

How to Get the TOEFL Score of 600

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TOEFL and Thinking Pattern

Most beginners in TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language) complain its level of difficulty especially in the Listening and Reading sections. They sometimes grow frustrated as the test is administered within a set of time. There are 140 items which should be done in two hours. This means that each item must be answered in less than one minute. In fact, test takers should be trained to answer each item in thirty seconds.

What is often misunderstood is the fact that TOEFL is a speed test which requires quick and efficient thinking to comprehend each item. This is relevant to the culture of the language. It is commonly known that language is related to culture. Indonesian students have little training for the speedy thinking process. As a result, they miss the implication of a sentence in the Listening section.

There are two types of thinking in terms of creativity according to Edward de Bono. The vertical thinking just takes information as it is without any relationship with other pieces of information. The lateral thinking assumes that anything must be related to other pieces of information. Creativity in Listening can be practiced by predicting or anticipating what word or sentences comes one after another. For instance, the part of sentence *She wants to...* can be completed by adding a full verb such as *go, study, work* and so on. The anticipatory skill must be trained from time to time. It is of course a kind of guessing by applying the grammatical knowledge. The more it is practiced, the better the guessing is. The grammatical rules should be familiar to improve the anticipatory skill. The final word or sound of the sentence or utterance can be a clue to search for the proper completing word. When the sentence is constructed correctly, then, it can also be another clue for a larger sentence. In this case, the coherence of two sentences is also the element to be grasped in the skill.

It is interesting to note that Noam Chomsky (1965) stated that there is no limit to the length of a sentence. There can be embedded sentences in a compound-complex sentence. The skill to compose a much larger sentence should be practiced from an earlier stage. Thus, this sentence is possible in terms of the Chomskyan term "recursiveness": *The young, clever man, who has come from London with a bag, told his older brother the other day when they met at the airport that he would visit him again after he had finished his studies in the United States.* There are 41 words in this sentence and it can be categorized as a long sentence. However, this is not commonly used in a conversation because of the limitation of the memory. The STM (short-term memory) functions well when there is not too much information imparted. Psychologists have discovered that on the average a listener can remember 7 words in one chunk or at a time of remembering. When there are more than 7 words in a chunk, the listener may lose the meaning of the sentence. In the TOEFL, for instance, each sentence in the conversation has more than 7 words as in the following excerpt:

Woman : If I were you, I'd take the bus to work. Driving in that rush-hour traffic is terrible.
Man : But by the time the bus gets to my stop, there aren't any seats left.
Narrator : What does the man?

The conclusion must be drawn so that the question as in the above can be answered precisely. First, the woman makes a suggestion to the man who drives his car. The suggestion is based on a reason related to the traffic jam. Then, the man has the argument why he has to drive his car to work. The bus he wants to take is full of passengers when it arrives at the bus stop. Second, the question of the narrator must be well understood. It is about the implication of the response. The following choices are given:

- A. He doesn't mind the traffic.
- B. He takes the bus to work.
- C. He has to stand on the bus if he takes it to work.
- D. He wants to ride to work with the woman.

The context of situation in a conversation must be analyzed in order to be able to understand the implicature (hidden meaning). The above short conversation shows the cohesion rather than the coherence of one sentence with another. It would be difficult of course for the beginner to understand the hidden meaning without having enough grammatical knowledge such as the use of conditional sentences type 2 and 3.

The problem with the thinking pattern is also concerned with the process of drawing the conclusion. Basically, there are two types namely the deductive (from general to particular) and inductive (from particular to

general). When a native speaker of English says "I come from the United States", he expects a particular question further like "Which part?" rather than "Do you like Indonesian food?" which is a deductive question. There is a shift from the topic of the country to the topic of food. In other words, people in the West love the details rather than general statements. This difference of course produces a different type of expectation. Likewise, in reading there is always an expectation of details as in a descriptive writing. The needs for details lead to the creativity of the mind to search for other relevant information. The game of "20 questions" for children in the United States indicates the practice of creative and inductive thinking. Such a type is not often practiced here except when the people are confronted with a debate or discussion.

Creativity involves multiple intelligences as Howard Gardner proposed (linguistic, logical, spatial, bodily, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist). This means that in order to understand the TOEFL better, all the aspects of learning must be involved. Listening to classical music may have the influence on the power of the brain to process information. With its capacity of storing more than 3 trillion pieces of information, it is possible to learn and master English to reach the score of 600. Even the maximum score of 677 (Paper and Pencil TOEFL) is possible when the multiple intelligences are applied. The meanings of unfamiliar words can be guessed better when sounds are used to interpret the meanings. The words "swerve" (turn aside abruptly) and "thud" (a dull sound), for instance, can be guessed by pronouncing them and imagining the context of situation. When the word "swerve" is connected with a vehicle, then, the sound of the screeching tires leads to the definition above. Similarly, the word "thud" as produced by a stone thrown to a bark of a tree gives the definition in brackets.

The listening skill can only be trained by the practice of listening to various sources such as radio broadcasts, songs, movies and conversations with native speakers. The idea that listening can be mastered by explaining it sounds illogical. The listener learns how to guess meanings after constructing the connectedness between one sentence with another. It takes self-determination and strong motivation to listen to the authentic materials. Doing so also trains the listener to concentrate on the utterances. There are cases in which the test takers sigh heavily when they cannot grasp the meaning of the cue sentence. As a result, they cannot concentrate on the next items, which certainly lead to confusion and frustration.

