reading teacher;

- evaluating supporting details and comprehension of reading
  - Length: 2 paragraphs
  - Focus: Comprehension of information; structure of argument
  - Other sections: Reading passage
  - Help: Peer discussion of article before writing, no additional support
  - Purpose: comprehension of article points and clarity of personal opinion
- Explain the process of applying to be an international student. What are the steps you had to take to study here?
  - Time: 40 minutes (not limited by the website, this is limited by the time you have)
  - Audience: BYU admissions committee
  - Length: 300 words max
  - Focus: Clarity, accuracy
  - Other sections: 3 other essay prompts (separate time for each)
  - Help: You can use support, but it must still be your writing
  - Purpose: clear organization and accuracy that demonstrates readiness for college

## **TOEFL Timed Writing Expectations**

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There are unique aspects of the TOEFL independent writing task (30-minute essay). As previously mentioned, all of the timed writing practice in this book will help you work toward success on the TOEFL writing section. However, there are some specific points that need to be made about the expectations for the writing on the test.

## Response format

You will have thirty minutes to write an essay. Sometimes the prompt will ask you to choose from more than two options as you write your response. However, many times you need to choose the better of two options or choose one side of an argument. If you need to make this kind of a choice, make a clear choice instead of trying to defend both sides.

Your answer should look like a balanced essay. You should write a four or five paragraph essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion. Choosing the number of body paragraphs will depend on your ability to write fluently and develop your ideas. Typically, it is easier for students to develop their ideas if they choose to write two body paragraphs. Writing two developed body paragraphs is better than writing three underdeveloped body paragraphs. An effective response is usually around 300 words. Remember that quality is more important than quantity in this instance.

Focus on what is possible for you to do well during the time limit without access to any additional help.

## Scoring

The scoring of the response is the biggest difference between TOEFL timed writing and the others you might be asked to do. Because the TOEFL is a *language* test, the emphasis in the grading will be on your language use. Your actual ideas are a secondary to the language you use to express the ideas. Therefore, while the TOEFL is imitating the type of writing you will do in a college setting, the task itself is different because of the rubric.

# Exercises

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## Exercise 1: TOEFL Rubric

Take some time to look over the [TOEFL Independent Writing Rubric](#).

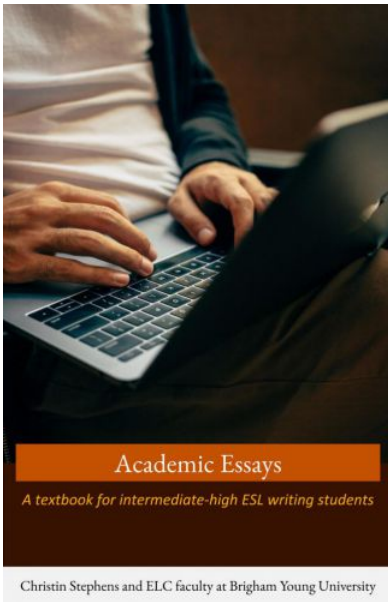
1. What will the test raters be focusing on as they assign a score to your essay?
2. How is this rubric similar or different from the rubrics your UP Writing teacher has used this semester?
3. Imagine a writing rubric for a class in your anticipated major. What similarities or differences would you expect there to be? Why would you see those differences?

## Exercise 2: Timed Writing Practice

*Before you begin writing, ask your teacher questions about the expectations for this timed writing practice. Listen carefully and decide how you will focus your time to meet those expectations.*

- What is one characteristic you think is key to being a good student? Why do you think that characteristic is so vital? What are the consequences of not developing this characteristic?

*Set a timer for 20 minutes. Write about the above topic. Your response should be between 250-300 words.*



Stephens, C. & Jackson, K. (n.d.). *Academic B Writing*.  
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