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Guide to Writing a TOEFL Essay – Independent Task

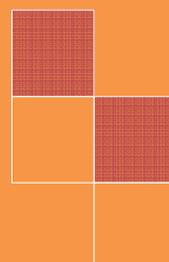
A TOEFL essay is a type of argumentative essay. In it the writer argues for a particular point of view or explains the steps necessary to complete a task. Either way, the essay will have the same basic format. If a few simple steps are followed, writing the TOEFL essay will be an easy task. The writer will be responsible only for supplying ideas, which are the important part of the essay anyway.



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GUIDE TO WRITING A TOEFL ESSAY - (INDEPENDENT TASK)

A TOEFL essay is a type of argumentative essay. In it the writer argues for a particular point of view or explains the steps necessary to complete a task. Either way, the essay will have the same basic format. If a few simple steps are followed, writing the TOEFL essay will be an easy task. The writer will be responsible only for supplying ideas, which are the important part of the essay anyway.

These simple steps will guide you through the TOEFL essay writing process:

- Tackle the topic.
- Prepare an outline of your ideas.
- Write your thesis statement.
- Write the topic sentences of the body paragraphs.
- Write the main points.
- Write the subpoints.
- Elaborate on the subpoints.
- Write the introduction.
- Write the body.
- Write the conclusion.
- Add the finishing touches.

1. Tackle the topic.

Topic: *Some students prefer to attend a small university. Others prefer to attend a big university. Discuss the advantages of each. Then indicate which type of university you prefer? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.*

- 1.1. Address the general topic first – find out the background idea, in this case *attending university*:
Some students prefer to attend a small university. Others prefer to attend a big university.
- 1.2. The second step involves focusing on the *specific idea*, which is the main target of the essay:
Discuss the advantages of each.
- 1.3. The third step is oriented towards the final idea in the topic – it asks your *opinion* and should be dealt with after the discussion is over: **Then indicate which type of university you prefer?**
- 1.4. **In other words, you should discuss the differences between studying in a small and big universities in the light of the advantages either one has to offer and should state which one is your choice based on the presented arguments.**

2. Prepare an outline of your ideas.

- 2.1. Before setting about, you should make a short plan (outline) of the main ideas relating to both small and big universities. A table may come in handy:



Advantages to small universities – (some ideas)	Advantages to big universities (some ideas)
1. smaller groups	1. more majors
2. more attention from lecturers	2. (perhaps) better facilities
3. easier transportation	3. richer academic life

2.2. It is possible to include only some of the ideas, so a revision may be needed; it may entail combining ideas, rephrasing, rethinking of their importance, ordering in terms of significance...

3. Write your thesis statement

- 3.1. Your thesis statement should address the aspects to be discussed in the exposition, rather than provide an opinion on the topic;
- 3.2. The thesis statement consists of *topic* and *controlling idea*.

Ex: Before finally making their choice, students have to carefully analyze all the advantages of either type of tertiary educational institutions.

- 3.2. Here *the type of university* is the topic, while *all the advantages* is the controlling idea.
- 3.3. The controlling idea identifies the scope of discussion in the body.

4. Write the main points and break them down to subpoints

- 4.1. Your main points have already been written out while preparing the outline. They will serve as the backbone of ideas in your essay. Writing them down though, won't be enough, as a convincing essay demands clarification and going to detail. Here, what is important, is to ask questions about the chosen points such as – *why, where, when, under what circumstances etc.*

Ex: *Why are smaller groups important for one's study?*

Or *Is a greater choice of majors crucial to one's decision in favor of a type of university?*

- 4.2. By breaking the main points down, you can specify why a certain point is important. For instance, smaller groups may be instrumental if a student wants to get more attention from the professor or in workshops. Remember, your points need not be unquestionable; all they have to conform to is commonsense *logic*.



5. Elaborate on the subpoints

- 5.1. Your subpoints are your arguments for or against an opinion. It is not enough though, to merely present the subpoints – you have to provide support. For example, stating that a student is entitled to having more majors at a big university does not present an argument. It is only through providing support that a clear point could be made – e.g., having a greater choice of majors may imply a finer tuning to one's specific needs, etc. Thus, a student may also get an interdisciplinary approach to science, which is a key to contemporary success in it.
- 5.2. Supporting a subpoint is crucial but should not be overdone – clarification should be within the reasonable bounds.

