

TOEFL Integrated Writing Practice Test 12

Question 1

Directions: Give yourself 3 minutes to read the passage.

The “comics medium” includes newspaper comic strips such as *Dennis the Menace* and comic books such as *Spider-Man*. Scholars around the world agree that comics are a uniquely American art form.

The first commercially successful comic strip was *Hogan’s Alley*, a comic strip from the 1890s. *Hogan’s Alley* featured the Yellow Kid, the world’s first popular cartoon character. This strip and its character marked the beginning of comics and was American in every respect. Set in a low-income neighborhood in New York City, *Hogan’s Alley* dealt with the lives of ordinary Americans. It was written and drawn by American cartoonist R.F. Outcault. Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, two famous and influential American publishers, printed the comic strip in their newspapers.

The first popular comic book in the world was also American. *Action Comics*, a series that is still in print today, was initially released in 1938. It featured Superman, the world’s first superhero. Like *Hogan’s Alley*, *Superman* was American-created.

Americans invented comic strips, and Americans have exported their unique art form to the rest of the world. Japanese comics, called *manga*, were inspired by the comics that Americans brought to Japan after World War II. Popular European comics series such as *Smurfs* and *Asterix* are influenced by Disney comic books. Today, American-created Disney comic characters are more popular in Europe than ever.

The comics medium started in America. While it has spread around the world, even comics that aren’t created by Americans have an undeniable American influence. This is why so many art and literature scholars recognize the comic strip as a truly American art form.

Directions: Summarize the main points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they challenge the specific points made in the reading passage. You have 20 minutes to plan and write your response. Your response will be judged on the basis of the quality of your writing and how well your response presents the points in the lecture and their relationship to the reading passage.

Question 2

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.

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.

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.

Directions: Here is the transcript.

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.