In the Reading section of the TOEFL, the inductive thinking pattern should also be applied. There is much information to be stored in the memory. The information is presented in details. The brain can create a kind of list containing similar information according to the category. Like Roget's Thesaurus, words are classified according to a certain theme. There are certain words for a certain concept. In the thesaurus, there are main concepts called classes like Abstract Relation consisting of minor concepts such as *relation, quantity, order, number, time, change, causation*, Space, Matter, Intellect, Volition, and Affection each having minor concepts. Whatever the system of classifying words is, this proves that creativity is essential. The total vocabulary of English is huge (over 4 million lexical items) which can be classified according to the purpose and meaning of the words. In enlarging the vocabulary for the sake of understanding the reading materials, there should be an attempt to know the classification of words. Wilfred Funk (1961) with his book *Six Weeks to Words of Power* introduces the various uses of words. For example, there are verbs of action, verbs of general value, and verbs of denial which are all intended to classify words according to their uses. Ludwig Wittgenstein is right in his philosophical statement that "the limit of your language is the limit of your world. The more words are stored in the memory, the larger the world is constructed in the mind.

The most effective type of reading is the interactive reading. The reader constantly uses his "schemata" or previously acquired knowledge structures (Carrell, 1988: 76). What is written in the reading materials must be seen in relation to what is beyond the text. The interaction between the mind and the text occurs naturally when the "known" is used to understand the "unknown". Understanding the context or what is beyond the text is more important than comprehending what is explicitly explained. Creative and inductive thinking demands greater curiosity about what is implied in the text.

To beat the Reading section, the test takers are expected to read at the speed of 300 words per minute. One text contains at least 300 words and so it takes one minute to finish reading and understanding the text. An average university student in the US is expected to read at 500 words per minute (wpm) or otherwise he can never finish the whole book for one semester. Thus, reading speed must be improved in order to get a higher score in the Reading section. Reading activities are also enhanced by having a clear purpose. Oxford (1990:158) suggests that learners must look for the purpose in light of the situation and the type of material. There are different purposes for reading such as looking quickly through the piece to get the main idea or gist (skimming), searching rapidly for a particular piece of information (scanning), reading a longer text for pleasure (extensive reading), and reading a shorter text carefully and in detail (intensive reading). It is interesting to state that Listening and Reading have more items (each has 50 items) compared with the Structure section (40 items). This is one of the reasons why many learners say that TOEFL test is difficult. The preparation for the test in reality is more focused on the grammar or structure which is

not effective. On the other hand, there are more items (100 items) which require the continuous practice of listening and reading. Therefore, the business of TOEFL preparation cannot totally change the attitude of the learners to practice the skills of listening and reading.

Language Attitude

To be successful in reaching the desired score of 600 and beyond, the beginner should have a positive language attitude. Differences between English and Indonesian must be taken as a reality and explored to understand the nature of the target language. For instance, the collocations in English cannot be translated into Indonesian such as *take medicine, meet the requirements, break the rules, pay the last visit, hold a meeting* and so on. The learner can accept the differences which stimulate the curiosity to collect as many collocations as possible. There are differences in the language expression due to the influence of culture. The expression *Will you marry me?* indicates the cultural difference. Sciences and technology as byproducts of culture also produce many different expressions and terms which cannot be directly translated into English. The term *van Allen's belt* has nothing to do with a belt in a real sense. It is an area or space between the Moon and the Earth where zero gravitation exists.

The language attitude will lead to the discovery of different learning styles. Mastering the grammar of English takes time, however, when the learner studies the structure by reading 10 books of grammar at the same time, he may get the benefit of having more information about a topic selected. For example, he can decide to study Verb as an important part of speech. One book may discuss it from a different point of view. Thus, when more grammar books are read, there will be a holistic view of the Verb. The learner can see the relationship between Verbs and other parts of speech and understand the difficulties in mastering the rules. The sub-topics like Tenses, Mood, Agreement, Indirect Speech, Phrasal Verbs will show the range of use of the verbs in English sentences.

How to enlarge the vocabulary comes from the language attitude. Understanding the role of prefixes and suffixes, for example, can help the learner to increase the vocabulary stock (33%). The TOEFL test requires at least 10,000 words which are sufficient for the learner to read *Reader's Digest* magazine without using the dictionary. If the learner can see the root and stem of a word, it is possible for him to guess the meaning without sweat. Guessing in the TOEFL test can increase the possibility of getting a higher score as much as 14%. The more information is acquired about a word, the more precise the guessing becomes. Reading itself is a kind of psycholinguistic guessing.

What is most important before reaching the desired score of 600 and beyond is the mental readiness for hard work and perseverance in studying the language. Thomas Alva Edison with his slogan "a genius is 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration" suggests that the learner should study English continuously and diligently. The linguistic competence will be more internalized as there is a holistic view of the language. A problem in grammar can be analyzed by relating it to other aspects of the language. It is like understanding the function of a human body. The body organs function according to the mechanisms and contribute to the health of the person.

General knowledge must be acquired at any cost. The Reading section of the TOEFL contains materials of different sciences. It would be easier to understand the texts if there is enough general knowledge (schemata) to be applied for interactive reading. Terms, concepts, notions and ideas are comprehensible when the interaction goes naturally. In addition, the general knowledge of the world helps the learner to understand what is beyond the texts.

It is suffice to say that beating the TOEFL test to get the score of 600 requires a better understanding of the nature of the test. Listening and Reading sections have more items. This means that the learner should focus more on the two skills. Understanding an implicature in a conversation, for instance, can be acquired through the practice of anticipatory skill and analyzing the topic from the context of situation. The cohesion rather than the coherence is more important in the speech function. Therefore, the learner must learn how to draw a conclusion from given conversations, mini-talks (lectures), radio or television talk shows, interviews and news reports. With the right mental attitude or language attitude, all the difficulties can be handled. It takes the sacrifice of time more than planned as in Murphy's Laws. Given enough time and energy supported by strong motivation and determination, it is possible to get the TOEFL score of 600 and beyond.

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