TOEIC
What it is—What it’s used for—What you should know

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It has been over 25 years since the TOEIC test was first introduced in Japan. Today, many companies use the scores not only for overseas assignments but also for promotions and assignments within the company. The purpose of this paper is to better prepare people for the TOEIC test by helping them understand each section of the test so their scores will reflect their real ability.

Introduction

In the beginning, the TOEIC (Test Of English for International Communication) test was mainly used by companies to decide if a worker was qualified to work overseas or not. In December of 1979, the test was taken by only 2,773 people, but over the years, the importance of the test has grown significantly. In 2003, about 3,400,000 people took the test worldwide. This means that the chance of being required to take the TOEIC test sometime during one’s business career increases year after year.

What it is:

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) developed the TOEIC test at the request of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) of Japan in 1979. MITI wanted a test that could be given to a large number of people at the same time. It also preferred a test that was easy to administer and could be taken at a reasonable cost. TOEIC is aimed at Japanese businesspeople, and is designed to grade their English comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills.

ETS was chosen because it had many years of experience designing tests for professional qualifications. Some of the other tests developed by ETS are TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language), GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test), and SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test).

What it’s used for:

The TOEIC test is used to judge a person’s ability to communicate in English in a business setting. The test is divided into two sections: one for listening comprehension, and the other for reading comprehension. The listening section is divided into 4 parts, and the reading section into 3 parts. Each section has 100 questions for a total of 200 questions. The time limitations are 45 minutes for the listening section and 75 minutes for the reading section. The scoring range is from 5 to 495 points for each section for a total of 990 points.

Results are divided in the following way: 10–400 a beginner, 400–600 an intermediate level student, 600–700 high intermediate, 700–800 low advanced, 800–990 advanced. The scores are used by businesses to help decide which employees should work overseas, who should receive promotion, and the type of job an employee should be doing.

Here is an example of how the scores could be used in the case of an engineer. If an engineer gets a score of 500, he or she could work with foreign engineers in Japan. But for the same engineer to work overseas, he or she would need a score of about 650 or more. Some companies now require new employees to have a score of 450 in order to be offered employment.

What you should know:

Before the test:

You must carefully study each section of the test before you take the actual test. This means you should completely understand the directions for each part. Here are some of the things you should know about the test before you take it. By knowing the test and understanding it, you can concentrate on the questions and
answers and get a better score.

How many questions are in each part?
How much time is allowed for each part?
What types of questions are there?
What will be covered in each part of the test?
Practice taking the test many times to get your timing down and find which areas you need to work on.
Do not spend much time on the sections that are easy for you.

Grammar is an important part of the test, but you should not spend all your time studying just grammar. More important is Basic English communication, because the TOEIC test measures your level of English. You should study using a variety of English materials such as newspapers, English television and DVDs, English songs, etc.

Do not waste time by trying to translate everything into Japanese. If there is a word you do not know, try to understand the meaning from how it is used in the sentence. Remember, you cannot use a dictionary during the test, so do not use one when you take the practice tests. Also, when you take a practice test, be sure to time yourself. Do not give yourself more time than the test does. This will help you get used to the timing when you take the real test.

During the test:

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Usually you can find one answer that is wrong. The more answers you can eliminate, the better your chances of getting the correct answer will be. If you can eliminate two answers, you have a fifty-fifty chance of getting the right answer.

You will be notified when there is 15 minutes left on the test. At that time you should finish what you are doing and check that all answers are marked. Be sure to answer all the questions. They do not take points off for wrong answers. If at the end of the test there are some questions that you did not answer, guess. You have a 25% chance of getting the right answer if you guess.

The answers on the TOEIC test have choices which are called “distractors.” These choices try to trick you in different ways. For example, there will be words that sound the same but are spelled differently than the correct choice. If you take practice tests you will learn about “distractors” and how they try to trick you.

Do not change an answer once you pick it unless you are very sure your first choice was wrong. Many people change the correct answer to the wrong answer. Trust your instincts.

