

## TOEFL INTEGRATED WRITING PRACTICE PAPER

### QUESTION 1

*The following reading passage and audio lecture clip are used to complete the writing task.*

#### Speaking Through Social Media

The widespread phenomenon of mass communication through cell phones and the internet has spurred enormous controversy. Many believe that people have become less able to build bonds with friends and family members. It is impossible to deny that social media is constantly changing the way that people interact with one another. With the advent of new technologies that allow for non-simultaneous and distant interaction, people all over the world are now able to build relationships in a way that was formerly not possible. Some might say that this is a negative trend, but this new development opens up for unique and effective connections.

People often feel estranged in their surroundings. There are so many hobbies and interests that people enjoy, that it can be difficult to find someone who shares the same passions. Social media is of huge benefit to these people as they are empowered with opportunity for connection to a widespread community and countless resources. Some may have always wanted to learn more about a topic without having an avenue to jump in. Social media has proved itself to be effective in educating people of all ages on a variety of subjects ranging from rollerblading to string theory.

Moreover, the internet is especially helpful for helping people find a voice. Whereas the first amendment protects our right to free speech, many people feel that they have lost their ability to be heard. Social media allows us all to find a new way to speak confidently and ensures that every person has the opportunity to be heard.

#### **Audio for listening:**

<https://soundcloud.com/user-827804196/toefl-writing-practicr>

### QUESTION 2

In a vote that took place at the International Astronomical Union Conference on August 24th, 2006, Pluto lost its status as a planet in our solar system. Pluto was originally discovered in 1930 when scientists were searching for something that was interfering with Uranus's orbit. Though Pluto was estimated to be similar in size to Earth, it was later discovered that it was even smaller than our own moon, as well as many other moons. It is now known that there are thousands of planetary objects similar to Pluto, including Eris which is slightly larger than Pluto. Choosing to reclassify Pluto to a dwarf planet honors the fact that science is about making new discoveries. While it was a sad day for Pluto lovers, people in general have accepted the idea, and the next

generation of children will grow up knowing only eight planets and thinking nothing of it. As Mike Brown, the astronomer who discovered Eris, noted following the IUC's decision, "science is self-correcting."

**Audio for listening:**

<https://www.englishclub.com/audio/toefl/englishclub-toefl-writing.mp3>

**QUESTION 3**

**Directions:** Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.

**Reading Time:** 3 minutes

Critics say that current voting systems used in the United States are inefficient and often lead to the inaccurate counting of votes. Miscounts can be especially damaging if an election is closely contested. Those critics would like the traditional systems to be replaced with far more efficient and trustworthy computerized voting systems.

In traditional voting, one major source of inaccuracy is that people accidentally vote for the wrong candidate. Voters usually have to find the name of their candidate on a large sheet of paper containing many names—the ballot—and make a small mark next to that name. People with poor eyesight can easily mark the wrong name. The computerized voting machines have an easy-to-use touch-screen technology: to cast a vote, a voter needs only to touch the candidate's name on the screen to record a vote for that candidate; voters can even have the computer magnify the name for easier viewing.

Another major problem with old voting systems is that they rely heavily on people to count the votes. Officials must often count up the votes one by one, going through every ballot and recording the vote. Since they have to deal with thousands of ballots, it is almost inevitable that they will make mistakes. If an error is detected, a long and expensive recount has to take place. In contrast, computerized systems remove the possibility of human error, since all the vote counting is done quickly and automatically by the computers.

Finally some people say it is too risky to implement complicated voting technology nationwide. But without giving it a thought, governments and individuals alike trust other complex computer technology every day to be perfectly accurate in banking transactions as well as in the communication of highly sensitive information.

**TRANSCRIPT OF A LECTURE**

Narrator Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

Professor While traditional voting systems have some problems, it's doubtful that computerized voting will make the situation any better. Computerized voting may seem easy for people who are used to computers. But what about people who aren't? People who can't afford computers, people who don't use them on a regular basis—these people will have trouble using computerized voting machines. These voters can easily cast the wrong vote or be discouraged from voting altogether because of fear of technology. Furthermore, it's true that humans make mistakes when they count up ballots by hand. But are we sure that computers will do a better job? After all, computers are programmed by humans, so "human error" can show up in mistakes in their programs. And the errors caused by these defective programs may be far more serious. The worst a human official can do is miss a few ballots. But an error in a computer program can result in thousands of votes being miscounted or even permanently removed from the record. And in many voting systems, there is no physical record of the votes, so a computer recount in the case of a suspected error is impossible! As for our trust of computer technology for banking and communications, remember one thing: these systems are used daily and they are used heavily. They didn't work flawlessly when they were first introduced. They had to be improved on and improved on until they got as reliable as they are today. But voting happens only once every two years nationally in the United States and not much more than twice a year in many local areas. This is hardly sufficient for us to develop confidence that computerized voting can be fully trusted.

**Directions:** Give yourself 20 minutes to plan and write your response. Your response is judged on the quality of the writing and on how well it presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage. Typically, an effective response will be 150 to 225 words. You may view the reading passage while you respond.

**Response time:** 20 minutes

**Question:** Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

---

## QUESTION 4

**Directions:** Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.

**Reading Time:** 3 minutes

In an effort to encourage ecologically sustainable forestry practices, an international organization started issuing certifications to wood companies that meet high ecological standards by conserving resources and recycling materials. Companies that receive this certification can attract customers by advertising their products as “ecocertified.” Around the world, many wood companies have adopted new, ecologically friendly practices in order to receive ecocertification. However, it is unlikely that wood companies in the United States will do the same, for several reasons.

