ELL SUMMER INSTITUTE SECTION

TOEFL iBT® Writing

REQUIREMENTS FOR SAVING AND SUBMITTING DOCUMENTS

1. **Filename:** Save your document with your first and last name plus the ELL Summer Institute section and the year for which you are applying.

   Example: Jane Doe TOEFL iBT Writing 20XX.doc

2. **Identifying Info:** Your name should not appear anywhere inside the document. It should only appear in the filename.
3. **Submission Format:** More detailed instructions on how to format materials for submission are provided throughout the document.

OVERVIEW

One part of the TOEFL iBT Writing test assesses the examinee's ability to write in response to a two-part stimulus on an academic subject. The stimulus consists of a reading passage followed by a recorded lecture on the same topic. After reading the passage and listening to the lecture, the examinee is directed by a 'prompt' for a written response. A typical prompt is "Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on the specific points made in the reading passage." The stimulus and prompt together constitute the writing item.

The reading passage part of the stimulus is between 250 and 300 words long. It begins with a brief introduction that explains an issue, practice, position, theory, or explanation. The reading states a thesis, that is, a position in favor of or against this practice, issue, explanation, etc., and then presents three **clear and distinct** arguments that support the thesis.

The lecture is on the same topic as the reading, and rebuts each of reading passage's three arguments. The lecture does not restate (though it may allude to) the arguments of the reading, but it presents arguments of its own that "line up" with and counter the specific arguments presented in the Reading. The lecture script is no more than 300 words.

There are three sample items in the final section of this document. Note that after each of the items there is a table of the "key points." This is not seen by the examinee. The key points are written by the item writer as a guide for the raters who will score examinees' written responses.

WORK SAMPLE TASKS

Each applicant for the TOEFL iBT Writing section is required to submit a Writing work sample. The work sample has **TWO** tasks:

Task I: Write an item
Write a reading + lecture stimulus with three point/counter point pairs based on Source Material A **or** Source Material B indicated below. You **must** use only provided source material. You should not provide a key points table for Task I.

Task II: Produce a table of key points [See examples of items] for a *possible* item based on the remaining set of source material. Produce the point table only for Task II.

In sum, your work sample will consist of an item with a reading and a lecture stimulus (Task I) on one of the two sets of source material and a table of key points (Task II) for the remaining set of source material. You may use **either** Source Material A or Source Material B for a given task, **but** you must complete **both** tasks and use **different** source material for each.

Both the item and the key points table should be put in a single Word document and titled as indicated above.

GENERAL ADVICE ON WRITING YOUR ITEM

Clarity, simplicity, and directness: These are primary virtues that can take precedence over completeness of coverage or nuances of a position or argument. Sometimes there is an interesting or important argument that must be foregone because it cannot be delivered with sufficient simplicity or because the reply to it cannot be made simply and directly.

Distinct: The distinctness of points/arguments should be maximized. Of course, each of the three arguments supports the same thesis, but consistent with that, each point should be as distinct as possible. [E.g. in an item about global warming, three different arguments about carbon dioxide concentrations will all blur together in the examinee's mind. So one argument could be about carbon dioxide, one about retreating glaciers, and one about the geological record.] In practice, the desideratum of distinctness may force not using a good point/counterpoint because it would infringe on the idea of another point pair.

Arguments: An argument is not just an opinion. For each individual point there has to be a basis, grounds, evidence for the conclusion (the thesis). The rebuttal of the lecture is not just a contrary opinion, and the rebuttal cannot *ignore* the reading argument. Each of the three lecture rebuttals has to engage the reading argument of the corresponding point. It has to undermine the evidence, or provide an alternative explanation of the evidence, or take issue with an assumption explicitly or tacitly made in using the evidence to support the Reading thesis. One can call the accuracy of the Reading *evidence* into question, "new data suggests that...", but one cannot rebut the reading argument just by disagreeing with the argument's conclusion.

Take into account the fact that the examinee will hear the lecture only once. So the lecture in particular needs to be **clear, simple, and straightforward**. Do not use difficult vocabulary and be sure as part of the exposition to provide a brief gloss of a technical term that cannot be avoided.

In general, each individual reading point (and each the lecture counters) should constitute a single argument (reply), not a family of separate points (replies).

Do not try to cover all the material in the source or even on a given point. It is generally necessary to *simplify* the issues. The point of these items is to provide a basis for assessing the examinee's ability to write, and we can't do that if the response-limiting factor is the complexity of the reading passage and lecture.

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR YOUR WORK SAMPLE

YOU MUST USE THE TOPICS AND SOURCE MATERIAL WE INDICATE BELOW.