About listening section Part 1:

In Part 1 of the listening section you will only have a picture to look at. There are no written questions or answers. There are 20 questions and each question has four possible answers.

Before the recording starts, look at picture one carefully. Try to understand the main points of the picture. If there are people in the picture try to understand what they are doing and where they are. See what items are in the picture. What are they being used for and by whom? If the picture is an outside scene, what season is it? Where is the location? What is the main point of the picture? You will only have 5 to 8 seconds to answer.

Try to answer as quickly as possible and start looking at the next picture. Do not leave any questions to come back to later because you will not have time. If you do not know the answer, eliminate as many answers as possible and guess. If you spend too much time on one question and cannot hear the next question or become confused, mark any answer and start looking at the picture for the next question.

One way to answer quickly is to use your pencil. First, put it on answer “A” and listen to the statement. If you think it is the right answer, leave your pencil on “A” and listen to “B.” If you think “A” is still the correct answer, do not move your pencil and listen to “C” and “D.” But if you think “A” is wrong, move it to “B” and listen to the statement. Keep moving the pencil until you think you have the right answer. This way, you can remember which answer you thought was correct.

Be very careful of words that sound alike as they are often used as “distractors.” A good example is the words “work” and “walk.” You will have to try to understand which word is used from the context of the sentence. Also be careful of words that can have more than one meaning such as “long.” It can mean distance or time, depending how it is used in a sentence.

About listening section Part 2:

In Part 2 of the listening section you will listen to a recording with a question and answers. The questions
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and answers are not written on the test paper. There are 30 questions and each question has three possible answers. This part of the listening test may be the hardest, as there is nothing to look at or read.

In this part there is also very little time between questions. You must answer as quickly as possible and get ready to listen to the next question. You should also use your pencil to keep track of the correct answer.

Some of the “distractors” in this part are: Wh- questions vs. Yes/No questions, negative meaning expressions, and homonyms. You should be careful of these differences.

A homonym is a word that sounds the same but is spelled differently. Some examples are: week/weak, add/ad, hear/here, knot/not, right/write, and weight/wait. You have to be able to understand which word is being used from the context of the sentence. As you study for the TOEIC, you should make a list of homonyms.

About listening section Part 3:

In Part 3, you will hear a short conversation between two people. The conversation goes speaker A, speaker B, and speaker A. There are 30 questions and four possible answers. There is only one question per conversation. The question and four possible answers are printed in the test booklet.

In this part, you should read the question and answers before listening to the recording. Try to understand the general idea of the conversation and look for key words in the question. Answer as quickly as possible and start reading the next question before the recording starts. You should also understand and study Wh- questions and modal verbs for this part.

Modal verbs are auxiliary verbs such as: can/can’t, could/couldn’t, may/may not, shall/shall not, will/won’t, have to/don’t have to, must/must not, should/shouldn’t, ought to/ought not to, might/might not, used to/didn’t use to, and would/wouldn’t. These verbs are usually used to show mood or tense and are used with other verbs. They are different from other verbs in that there are no -s and -ing forms.

About listening section Part 4:

In Part 4, the recordings are 1 to 1.5 minutes long. There are two types of recordings: a long conversation between two people or a single speaker giving a short report or talk. There are 20 questions and four possible answers.

You should try to read the questions and answers before you hear the tape. This will help you to know what to listen for in the recordings. You should also listen for the main idea of the conversation or talk. This part of the listening test has many idioms, and sometimes you will have to make assumptions about the conversation. Answer as quickly as possible and start reading the next question.

In this case, making assumptions means that you may not hear the exact information mentioned in the conversation, but you can assume or understand, based on the conversation, that something is true or talked about. A good example of this is a conversation between two people talking about the weather. They may talk about how bad the weather looks. The question could be asked what should the man bring with him, and the correct answer would be an umbrella, even though it was not mentioned in the conversation.

