

subject focus

Toefl preparation courses in the USA

Test preparation is popular with international students in the USA who are anxious to gain admission to one of the country's well reputed universities.

For any international student wanting to study in a university in an English speaking destination, scoring well in an academic test of English is an essential part of the application process. In the USA, the Test of English as a Foreign Language, or Toefl test, is most commonly used as an indicator of language ability by universities. Preparation courses, which guide students towards a successful test result, are now an important part of the education travel landscape.

Many Toefl preparation courses are offered at language schools attached to universities, as is the case at the University of Southern California Language Academy in Los Angeles, CA, which has been offering such courses since 1997 "due to the overwhelming student demand for them". Angela Mitchell, Marketing and Recruitment Specialist at the school, says, "We offer a Toefl elective for low intermediate level students, which is four hours of their 21 total hours a week. For intermediate/advanced students, we offer a specialised 'Toefl Track', which is eight hours of 21 per week."

Combining specific exam-focused tuition with further lessons in general English is a common option offered at many language schools. Steve Horowitz, Director of the UESL programme at Central Washington University in Ellensburg, WA, says that they only offer the Toefl preparation course as an elective part of their full-time intensive English programme. "It is one of our most popular elective classes," he adds.

The popularity of and demand for Toefl preparation courses among international students coming to the USA is also something that Scott Helfgott, National Director of Academic Programs at Aspect North America,

emphasises. He points out that they have two Toefl preparation courses that are offered at all Aspect schools throughout North America as electives to complement general English courses. "At Aspect New York, an additional course called Toefl 110 is also offered as an intensive programme for those students who are interested in a curriculum entirely devoted to preparing for the Toefl exam," he says. "No general English language classes are given within this curriculum."

Recent changes to the format of the Toefl exam have meant that schools have had to stay up-to-date by changing the content of their courses. The Internet-based Toefl test (iBT) was introduced into the USA in 2005 and has taken over from the computer-based test (CBT), which was phased out completely in September 2006. Along with a different testing format the new test also examines students on slightly different skills, as Helfgott explains.

"Unlike the CBT Toefl, the Toefl iBT no longer explicitly tests grammar and has an added section which tests students' English speaking abilities," he says. "The new Toefl exam focuses entirely on four fundamental skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. Students are tested on each skill independently and as part of integrated exercises where two or more skills are tested concurrently."

Staying abreast of the latest technological advances and changes in the Toefl test has been beneficial to many language schools, according to Mitchell. "We have offered the iBT preparation since that test began in 2005 and students have been quite receptive as this preparation is not always readily available in their home countries," she says.

Location	Name of school	Range of Toefl prep. courses	Min. length of course	Testing centre?
Ashland, OH	Ashland University CES	f	7	
Baltimore, MD	College of Notre Dame of Maryland ELI	e	8	✓
Bellevue, WA	Bellevue Community College	f	-	✓
Boston, MA	The Olin Center for International Study	e, f	4	
Ellensburg, WA	UESL programme, Central Washington Uni.	e	10	✓
Evansville, IN	University of Evansville IEC	e	8	
Los Angeles, CA	USC Language Academy	e	6	
Monterey, CA	Monterey Instit. of Int. Studies IEP	e	8	✓
New York, NY	New York Language Center	e	5	
San Diego, CA	International House	e	8	
San Marcos, CA	California State University LCI	e	12	✓
Scottsdale, AZ	Scottsdale Community College	-	10	
Tallahassee, FL	Florida State University CIES	e	6	✓
various	Aspect Education	e, f	8	
various	inlingua Language Centers	e, f	1	

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