Source Material A (single article):

- **On the controversy of what caused the megafaunal extinctions at the end of the Pleistocene** http://faculty.washington.edu/grayson/jas30req.pdf

Source Material B (3 articles in a separate .pdf file):

- **The Basics of Biochar: A Natural Soil Amendment**
- **Woodchips with everything. It's the Atkins plan of the low-carbon world**
- **Biochar: A Critical Review of Science and Policy (Portions of this article are unnecessary for this activity and have been redacted; they are blacked out.)**

THREE EXAMPLES OF TOEFL WRITING ITEMS

EXAMPLE 1

Were Dinosaurs Endotherms?

Reading Passage:

Endotherms are animals such as modern birds and mammals that keep their body temperatures constant. For instance, humans are endotherms and maintain an internal temperature of 37°C, no matter whether the environment is warm or cold. Because dinosaurs were reptiles, and modern reptiles are not endotherms, it was long assumed that dinosaurs were not endotherms. However, dinosaurs differ in many ways from modern reptiles, and there is now considerable evidence that dinosaurs were, in fact, endotherms.

Polar dinosaurs

One reason for believing that dinosaurs were endotherms is that dinosaur fossils have been discovered in polar regions. Only animals that can maintain a temperature well above that of the surrounding environment could be active in such cold climates.

Leg position and movement

There is a connection between endothermy and the position and movement of the legs. The physiology of endothermy allows sustained physical activity, such as running. But running is

efficient only if an animal's legs are positioned underneath its body, not at the body's side, as they are for crocodiles and many lizards. The legs of all modern endotherms are underneath the body, and so were the legs of dinosaurs. This strongly suggests that dinosaurs were endotherms.

Haversian canals

There is also a connection between endothermy and bone structure. The bones of endotherms usually include structures called Haversian canals. These canals house nerves and blood vessels that allow the living animal to grow quickly, and rapid body growth is in fact a characteristic of endothermy. The presence of Haversian canals in bone is a strong indicator that the animal is an endotherm, and fossilized bones of dinosaurs are usually dense with Haversian canals.

Listening:

[Narrator] Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

[Professor] Many scientists have problems with the arguments you read in the passage. They don't think those arguments prove that dinosaurs were endotherms.

Take the polar dinosaur argument. When dinosaurs lived, even the polar regions where dinosaur fossils have been found were much warmer than today—warm enough during part of the year for animals that were not endotherms to live. And during the months when the polar regions were cold, the so-called polar dinosaurs could have migrated to warmer areas or hibernated like many modern reptiles do. So the presence of dinosaur fossils in polar regions doesn't prove the dinosaurs were endotherms.

Well, what about the fact that dinosaurs had their legs placed under their bodies, not out to the side, like a crocodile's? That doesn't necessarily mean dinosaurs were high-energy endotherms built for running. There's another explanation for having legs under the body: this body structure supports more weight. So with legs under their bodies, dinosaurs could grow to a very large size. Being large had advantages for dinosaurs, so we don't need the idea of endothermy and running to explain why dinosaurs evolved to have their legs under their bodies.

OK, so how about bone structure? Many dinosaur bones do have Haversian canals, that's true, but dinosaur bones also have growth rings. Growth rings are a thickening of the bone that indicate periods of time when the dinosaurs weren't rapidly growing. These growth rings are evidence that dinosaurs stopped growing or grew more slowly during cooler periods. This pattern of periodic growth—you know, rapid growth followed by no growth or slow growth and then rapid growth again—is characteristic of animals that are not endotherms. Animals that maintain a constant body temperature year round, as true endotherms do, grow rapidly even when the environment becomes cool.

Prompt:

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

Dinosaur Key Points:

Reading:	**Lecture**:
Thesis: There is strong evidence for believing that dinosaurs were endotherms like modern mammals and birds.	Antithesis: The arguments that dinosaurs were endotherms all have weaknesses.
Polar Dinosaurs The presence of dinosaur fossils at the poles suggests that dinosaurs were endotherms because only endotherms can remain active under conditions of cold.	The polar regions were warmer during the dinosaur age, and during the cold season, dinosaurs may have migrated or hibernated.
Leg Position and Movement In general reptiles have legs out to the side. In contrast endotherms have the legs placed under the body to allow the sustained running that an endothermic metabolism makes possible. Dinosaurs had their legs under their body, so they were probably running endotherms.	Having legs under the body allowed dinosaurs to grow to large size, which was advantageous but which has nothing to do with endothermy. So it cannot be concluded from the placement and movement of the legs that dinosaurs were endotherms.
Haversian Canals Endotherms grow relatively rapidly and the bones of rapidly growing animals typically have Haversian canals. Dinosaur bones are generally dense with Haversian canals. It seems likely, therefore, that dinosaurs were endotherms.	Besides Haversian canals, dinosaur bones often show growth rings that suggest that dinosaurs stopped growing when conditions became cold. True endotherms continue to grow rapidly even during the cold periods, so dinosaurs were probably not true endotherms.

Example 2

Life on Mars

Reading Passage:

For years, scientists have been trying to discover whether life exists on Mars. Most have concluded that the Martian environment today is too harsh to support living organisms. However, three recent discoveries lend support to the idea that there may very well be life on Mars after all.