About the reading section:

There are 100 questions in the reading section: 60 questions on grammar in parts 5 and 6, and 40 questions in part 7 on reading. You will have 75 minutes to finish all 3 parts that are timed together. You should do parts 5 and 6 as quickly as possible. Do not spend more than 30 minutes on these two parts. Part 7 may be easier for you and it is worth many points, so save enough time to finish. Some people like to do part 7 first and then do parts 5 and 6.

About reading section Part 5:

Part 5 is an “incomplete sentence” test. You will have 40 questions with 4 possible answers. In each question there will be a blank space, and you must choose the correct word or phrase to fill that blank. The sentence must be grammatically correct. In this part you will be tested about prefixes, suffixes, the passive voice, prepositions, and related pronouns.

First, read the question and try to guess the missing word. Try this when you are doing the practice test to see if this helps you or not. Next, read the answers and try to find which words or phrases are incorrect. That way you will reduce the possible number of choices.

Finally, if you still have trouble finding the correct answer, try reading the sentence with each of the choices. One or two should sound clearly wrong to you. Be sure to read all the answers. One may sound right
at first, but another answer may sound better. If you still are not sure, guess and go on. You will need a lot of time for part seven.

**About reading section Part 6:**

Part 6 is an “error recognition” test. You will have 20 questions with 4 possible answers. Each question will have a word or phrase underlined. You have to choose the underlined word or phrase that is incorrect.

The word or phrase must be rewritten to be grammatically correct. The word or phrase cannot be removed from the sentence to make the sentence correct. Some of the areas covered in Part 6 are: correct verb tense, subject and verb agreement, correct pronouns, and conjunctions.

**About reading section Part 7:**

Part 7 is a “reading comprehension” test. You will have 40 questions with 4 possible answers. There will be about 12 to 15 reading sections on each test, and from 2 to 5 questions for each reading section.

The reading sections will be business letters, short newspaper and magazine stories, advertisements, forms, and notices. The questions will be about the main idea, the writer’s attitude, details, and what may be implied in the reading section.

You should first quickly read the section. This means you read the section once fast without worrying about understanding everything. Just try to get a general understanding. Next, read the question, and look for key words and what the question is about. Once you have the key words and an idea of what to look for, read the section again and look for the key words or the main idea. The answer should be near the key words or the main idea. If you cannot find the key words, look for the general idea of the question.

Look for the answer that correctly answers the question. Sometimes “distractor” choices look correct. One example of a “distractor” is an answer that is exactly the same as what is written in the reading section. It may look the same as the reading section, but does it answer the question? Be careful. If two answers look correct, pick the one that best answers the question. You can also use key words in the answers to locate where you can find the answer.

If there are two answers that are the opposite, the chances are very good that one of them is the correct answer. A good example is: A: prices will go up if demand goes up / B: prices will go down if demand goes up.

**About improving your score:**

How much do you have to study to improve your score? That depends on the level you are at when you start to study. Below is a list showing the approximate hours you must study to improve your score by one point. Remember, this is only approximate, as some people study harder or learn faster than others.

- To improve from 200 to 300 points = 1 hour
- To improve from 300 to 400 points = 1½ hours
- To improve from 400 to 500 points = 2 hours
- To improve from 500 to 600 points = 2½ hours
- To improve from 600 to 700 points = 3 hours
- To improve from 700 to 800 points = 3½ hours
- To improve above 800 points = 4 hours

Why is this? Why does each level take more and more hours? Studying for the TOEIC is like pouring water into a cone. At first, it takes little water to move from one level to the next. However, as you move up, the cone becomes wider and wider, so it takes more water to go to the next level.

