

## TOEFL Integrated Writing Practice Test 11

### Question 1

Sea otters are a small mammal that lives in the waters along North America's west coast from California to Alaska. A few years ago some of the sea otter populations off of the Alaskan coast started to decline rapidly and raised several concerns because of their important role in the coastal ecosystem. Experts began investigating and came up with two possible explanations. One explanation was environmental pollution and the second was attacked by predators.

At first, it seemed as if pollution was the most likely cause for the population decline. One reason pollution was more likely was because of the known pollution sources along the Alaskan coast such as oil rigs. Also, water samples taken in the area showed increased levels of chemicals that could decrease the otters' immune systems and indirectly result in their deaths.

Another thing that pointed to pollution as the culprit was the decline of other sea mammals such as seals in the same areas. This indicated that whatever was affecting the otters was also affecting the other sea mammals. Environmental pollution usually affects an entire ecosystem instead of just one species. Only predators that occurred in a large area, such as orcas (a large predatory whale), could cause the same effect, but they usually hunt larger prey.

Finally, scientists believed the pollution hypothesis would also explain the uneven pattern of otter decline. In some Alaskan locations, the otter population declined greatly while other populations remained stable. Some experts suggested this could be explained by ocean currents, or another environmental factor might have created uneven concentrations of pollutants along the coast.

### Directions: Read the lecture transcript

Professor:

Ongoing investigations have shown that predation is the most likely cause of the sea otter decline after all.

First, there is a lack of dead sea otters washing up on Alaskan beaches which is not what you would expect from infections caused by pollution killing them off. However, the fact that dead otters are seldom found supports the predator hypothesis. If a predator kills an otter, then it is eaten right away and can't wash up onshore.

Second, orcas prefer to hunt whales, but whales have essentially disappeared in that area from human hunters. Since the whales are not as available, orcas have had to change their diet to what is available. Since there are only smaller sea animals available, the orcas have probably started hunting those more and created the decline in all of the species mentioned in the passage.

Finally, predation is a more likely reason for the uneven pattern of otter decline. Otters in locations that are more accessible to orcas are more likely to be hunted. This is supported by the stable populations of otters in shallow rocky locations where orcas can't access.

**Question:** Summarize the point made in the lecture and explain how the speaker cast doubt on specific points made in the reading passage.

## **Question 2**

Although it's a new technology, solar energy provides benefits to the entire world. First, solar energy eliminates our reliance on non-renewable fossil fuels. Additionally, solar energy is non-pollutant, which makes it better for everyone. Finally, there is almost no maintenance as solar panels have a long life span without regular maintenance. So, the benefits seem to be overwhelmingly positive and supportive of further production.

The first benefit is the ability for solar energy to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Many sources of energy are renewable only over millions of years. Unfortunately, humans consume those faster than they are produced. Solar energy could be a replacement for non-renewable sources as a perpetual source of energy. Thus solar energy can become a new energy with no legitimate fear of overproduction.

Another benefit is the non-pollutant aspect of solar energy. Burning fossil fuels is known to produce deadly pollution, while solar energy produces zero harmful byproducts. While current energy sources produce disgusting smells, sounds, and visuals, solar energy produces nothing offensive. Therefore, when considering the health of the planet, the lifelong health benefits of solar energy are unparalleled.

Finally, solar energy has low costs. The cost of solar panels is a one-time purchase. Also, after installation, the lifespan of a solar panel is thirty years. After the initial cost, the solar panel will cost almost nothing. This is a benefit to personal finances, but also peace of mind since there is no worry about rising prices or lack of resources.

In conclusion, these benefits provide support for more people to consider switching to solar power. Both the renewable aspect as well as the non-polluting aspect means that there will be added benefits for individuals, cities, and the planet. The low lifelong cost of installation and maintenance provides a lifetime of benefits. Thus, solar energy looks to be one of the world's great ideas.

## **Directions: Read the lecture transcript**

Ok class, today we're going to talk about solar energy. That's right, the energy we get from the sun. Aside from the typical advantages such as renewable clean energy, there are other less thought of considerations for renewable energy. We'll rehash some of those important ideas and other concepts such as offset production, multifaceted uses, and financial benefits.

One argument for solar energy use is clean renewable energy. Unfortunately at this point to produce solar panels we need to use fossil fuel energy. Is the energy used worth the energy gained? In five years, a solar cell will produce more energy than was used to make it. Given the lifespan of a solar cell, this offsets the production cost of consumption.

The second point today is the multifaceted uses for solar energy. There are more uses than just clean energy. The privatization of energy means that a person controls their energy output and where it goes. Solar-powered water heaters are designed to optimize energy use so that people aren't wasting money and energy. This is a benefit to the consumer concerning health and finances.

Our final point for the day, the financial benefits of solar. You're paying for the panels, but that's all. On top of that, some people have been able to acquire so much energy that they sell their excess power to energy companies. Also, there are tax incentives that help offset the cost of installation. At that point, the financial benefits are amazingly compounded.

So let's recap really quickly. The benefits of solar energy are renewable clean energy with a lifespan that outweighs the energy production costs. The energy produced can be used in multiple ways by consumers, while the benefits of selling energy or receiving tax benefits makes this an obvious choice. So what exactly is keeping people from making the move to solar energy?

