

Expected English Proficiency for Students: The Common Test for University Admission and **TOEFL Primary®/Junior®**

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Introduction

The world has been globalized, and each country is closely connected due to the development of technology. English has become the global language of international conferences and meetings, and 60.4% of the language used on the Internet is already English in 2021 (W3Techs; <http://w3techs.com>). Furthermore, the British Council (2013) predicted that more than two billion people worldwide would be using and learning English by 2020. Recently, more and more classes are being taught in English at every school level, even at Japanese universities. Therefore, when considering the English language skills needed for students living in the 21st century, teachers have to foster their practical English skills utilizing "critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity" (Shin, 2021, p. 4).

The Common Entrance Examination for University Admissions (after this referred to as the "Common Test") has considered the current state of English in the fast-changing world. Accordingly, it has changed from a test of foreign languages based on rote memorization to a test of the ability to use English as a tool for information analysis and global communication. In the future, it will be even

more necessary for university students to have the English ability to comprehend the outlines and main points of familiar topics they will encounter while using various materials.

On the other hand, the TOEFL® tests family (TOEFL® Primary™, TOEFL Junior®, TOEFL® ITP, & TOEFL iBT®) created by Educational Testing Service (ETS) in the U.S. have been assessing the English language skills for non-native English speaking children and students for a long time. In particular, TOEFL Primary® and TOEFL Junior®, launched in 2014 and 2011, can measure communicative competence among young learners, such as elementary to junior and senior high school students. Each test aims to help students acquire the globally expected English skills they need at each stage of their development as global citizens. Thus, TOEFL® tests measure whether students can successfully develop their English to use it at each school level and can prepare themselves to study at the next academic level, which is similar to the aims of the newly launched Common Tests. As a result, both tests have similarities in the format of the questions. In the following, I will examine the reading and listening questions of those two kinds of tests.

In communication, people need to understand the intentions of other people correctly. In addition, participants of global written communication have to read English sentences accurately, understand other people's intentions, and infer their opinions behind the sentences. For example, in this year's Common Test, one of the questions asked students to distinguish

between facts and opinions (Figure 1). The question in the reading section explained the views of the judges in a band contest. Students needed to derive the "opinion" that the band and audience were united in excitement at the competition from the "fact" that the band's performance and the audience's reaction.

問 4 One opinion from the judges' comments and shared evaluation is that

9 .

- ① each evaluated band received the same total score
- ② Ms Wells' suggestion about originality was agreed on
- ③ Silent Hill really connected with the audience
- ④ the judges' comments determined the rankings

Figure 1. Common Test, 2021

The TOEFL Primary® has a similar question that asks for "opinions" (Figure 2). Here, Lucy and her mother accidentally ran into a bear in the backyard, and the question asks how they felt

about it. The word "surprised" is not used in the dialogue. However, students have to infer the characters' feelings from their hushed voices or unpreparedness for looking at the bear.

17. How do Lucy and her mother feel at the end of the story?

- (A) Angry
- (B) Excited
- (C) Surprised

Figure 2. TOEFL Primary® Step 2, GC&T

Also, Information processing skills are necessary for children and students living in the 21st century. CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has been widely adopted at schools in many countries. It is a teaching method incorporating content from other subjects or specific themes (such as the environment) into English. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science,

and Technology (MEXT) has also called for cross-curricular perspectives incorporated in the new Course of Study, the national guideline. In this year's Common Test, students were asked to read and organize data from timetables and graphs and to read and understand English sentences while making calculations based on travel information and guide maps (Figure 3).

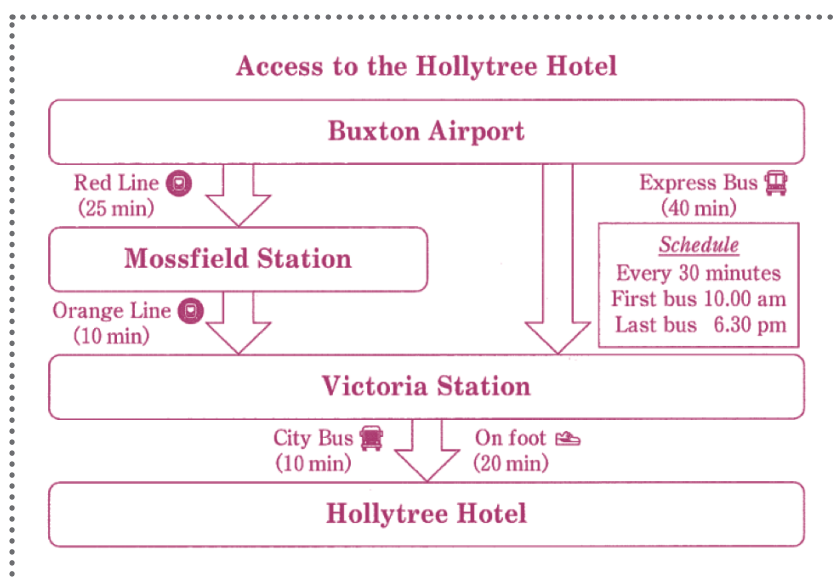


Figure 3. Common Test, 2021

Students need to read English texts and process the information by using materials and common sense. This kind of English ability is required when students take university classes and communicate with others globally. Thus, they will use English not just for everyday conversation. In the future, students will be expected to use English as a communication tool to gain new knowledge and to collaborate with others. For this reason, students have to improve their ability to process information from a

cross-curricular perspective at each school level. In the TOEFL®, students are always asked to understand the content by combining materials and English. In the TOEFL Junior® test shown in the example below, students have to comprehend where, when, and what will happen by reading English explanations and the chart (Figure 4). Going back and forth between the English text and the material is a practical way to use English to get information. Students living in a global society are expected to acquire these skills.

