Mapping TOEFL® iBT on the Common European Framework of Reference

Executive Summary

Background

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) provides a common basis for describing the skills needed to reach different levels of language proficiency, and is used by language instructors, educators, curriculum designers and agencies working in the field of language development. The CEFR describes language proficiency in reading, writing, speaking and listening on a six-level scale:

- A1 – A2 (Basic User)
- B1 – B2 (Independent User)
- C1 – C2 (Proficient User)

The CEFR provides a descriptive context that may be used to interpret the meaning and practical significance of scores on language tests. If a test score can be one of the levels of the CEFR, what that score means and what candidates with at least that score are likely to be able to do becomes clear.

ETS's Goal

The Internet-based TOEFL® iBT (*TEST OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE™*) measures the ability to use and combine listening, reading, speaking and writing skills to communicate in an academic environment. The purpose of this mapping study was to identify the minimum scores on the TOEFL® iBT corresponding to each level of the CEFR. Minimum scores were identified separately for speaking, listening, writing and reading.

Standard-setting Study

Standard setting is the process by which a panel of informed experts makes score requirement recommendations that correspond with the level of knowledge, skill, proficiency, mastery or readiness candidates need in order to be placed in a certain category. The end result of standard setting is a recommended minimum score requirement, or cut score. The minimum scores for each CEFR level in this particular study are presented as lower limits of the level for each modality.

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For this study, the panel consisted of 23 experts (English-language instructors, administrators or directors of language programs and language testing experts) from 16 different European countries.

Results

The expert panel was able to make connections between the construct of the test and the CEFR. The table below presents the recommended score ranges and the minimum score for each modality at each CEFR proficiency level.

The panel determined the TOEFL® iBT Speaking section spans the widest range of proficiency (from A1 level to C1 level) and the Reading section was the only section that reached the C2 level. Overall, the results suggest that the TOEFL® iBT is best used to discriminate at the B1 to C1 levels of the CEFR, which is consistent with the claims of the test.

Interpreting Results

Institutions, English programs and learners can interpret the recommended minimum scores on the TOEFL® iBT by referring to the global descriptors and other tables in the CEFR at **www.ets.org/results/cefr.html**. The results represent the recommendations of informed experts using recognized standard-setting approaches. However, they should be considered guidelines as ETS does not recommend the use of rigid cut scores.

Technical Report

This standard-setting study was conducted by ETS researchers Richard J. Tannenbaum, Ph.D., and E. Caroline Wylie, Ph.D., in October 2006.

Test Section	Total Score Scale Range	Minimum Score					
		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
TOEFL® iBT Total[1]	0–120			57–86	87–109	110–120	
TOEFL® iBT Reading	0–30			8	22	28	29
TOEFL® iBT Listening	0–30			13	21	26	
TOEFL® iBT Speaking	0–30	8	13	19	23	28	
TOEFL® iBT Writing	0–30		11	17	21	28	

[1] TOEFL® scores are reported in 1-point increments.

For more information on this study, mail us at cef@etsglobal.org.

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