First, large amounts of methane have been detected in the Martian atmosphere. This suggests the presence of living methanogens, tiny organisms that release methane into the atmosphere as a by-product of their life processes. Methanogens get their energy from hydrogen in rocks and do not need oxygen or sunlight to live, so they can survive in harsh environments like Mars. Since methane can remain in Mars' atmosphere only for a few centuries after it's created, these methanogens must be present and producing methane today.

Second, the existence of life on Mars is also strongly supported by a meteorite discovered in Antarctica in 1996. The particular chemical composition of this meteorite indicates that it is a rock from the surface of Mars. The meteorite also contains chemically pure and flawless crystals of the compound magnetite. Such magnetite crystals are produced in nature only by bacteria.

Third, observations of hydrogen on Mars made in 2001 by NASA's Mars Odyssey spacecraft suggest the presence of liquid water there that could support organisms. The spacecraft detected the hydrogen in the top layer of Martian soil. This hydrogen is just what one would expect if there were liquid water under the surface. A subterranean reservoir of liquid water is an extremely suitable environment for microscopic life.

Listening:

[Narrator] Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about.

[Professor] Mars is a very unfriendly place for life. The evidence that has been put forward as supporting there being life on Mars is actually very ambiguous. The facts as we know them can easily be accounted for without supposing life on Mars.

First, methanogens are not necessarily the source of the methane. Methane can be produced by nonbiological processes like volcanic eruptions. The same experiments that detected the atmospheric methane also indicated recent volcano activity. Moreover, unlike methanogens, volcanoes have actually been found on Mars. So since no methanogens have been found yet, it's more likely that volcanoes are the source of Mars's methane.

Second, while the magnetite crystals found in the meteorite from Mars were probably made by bacteria, there is no indication that the bacteria themselves originated on Mars. The meteorite arrived on Earth about 13,000 years ago, which means it has had thousands of years to become exposed to bacteria on Earth. So it could have been bacteria on Earth that formed the crystals we now observe. Indeed, recent research performed on the meteorite found that, in fact, it has become contaminated by Earth bacteria. Since the sample has been contaminated, the magnetite crystals on the meteorite cannot be used as evidence for life on Mars.

Third, what about the supposed existence of liquid water near enough to the surface of Mars to support life? The recent investigations of Mars detected hydrogen; they didn't detect liquid water per se. It's actually much more likely that if there's any water close to the Martian surface, it's frozen; in other words, it's ice, not liquid water. And that's not a great environment for life.

Prompt:

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on the specific points made in the reading passage.

Life on Mars Key Points:

Reading	Lecture
Thesis: The evidence supporting the theory that there are living biological organisms on Mars is convincing.	Antithesis: Though the evidence for life on Mars is interesting and may warrant further investigation, but at present it is questionable.
Supporting Arguments	**Rebutting Arguments**
The large amount of methane detected in the atmosphere suggests the presence of living methanogens.	Methanogens have not yet been found on Mars, while volcanoes, which also produce methane, have been.
A meteorite from Mars contains magnetite crystals, which can be produced only by living bacteria.	The magnetite crystals on the meteorite from Mars may have been caused by bacteria from Earth; after all, the meteorite has been on Earth for a long time and studies show that the meteorite has been contaminated by Earthly bacteria. Because of the contamination, it cannot be concluded that the crystals were formed by Martian bacteria.
Recent data indicate that there may be liquid water under an ice layer, and thus there may be living organisms.	The existence of the ice layer is only an inference from the presence of hydrogen in the soil, and there are other equally plausible, non-biological explanations for that soil hydrogen.

Example 3

VOTING MACHINES

Reading Passage:

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. The advocates of replacing the old system of voting with computerized voting machines support their position with several arguments.

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.

Third, 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.

Listening:

[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.

Prompt:

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they oppose specific points made in the reading passage.

Voting Machine Key Points:

Reading	Listening
Thesis: Traditional methods of recording votes should be replaced with computerized voting machines.	Antithesis: Introducing computerized voting machines will not solve the problems critics have of traditional voting methods.
Computerized voting is user-friendly and will make casting the correct vote easier for people who occasionally miscast their vote using ballots.	People unfamiliar with computers will find computerized voting difficult, and may miscast their votes or even not participate in elections.
Counting ballots by hand is tedious and results almost inevitably in errors; recounts would also be expensive; these errors will be eliminated by the computerized voting machines, because computers do not make counting errors.	Programs for computerized voting machines may contain errors, which may result in more serious miscount than errors due to human counting and no possibility of recount for some machines.
Governments and individuals trust complex technology to be fully reliable for financial transactions and communications. Computerized voting technology should be no different.	Financial and communication technology are used daily and have been made reliable; computerized voting takes place so seldom, it doesn't have the chance to be fully tested.