Student Volunteers Needed!

On Saturday, December 12th, from 10 A.M. until 4 P.M., Carverton Middle School will be holding a music festival in the school gymnasium. The special event will feature a variety of professional musicians and singers.

| Task | Time | Date |
|-----------------|----------------|---------------|
| Make posters | 1 P.M.–4 P.M. | December 5th |
| Set up gym | 11 A.M.–4 P.M. | December 11th |
| Help performers | 9 A.M.–4 P.M. | December 12th |
| Welcome guests | 10 A.M.–2 P.M. | December 12th |
| Clean up gym | 4 P.M.–7 P.M. | December 12th |

Interested students should speak with Ms. Braxton, the music teacher. Students who would like to help at the festival must have written permission from a parent or guardian.

Figure 4. TOEFL Junior®, ETS, 2021

In this year's Common Test, the score for the English listening section was increased to 100 points, although it was previously 50 points. Now, it weights half of the English test, the same as the reading section. Until recently, listening questions had been treated as extras in university entrance exams. However, listening positions as an essential skill in the Common Test due to the importance of oral communication. Besides, the listening and reading sections have consistently been scored the same in the TOEFL® because those two skills have been equally important for young learners.

Listening, like reading, is a receptive skill, and at

the same time, an important communication skill. Participants of communication or presentations need actively pay attention to information to understand what other people say. For example, in university classes, students must listen to professors in lectures, take notes, and look at materials to understand the content more deeply. The Common Test included many questions that can be considered as preparation for such tasks. For example, in the question about listening to a university lecture on happiness, students need to listen to the professor while taking notes (Figure 5).

○ **World Happiness Report**

- Purpose: To promote [27] happiness and well-being
- Scandinavian countries: Consistently happiest in the world (since 2012)

Why? ⇒ "Hygge" lifestyle in Denmark

↓ spread around the world in 2016

○ **Interpretations of Hygge**

| | Popular Image of Hygge | Real Hygge in Denmark |
|-------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| What | [28] | [29] |
| Where | [30] | [31] |
| How | special | ordinary |

Figure 5. Common Test, 2021

In the questions, students will take notes on vocabulary definitions and examples of usage related to happiness while listening to the lecture. Note-taking is an essential academic skill. Students can actually simulate their skills in the test.

In TOEFL Junior®, note-taking sheets are provided to test takers for listening questions at the

beginning of the test. Students need to listen to a university lecture every time and are required to take notes while listening to the class. The example shown in Figure 6 is a question in which students listen to a biology lecture on the characteristics of leafcutter ants and answer questions. The TOEFL® requires students to demonstrate academic skills in English as well as

English language skills that they are expected to acquire when studying in English. Thus, students can develop the foundation to continue their

English studies without problems by obtaining opportunities to check themselves in the tests.

7. What is the main topic of the talk?

- (A) A newly discovered type of ant
- (B) A type of ant with unusual skills
- (C) An increase in the population of one type of ant
- (D) A type of ant that could be dangerous to humans

8. According to the teacher, what is one activity that both leafcutter ants and people do?

- (A) Clean their food
- (B) Grow their own food
- (C) Eat several times a day
- (D) Feed their young special food

Figure 6. TOEFL Junior®, ETS

The TOEFL Primary®, designed for elementary and junior high school students, also asks students to answer age-specific academic questions after listening to a teacher or instructions in class. For example, in TOEFL Primary® Step 1, a teacher tells

the students that they have an assignment due tomorrow morning for next week's presentation. The students listen to the teacher's explanation and answer what they need to do tomorrow morning (Figure 7).

What will happen tomorrow morning?

- (A) The students will work on their posters.
- (B) The students will present their projects.
- (C) The students will give their projects to the teacher.

Figure 7. TOEFL Primary® Step 1, GC&T

In addition, TOEFL Primary® Step 2 requires students to listen to more academic contexts. For example, students will listen to a science or social studies lecture and answer questions about it. If the topic is about wild animals, students will listen to explanations of each animal's characteristics and its relationship to humans and then answer

questions. Such questions enable students to apply what they have learned in other subjects to English. Thus, TOEFL® measures students' learning skills in English, which are necessary for them when they study academic topics and use their previous knowledge in cross-curricular learning.

Conclusion

English has become an indispensable tool for all people in global communication. Thus, students are required to demonstrate how effectively they can use the communication tool. The TOEFL® and the newly launched Common Test indicate this direction clearly. As global human resources, young learners need to develop a foundation for communicating and solving local and global problems in English while collaborating with people from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Tests have changed. English

lessons at schools must also change. There is a greater need for English classes that truly improve students' English communication skills than classes that only aim to have students pass entrance exams or get high scores on tests. For students to acquire the "lifelong learning strategies" to survive in the 21st century, English curricula and instructions between different school levels should have smooth transitions and help students improve their English to meet the global standard.

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