6. Writing the introduction

- 6.1. The introduction addresses the topic on the one hand and ensures a smooth transition towards the body. It includes several key components.
- 6.2. The first sentence of the introduction attends to the **general topic** of the question.

Question: **Some students prefer to attend a small university. Others prefer to attend a big university.** *Discuss the advantages of each. Then indicate which type of university you prefer? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.* The general topic of this question refers to types of university, more specifically to their **sizes** and the implications that are brought forward by this. So, the first sentence should be a comment (restatement) of the key word **size**.

Ex: **When considering the choice of university one should take into account its type.**

- 6.3. The second (and probably third) sentences narrow the focus down to the opposition **small/big** university in the light of their **advantages**.

Ex: **Both small and big universities can be beneficial to students each in their own unique way.**

- 6.4. The next sentence can clarify the key word **beneficial** and its relevance to a student's choice.

Ex: **While some students prefer the comfort of a small-sized university, others opt for the greater number of opportunities presented by a bigger Alma Mater.**

- 6.5. The final sentence of the introduction is the **thesis statement**. It targets the points of discussion in the body related to the question. It consists of *topic* and controlling idea.

Ex: Before finally making their choice, students have to carefully analyze all the advantages of *either type of tertiary educational institutions*.

Intro: *When considering the choice of university one should take into account its type. Both small and big universities can be beneficial to students each in their own unique way. While some students prefer the comfort of a small-sized university, others opt for the greater*



number of opportunities presented by a bigger Alma Mater. Before finally making their choice, students have to carefully analyze all the advantages of either type of tertiary educational institutions.

7. Writing the body

7.1. We have already made a thorough plan of the major points and have discussed the subpoints and support. What is also characteristic of the body is that it consists of **two or three** paragraphs each one dealing with a specific key point.

7.2. Schematically, a paragraph of the body involves three distinctive elements – *topic sentence, key ideas and support.*

7.3. The topic sentence is a miniature variant of the thesis in view of having both a *topic* and a controlling idea.

Ex: *Small universities* give students many advantages.

7.4. The rest of the paragraph presents the key points and the support connected with the controlling idea and the topic of the *topic sentence*.

Ex: *Small universities* give students many advantages. First, they may wish to study in smaller groups. That will enable them to get to know their fellow-colleagues better so that they can learn how to work in teams more properly. The teacher will pay more individual attention to each student if the latter are in smaller groups, which is also of paramount importance to getting better understanding of the subject matter or if experiments are involved. As small universities are within the confines of cities, that means students will have to spend less money on transport to an otherwise outlying campus or they can live with their parents.

8. Writing the conclusion

8.1. The conclusion provides the overall stance of the writer on the given question based on the fact that the arguments have already been presented.

Ex: *To sum up, a student may choose to live in whatever type of university suits him/her although I do believe that in my case a bigger university is the better option.*

8.2. Some of the arguments presented in the body may be reinforced here to strengthen the point.

Ex: *For me, a greater selection of majors is fundamental, as I want to make the best of several scientific domains.*

8.3. The last sentence of the essay should be an effective **signing off**. It may go out of the specific topic but if the idea is related in a broader sense.

Ex: Whatever the choice, a student should always bear in mind that his university education will be his/her starting point in a successful career.

9. Linking

9.1. An essay is unthinkable without proper linking words and phrases. Linking should be involved both within the sentence and between sentences and paragraphs. See the document [TOEFL iBT Transitional Words](#).

9.2. The linking words and expressions should be in neutral to formal register.

10. The finishing touches

10.1. Editing should never be underestimated, so one should have enough time to do it. Check for spelling mistakes, tenses, articles, prepositions, etc.

11. Some considerations

There are some golden rules when writing a TOEFL essay:

Budget your time well:

1. *Five minutes for drawing an outline;*
2. *Twenty minutes for writing;*
3. *Five minutes for revision and editing.*

Understand the question well – that may mean simplifying the topic first

Follow your plan/outline, otherwise you may miss a point or get thing out of hand by indulging too much in a point.

Use an objective style – more formal language is a must.

Write clearly in well-defined paragraphs.

Make sure that you read your piece before submission. It must flow naturally, the points have to be presented clearly and appropriate linked.



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