First, American consumers are exposed to so much advertising that they would not value or even pay attention to the ecocertification label. Because so many mediocre products are labeled “new” or “improved,” American consumers do not place much trust in advertising claims in general.

Second, ecocertified wood will be more expensive than uncertified wood because in order to earn ecocertification, a wood company must pay to have its business examined by a certification agency. This additional cost gets passed on to consumers. American consumers tend to be strongly motivated by price, and therefore they are likely to choose cheaper uncertified wood products. Accordingly, American wood companies will prefer to keep their prices low rather than obtain ecocertification.

Third, although some people claim that it always makes good business sense for American companies to keep up with the developments in the rest of the world, this argument is not convincing. Pursuing certification would make sense for American wood companies only if they marketed most of their products abroad. But that is not the case—American wood businesses sell most of their products in the United States, catering to a very large customer base that is satisfied with the merchandise.

**READ THE TRANSCRIPT OF A LECTURE**

**Directions:** Read the transcript

Narrator Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

Professor Well, despite what many people say, there's good reason to think that many American wood companies will eventually seek ecocertification for their wood products. First off, consumers in the United States don't treat all advertising the same. They distinguish between advertising claims that companies make about their own products and claims made by independent certification agencies. Americans have a lot of confidence in independent consumer agencies. Thus, ecologically minded Americans are likely to react very favorably to wood products ecologically certified by an independent organization with an international reputation for trustworthiness.

Second point—of course it's true that American consumers care a lot about price—who doesn't? But studies of how consumers make decisions show that price alone determines consumers' decisions only when the price of one competing product is much higher or lower than another. When the price difference between two products is small—say, less than five percent, as is the case with certified wood—Americans often do choose on factors other than price. And Americans are becoming increasingly convinced of the value of preserving and protecting the environment.

And third, U.S. wood companies should definitely pay attention to what's going on in the wood business internationally, not because of foreign consumers, but because of foreign competition. As I just told you, there's a good chance that many American consumers will be interested in ecocertified products. And guess what, if American companies are slow capturing those customers, you can be sure that foreign companies will soon start crowding into the American market, offering ecocertified wood that domestic companies don't.

**Directions:** Give yourself 20 minutes to plan and write your response. Your response is judged on the quality of the writing and on how well it presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage. Typically, an effective response will be 150 to 225 words. You may view the reading passage while you respond.

**Response time:** 20 minutes

**Question:** Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

**Question: 5**

**Were Dinosaurs Endotherms?**

**Reading Passage:**

Endotherms are animals such as modern birds and mammals that keep their body temperatures constant. For instance, humans are endotherms and maintain an internal temperature of 37°C, no matter whether the environment is warm or cold. Because dinosaurs were reptiles, and modern reptiles are not endotherms, it was long assumed that dinosaurs were not endotherms. However, dinosaurs differ in many ways from modern reptiles, and there is now considerable evidence that dinosaurs were, in fact, endotherms. Polar dinosaurs One reason for believing that dinosaurs were endotherms is that dinosaur fossils have been discovered in polar regions. Only animals that can maintain a temperature well above that of the surrounding environment could be active in such cold climates. Leg position and movement There is a connection between endothermy and the position and movement of the legs. The physiology of endothermy allows sustained physical activity, such as running. But running is efficient only if an animal's legs are positioned underneath its body, not at the body's side, as they are for crocodiles and many lizards. The legs of all modern endotherms are underneath the body, and so were the legs of dinosaurs. This strongly suggests that dinosaurs were endotherms. Haversian canals There is also a connection between endothermy and bone structure. The bones of endotherms usually include structures called Haversian canals. These canals house nerves and blood vessels that allow the living animal to grow quickly, and rapid body growth is in fact a characteristic of endothermy. The presence of Haversian canals in bone is a strong indicator that the animal is an endotherm, and fossilized bones of dinosaurs are usually dense with Haversian canals.

### **Listening:**

[Narrator] Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

[Professor] Many scientists have problems with the arguments you read in the passage. They don't think those arguments prove that dinosaurs were endotherms. Take the polar dinosaur argument. When dinosaurs lived, even the polar regions where dinosaur fossils have been found were much warmer than today—warm enough during part of the year for animals that were not endotherms to live. And during the months when the polar regions were cold, the so-called polar dinosaurs could have migrated to warmer areas or hibernated like many modern reptiles do. So the presence of dinosaur fossils in polar regions doesn't prove the dinosaurs were endotherms. Well, what about the fact that dinosaurs had their legs placed under their bodies, not out to the side, like a crocodile's? That doesn't necessarily mean dinosaurs were high-energy endotherms built for running. There's another explanation for having legs under the body: this body structure supports more weight. So with legs under their bodies, dinosaurs could grow to a very large size. Being large had advantages for dinosaurs, so we don't need the idea of endothermy and running to explain why dinosaurs evolved to have their legs under their bodies. OK, so how about bone structure? Many dinosaur bones do have Haversian canals, that's true, but dinosaur bones also have growth rings. Growth rings are a thickening of the bone that indicate periods of time when the dinosaurs weren't rapidly growing. These growth rings are evidence that dinosaurs stopped growing or grew more slowly during cooler periods. This pattern of periodic growth—you know, rapid growth followed by no growth or slow growth and then rapid growth again—is characteristic of animals that are not endotherms. Animals that maintain a constant body temperature year round, as true endotherms do, grow rapidly even when the environment becomes cool.

**Prompt:** Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they challenge the specific points made in the reading passage.