One more problem is SEM (Standard Error of Measurement). In the case of the TOEIC, this means your score could be about ±40 points of your “true” score. Your true score would be the average score after taking the test many times without studying. This is the reason if you only study for a short time, your score could be the same, higher, or even lower. So you should study for over 100 hours before you try retaking the TOEIC.
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References

ここまで辞書を使わずに読み進んでこられたら、TOEIC で600点前後の得点が出されると思われる。ここからはそれ以下のレベルの人のために要約したものである。

TOEIC とは

TOEIC はビジネスの場においての英語コミュニケーション能力を測るものである。この試験はリスニングとリーディングの2つのセクションからなり、さらにリスニングは4つのパート、リーディングは3つのパートに分けられている。それぞれのセクションに100問あり、全部で300問の問題から出来ている。時間の配分はリスニングが45分、リーディングが75分となっている。得点は各セクション495点満点、トータルで990点満点である。

エンジニアとして、外国から来たエンジニアと日本で仕事をする場合には500点以上が望ましいと言われ、海外で仕事をする場合は650点から上のスコアを取ることが必要とされる。現在、日本の多くの企業が雇用の条件として450点以上を要求している。

TOEIC を受験するまえに

受験する前に問題の構成や時間配分を知っておいたほうが良いのは言うまでもないが、このほかにも問題の内容の傾向や問題の出し方の傾向なども知っておいたほうが良い。過去に出された TOEIC の問題集などで時間配分をあらかじめ考えておいたり、苦手な問題のエリアなどを研究しておくと良い。

文法は TOEIC の需要な部分を占めるので、しっかり勉強しておくなければならない。しかし、さらに重要なのはコミュニケーションをとるための英語なので、日ごろから英学新聞やテレビの英語放送、DVD や英語の歌などで生きた英語を身につけることがある。

普段は辞書を使っても、試験の前には辞書を使わないで解らない単語の意味をコンテクストから推測する練習も有効である。

受験するとき

回答の方法はほとんどが4つの答えから正解を選ぶ方式なので、まず絶対に間違っている答えを消し、さらに答えを2つまで絞ることが出来れば正解率は5割になる。
不正解の答えは正解の答えと意味が似ていたり、同音異義語であったり、つづが似ていたりする場合が多いので注意を要する。
最初に選んだ答えを変更するのはよく自信がない限りやめたほうが良い場合が多い。

リスニング セクション パート1

写真だけを見せて聞こえてくる4つの説明の中から正解を選ぶ問題が20問出題される。
説明が聞こえてくる前に写真を見て、何があるか、人が何をしているところか、戸外か部屋の中か、季節はいつか等考えておいたほうが良い。4つの選択肢を聞き終わって回答のために与えられる時間は5〜8秒である。
できるだけ早く回答し、終わったら次の写真をよく見
る。正解がわからない場合は、とんでもない選択肢を除いてあとのどれかにマークして次の写真を見る。
錘筆をAの上においてAの説明を開き、正しいと思えば錘筆をAにおいたままでB、C、Dの説明を開き、正しくなければ錘筆をBに進ませて説明を開く。これも正しくなければ錘筆をCに進ませて説明を開く。こうすれば説明を覚えていなくても、どの説明を正しいと思ったか覚えていることになる。
音が似ていて紛らわしい単語が使われていたり、1つの単語がいろいろな意味にとれたりする場合があるので注意が必要である。
リスニング セクション パート2

このパートは読み上げの質問20問の形式で30問ある。質問を聞く、それに応答する答えを3つ読み上げられる中から選ぶ。問題用紙には質問と答えの選択肢も書かれていない。

問題と質問の関係が短いのばすやく回答し、次の質問に集中する必要がある。ここでも紛れもない同音異義語や、疑問詞を使った質問か、はい・いいえで答えられる質問か、否定語があるなどに注意して聞くと良い。

同音異義語とはweek/weak、add/ad、hear/here、knot/not、right/write、weight/waitなど発音が同じでつづりと意味が違っている語のことであるが、文の前後の意味関係や文法からどちらを使うべきか決まっている。日ごろから同音異義語を表にして覚えておくと良い。

リスニング セクション パート3

対話を聞いてから質問を読み4つの選択肢から正解を選ぶ形式の問題が30問出題される。質問と4つの選択肢は問題用紙に書かれている。

対話を聞いてくる前にすばやく質問と4つの答えを目を通しておく。どんな場面の会話なのか、キーワードはどれか等考えておくと良い。正解がわかれればすぐ次の問題に目を通すようにする。日ごろから文の意味がよくわかるように意識してみる。正解を選ぶだけでなく、理解を深める努力も忘れないで。

