**TOEFL Section 4: Writing (30 marks in 50 mins)**

This section is now a standard part of the TOEFL iBT. Previously, a writing test was administered as a separate test (TWE) from the paper and computer based TOEFL.

The iBT writing section is divided into two parts: Integrated Writing and Independent Writing.

**Integrated Writing** (Writing Based on Reading and Listening)

Here you will read a passage about an academic topic. Then you will listen to a lecture about the same topic. You are permitted to take notes while you read and listen. You will be asked a question that relates to both the text and the listening.

Your response should be 150-225 words. Hint: Look for three many points that are related. Your score will depend on the quality of your writing as well as how well you answer the question. After you have heard the lecture you will have twenty minutes to plan and write your response.

**Reading**

In a vote that took place at the International Astronomical Union Conference on August 24th, 2006, Pluto lost its status as a planet in our solar system. Pluto was originally discovered in 1930 when scientists were searching for something that was interfering with Uranus's orbit. Though Pluto was estimated to be similar in size to Earth, it was later discovered that it was even smaller than our own moon, as well as many other moons. It is now known that there are thousands of planetary objects similar to Pluto, including Eris which is slightly larger than Pluto. Choosing to reclassify Pluto to a dwarf planet honors the fact that science is about making new discoveries. While it was a sad day for Pluto lovers, people in general have accepted the idea, and the next generation of children will grow up knowing only eight planets and thinking nothing of it. As Mike Brown, the astronomer who discovered Eris, noted following the IUC's decision, "science is self-correcting."

**Next you will listen to part of a lecture on the same subject.**

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Transcript of lecture:**

As you all likely know by now, Pluto has been officially demoted to a dwarf planet. What this means is that we will no longer include it as part of our solar system. The debate about whether or not Pluto should hold its status as a planet created such a conflict within the community of world astronomers that it has been called the *Great Pluto War*. The decision on whether or not to demote Pluto was put to a final vote by astronomers from around the world at the International Astronomical Union Conference. However, when I say from around the world, I don't mean worldwide. In fact, less than 10% of the world's astronomers voted, and most of those who were at the conference had already gone home by the last day when the vote took place. Of more than 10 000 potential voters, less than 500 took part, mainly because there was no way for them to cast their vote without actually being at the conference. Many astronomers believe that if electronic voting had been an option, Pluto along with two other celestial objects, would now be considered planets. Furthermore, the definition that was decided upon for a planet - that it must clear the neighborhood around its orbit - doesn't technically hold up, since Earth, Mars, Neptune, and Jupiter all have asteroids as neighbors.

The IUC decision disappointed many people outside the astronomy community too. You see, there are more than a few Pluto lovers out there. Some were so angry at the resolution that they began putting petitions together to have the ruling overturned. In New Mexico, where Pluto's discoverer was a resident, state officials have declared March 13th, Pluto Planet Day. Children in particular have a thing with Pluto and are perhaps the least willing to part with it. The name for the now dwarf planet was put to a vote in 1930. And incidentally, *Pluto*, which was chosen unanimously by a group at the observatory where it was discovered, had been submitted by a young schoolgirl.

**Summarize the points made in the lecture, explaining how they cast doubt on the points made in the reading passage.**

**Sample Answer**

Pluto lost its status as a planet in our solar system at the International Astronomical Union Conference in 2006. The decision has been wrapped in controversy ever since.

The reading suggests that the decision was generally accepted and was based on the new scientific information that has been learned since Pluto's original discovery. However, the lecture refutes this idea, suggesting that the astronomy community was not fairly represented in the vote to demote Pluto to dwarf status, and that many people disagree with the decision.

According to the reading, Pluto was demoted due to its size. However, the professor points out that the reason Pluto was demoted was because it doesn't fit the new definition of a planet. According to the new definition, a planet must clear the neighborhood around its orbit. While Pluto does not, neither do other planets including Earth. Technically speaking, many planets have asteroids as neighbors, therefore, they do not clear their orbit.

Finally, the reading implies that people will soon forget that Pluto was ever a planet. In contrast, the professor talks of petitions and special ways that citizens are honoring the beloved planet Pluto. While the reading notes that children will not know any differently when they grow up without Pluto in their solar system, the professor claims that the lost planet will always have a place in children's hearts as it did from the very beginning.

**Independent Writing** (Writing Based on Knowledge and Experience)

This section of the test asks you questions about common experiences. You will be asked to give your opinion and provide reasons and examples. You will not be required to have any previous knowledge on a topic. You will have 30 minutes to prepare an essay in response to the question provided.

**Sample Question types:**

* Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Students should take out student loans to avoid working while studying. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.
* Some people think its better to live with a roommate. Other people prefer to live alone. Which do you prefer? Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.
* It is better to grow up with siblings than without. Do you agree or disagree? Use specific reasons and examples to develop your essay.
* It has recently been announced that the public library in your area will be closed for the summer months for a major renovation and expansion. Do you support or oppose this plan. Why? Use specific reasons and details to support your answer.

**Example:**

Read the example of a student's brainstorming session and essay.

When you are finished reading the example look at the checklist and find out why this student deserves a perfect score of 5.

Some people prefer to settle down and start a family in a rural area. Other people prefer the convenience of the big city.

Which do you prefer? Use specific reasons and examples to support your opinion.

**Sample Essay:**

Does this scenario sound familiar to you? A young couple meets and falls in love in the city. Later they get married and decide to move to a rural area. They plan to start a family. This may have been the case years ago, but today more couples are choosing to settle down in the city. In my opinion a city has more to offer a new family than a rural area. These things include jobs, institutions, and support systems.

There are more work opportunities for young couples in a city than in a rural area. Unemployment is much lower in urban centers. One reason for this is that many jobs in rural areas are seasonal. It is more common for large companies to be based in the city. Even though the cost of living is higher in the city than it is in a rural area, people who work in the city tend to have much higher salaries. Furthermore, financial stress is a leading cause of divorce and leads to the break up of families.

The city offers important institutions such as the best hospitals and schools that rural areas don't always have. For instance, people who get sick or have babies in rural areas often have to travel to the city for medical attention. This can lead to bills and transportation problems. While their parents have to commute to work, kids sometimes have to travel a long way on a bus to school. All of the travel takes away from family time. In addition, kids who grow up in rural areas are less likely to go to post secondary schools. Most have to go to the city to get a good education.

It is more likely that a young couple will have the support of friends and family in the city than in a rural area. When a young couple moves away from this support system, they often feel isolated. On the other hand, small communities are usually close and friendly. It doesn't take long to meet new friends in a small town. People look out for each other and the crime rate is much lower. Even still, you can never replace your best friends and relatives. Consequently, birthdays and holidays feel lonely without grandparents and childhood friends to join in the celebration.

Living in the city is a new trend for young families. This is partly because people are starting families later. I have already established my career and home in the city. My friends and family and all of the things I need are here. When I meet my future spouse I hope he agrees to settle down in the city.

|  |
| --- |
| **Essay checklist** |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Do I have an interesting introductory sentence? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Do I have a thesis? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Does my introduction state the topics that I plan to cover? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Does each paragraph have a topic sentence? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Do I use examples and reasons to support my points? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Is my spelling and punctuation correct? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Do I use simple grammatical structure that I am comfortable with? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Do I use transitional phrases? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Have I covered both sides of an issue fairly? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Did I prove my thesis? |
| http://www.englishclub.com/esl-exams/tick.gif | Does my conclusion end with an interesting thought or idea? |