**Question:** Summarize the points in the lecture, being sure to explain how they address the specific ideas about solar energy described in the reading passage.

### **Question 3**

There are different types of universities. Some universities focus almost completely on research. These universities reward professors for doing research. They hire professors that are dedicated to discovering new things and publishing their findings. Other universities focus more on teaching. These universities hire professors that are able to explain concepts to their students clearly. Some universities have tried to blend both approaches and focus on both research and quality teaching, which is problematic.

First, both doing research and teaching take time, and having a dual focus will distract professors from being adequately prepared for their classes. Doing research can often be a messy, complex process, and they may end up spending so much time doing research that they don't have time to prepare their lectures or exams. When professors are not adequately prepared for classes, students may struggle more to understand the concepts and do well in class. If professors are expected to both teach and research, they will not have time for both.

Also, there is no real benefit researchers bring to the classroom if they lack teaching skills. Many researchers who teach as professors have had limited teacher training. They have extensive knowledge of their field but do not know how to manage a classroom, write a reliable assessment, or scaffold student learning. Students are very frustrated by professors who lack

these teaching skills. Teaching skills are necessary in order to help students learn; thus, experts without formal teacher training don't have a clear advantage.

Finally, by choosing one focus, professors can become more skilled in what they choose to do. If they choose to be a researcher, they can make a name for themselves in research because they can devote all of their time to research. If they choose to be a teacher, they can gain the teaching skills they need to be an excellent teacher, rather than trying to make time to research as well.

**Directions: Read the lecture transcript**

Professor: Well, as you know from the reading, there are some reasonable concerns about universities that blend teaching and research. You will find some people, especially in this area, are passionate about this topic.

There are some points I want to make today during our class that wasn't included in your reading. I think that it's important to understand both sides of this issue.

Something that people don't always think about is how researching can make planning lessons easier. If you have a teacher who is a teacher and a researcher, they are very up-to-date in their field, so they don't have to spend the same amount of time preparing for classes. Their research is their preparation.

Rather than waiting for other researchers to investigate questions and publish their findings, researching professors are on the cutting edge of their field. They attend conferences and find out what other researchers are doing as they are doing it. The time they spend at these conferences is time well spent preparing them for their teaching assignments.

While it is true that researching professors may not have the practical teaching skills that other teachers have, they are passionate about their subject because what they research is what they chose to pursue their career.

One of my colleagues here in the department is famous for staying late to work on a presentation for class the next day because he is so excited to share his latest discovery with his students. His students love his lectures because they can tell how much the topic interests him, and they enjoy seeing the results of his research.

A final point I'll mention on this topic is that by only focusing on one thing, professors often get stuck. Teachers who don't do research tend to use the same books and go over the same material year after year. Teachers who research are able to continue growing because of their involvement in the field.

Researchers can also get stuck in a rut without the fresh perspective that teaching can bring.

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

#### **Question 4**

In many organizations, perhaps the best way to approach certain new projects is to assemble a group of people into a team. Having a team of people attack a project offers several advantages. First of all, a group of people has a wider range of knowledge, expertise, and skills than any single individual is likely to possess. Also, because of the number of people involved and the greater resources they possess, a group can work more quickly in response to the task assigned to it and can come up with highly creative solutions to problems and issues. Sometimes these creative solutions come about because a group is more likely to make risky decisions that an individual might not undertake. This is because the group spreads responsibility for a decision to all the members and thus no single individual can be held accountable if the decision turns out to be wrong.

Taking part in a group process can be very rewarding for members of the team. Team members who have a voice in making a decision will no doubt feel better about carrying out the work that is entailed by that decision than they might do work that is imposed on them by others. Also, the individual team member has a much better chance to “shine,” to get his or her contributions and ideas not only recognized but recognized as highly significant, because a team’s overall results can be more far-reaching and have a greater impact than what might have otherwise been possible for the person to accomplish or contribute working alone.

#### **Directions: Read the lecture transcript**

(Professor) Now I want to tell you about what one company found when it decided that it would turn over some of its new projects to teams of people, and make the team responsible for planning the projects and getting the work done. After about six months, the company took a look at how well the teams performed. On virtually every team, some members got almost a “free ride” ... they didn’t contribute much at all, but if their team did a good job, they nevertheless benefited from the recognition the team got. And what about group members who worked especially well and who provided a lot of insight on problems and issues? Well...the recognition for a job well done went to the group as a whole, no names were named. So it won’t surprise you to learn that when the real contributors were asked how they felt about the group process, their attitude was just the opposite of what the reading predicted. Another finding was that some projects just didn’t move very quickly. Why? Because it took so long to reach a consensus...it took many, many meetings to build an agreement among group members about how they would move the project along. On the other hand, there were other instances where one or two people managed to become very influential over what their group did. Sometimes when those influencers said “That will never work” about an idea the group was developing, the idea was quickly dropped instead of being further discussed. And then there was another occasion when a couple of influencers convinced the group that a plan of theirs was “highly creative.” And even though some members tried to warn the rest of the group that the project

was moving in directions that might not work, they were basically ignored by other group members. Can you guess the ending to \*this\* story? When the project failed, the blame was placed on all the members of the group.

**Question:** Summarize the points made in the lecture you just heard, explaining how they cast doubt on points made in the reading.