リスニング セクション パート4

ここでは最初に0分から1分半の対話から、何かの説明を聞いてから質問を読み4つの選択肢から正解を選ぶ形式の問題が20問出題される。ここでも聞こえてくる前に質問と選択肢に目を通しておくと良い。イディオムも多用されるし、時にはどういった状況かはよく想像することも必要である。とたえ、二人の人が「お天気が悪い」という話をしていたとする。質問で「何を持って出かければよいか」と聞かれて、対話の中で出てこなくて「傘」が正解となる。

リーディング セクション パート5

リーディング セクション100問のうちパート5とパート6を合わせて60問が文法問題で、パート7の40問が読解問題である。このセクション全体で75分なので、あまり文法問題のところで時間をかけすぎないように気を付ける必要がある。

リーディング セクション パート6

穴埋め問題が40問出題される。ここでは各文の空いている部分に入れると文法的に正しいものを4つの選択肢から選ぶ。接頭辞、接尾辞、受動態、前置詞、関係代名詞などがよく出題される。

最初に自分で空所に入るものを考え、それにあったものを選択肢の中から選ぶというやり方もあるが、何も考えた場合を用意して空所に入れてみて一番良いものを選ぶというやり方もある。後者の場合は時間配分に気をつけなければならない。

リーディング セクション パート7

パート6は誤りを見つける問題が20問出題される。動詞の時制、主語と動詞の一致、代名詞、接続詞に関する問題がよく出される傾向がある。

リーディング セクション パート8

パート7は読解問題が40問出題される。12-15の読み物にそれぞれ2-5の質問がある。内容はビジネスレター、新聞記事、雑誌記事、広告、書類、お知らせなどが多く取り上げられている。質問は、要旨を問うもの、著者の態度に関するもの、内容の詳細を問うもの、内部から推測される事柄を問うものなどがある。

わからない単語があっても気にせず最初にさっと読み、つぎに質問を読んでキーワードを捜すとよい。何を聞いていけるのか理解すれば、キーワードを手がかりにもう一度読む。これで正解がわかるはずだが、キーワードが見つからない場合は全体が何の話であるかを考えて正解を選ぶとよい。

時々、テキストの中の文をそのまま抜粋して選択肢の中に混ぜてあるので気をつけ、もし4つの選択肢のうち2つがまったく反対のことを述べていた場合、そのどちらかが正解であることが多い。

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スコアアップのために

どのくらい勉强すればスコアが上がるかというのはレベルによって異なる。個人差はあるが、通常は、200点から300点へ1ポイント上げるのに1時間、300点から400点へ1ポイント上げるのが1時間半、400点から500点へ1ポイント上げるのに2時間、と比例して時間が必要となり、800点から上に上げようとすれば1ポイントにつき4時間必要と言われている。それはちょうど逆さにした円錐形の容器に水を入れるようなものである。

TOEICのような試験の場合、1点まえ取れた点数というものは±40ポイントのゆらぎの部分が存在する。本当の実力より40ポイント低い取れてしまったかもしれないし、逆がよくて40ポイント高く取れてしまったかもしれませんね。真剣にスコアをあげることを望んでいるなら100時間勉強してからでなければあまり意味がない。

おわりに

現在、TOEICは英語によるコミュニケーション能力を測る手段としてわが国において広く使われている。北米に留学を希望するときはTOEFLを受けるが、TOEFLが大学において勉強するための英語の能力を測り、その六分の一が小論文にあてられているところがTOEICとTOEFLの違うところである。最近のコミュニケーションに偏った英語教育を受けてきたわが国の若者は文法問題に弱く、長文読解も難度が上がり大まかな理解しかできない者が多い。英語の習得は、文法、読解、作文、コミュニケーションを最初からバランスよく学ぶことが大切で、このどれも欠けても後になって伸び悩む原因になると思う。