

The Test of Oral English Proficiency (TOEP) is used to assess the oral English ability of non-native English speaking graduate students in order to determine their eligibility for working as teaching assistants (TAs) or associate instructors (AIs). TAs and AIs need to have a strong command of oral English so that they can effectively communicate with students. The TOEP assesses these communication skills with a 20-minute classroom simulation.

TOEP Eligibility

Any active multilingual UC Davis graduate student who is planning to be a TA or AI is eligible to take the TOEP. Students who have previously taken the TOEP must complete approved English instruction before they can retake the TOEP (see *retaking the TOEP*).

TOEP Format

During the TOEP, you will act as the TA for a mock class (made up of two undergraduate students and two raters). There are three parts to the test. You will be asked questions during all three parts of the exam. Questions will **not** be reserved for the end and may occur at any point during the exam session.

TOEP Section 1 (2-3 minutes) – Introduction

Introduce yourself to the audience. Make an introduction that is appropriate for a classroom setting (for example, share information like your name, your educational background, your home country, etc.). The audience will ask you some general questions.

TOEP Section 2 (5-7 minutes) – Presentation of Course Document

When you register for the TOEP, download the sample course document for section 2 from the TOEP website (<https://iae.ucdavis.edu/graduate/toep>). The document will be a syllabus, an assignment sheet, or some other type of common class document.

Review the document *before* the test. Present the assigned course document to the audience as if you were the TA for the course. Highlight the **key** information in the document and be prepared to answer questions about it. Make sure that you are familiar with all of the terms in the document as well as other vocabulary related to teaching a class since the audience will ask you questions about the document and the course. *Note:* If you are asked a question and the answer to it is not provided in the document, you can make one up.

Please note that **the course document will have intentional mistakes and typos** so that the raters can see how you address those errors with your students. Those errors will be highlighted on your copy of the course materials.

Bring your copy of the document to the exam. You may add your own notes to the document, but do not read at length from the document or your notes.

TOEP Section 3 (8-10 minutes) – Mini-Lesson

Prepare a mini-lesson on a basic academic topic. Your prepared mini-lesson should be about 7-8 minutes long. The total amount of time for this section will be about 8-10 minutes including the time you will spend handling questions. You may be asked to define key terms, explain something in a different way, provide an example, explain a relationship, or answer some other type of question about your lesson.

****You may not use any notes or materials during section 3.****

****There will be a whiteboard and markers in the exam room that you can use.****

Mini-Lesson Topic Guidelines

You must choose an appropriate topic. Choose a topic that is appropriate for a general undergraduate audience; do *not* choose a topic that requires specialized knowledge or prior coursework in a particular field. Your TOEP audience members may not have any experience in your field, so select a topic that *any* undergraduate student, regardless of major, can understand.

If you are in a department that relies heavily on mathematics, be particularly careful that your topic is accessible to non-math majors who may only understand mathematics from high school algebra and geometry. Do not present on a topic that requires an understanding of calculus or higher-level math.

You may choose to present about an equation or formula, but any mini-lesson about an equation or formula should include some context and discussion of the equation or formula – *How or when is it used? What types of problems is it used to solve? What key terms need to be defined in order to explain the equation or formula?* Do not plan a lesson that relies solely on plugging different values into an equation.

Mini-Lesson Topic Ideas

Here are some examples of topics that have been used for past mini-lessons. You do not need to choose a topic from this list, but you can use the list to help you think of an appropriate topic.

Acids & bases	Food equity	Properties of irrational numbers
Algorithms	Game theory	P-value
Amplifiers	GDP	Quick sort
Antimicrobial therapy	Genetically modified crops	Remote Sensing
Auditing	Graph of a function	Resistors
Balance sheets	Hair cells	Samples
Banana tree morphology & uses	Herbicide classification	Self-driving cars
Basic circuits	Hydrological cycle	Semiconductor devices
Batteries	Hydropower plants	Sensory tasting
Binary search	Hypothesis testing	Shock waves
Binomial theorem	Important materials	Small world phenomenon
Boolean algebra	Independence	Solubility
Bridges	Intersectionality	Spam filters
Byzantine art	LEDs	Stacks & queues
Catalysts	Linear regression	Stainless steel
Cells related to bones	Linear/Quadratic equations	Standard deviation
Chemical and physical changes	Logic gates	Statistical inferences
Chemical bonds	Machine learning	Stoichiometry
Combination	Microfabrication	Stomata
Concrete	Mitosis & meiosis	Structure design
Conditional probability	Money	Structure of DNA
Constructed wetland	Monty Hall problem	Supply & demand
Data structures in R	Newton's laws	Three phases
Dietary fat: digestion & absorption	Ohm's Law	Tire forces
Discovery & development of drugs	Optical communication	Tissue engineering
Discovery of the electron	Osmosis	Trade
Environmental effects on plants	Periodic table	Transistors
Epidemiology triad	Photolithography	Types of energy
Feedback control	Pipelining	Urban agriculture
Fertilization of angiosperms	Plant response to drought	Urbanization
Fibers/fabric	Polymers	Video compression
	Porosity	Visualization
	Post-harvest waste	Wastewater treatment
	Pre-Diabetes	Why ice floats
	Probability	Winemaking processes
	Profit maximization	

Timing

Section	Minimum Duration	Maximum Duration
Part 1: Introduction	2 minutes	3 minutes
Part 2: Course Document	5 minutes	7 minutes
Part 3: Mini-Lesson	8 minutes	10 minutes

Students in the testing room will keep track of the time and will hold up signs to let you know when you have one minute left and when you need to move on to the next section.

Preparation for the TOEP

In the same way that you will need to prepare for teaching a lesson as a TA, you will need to spend some time preparing for the TOEP. Practice your presentation in front of other people and get feedback from them to help you improve. You can arrange to meet with an IAE [Language & Culture Coach](#) to practice the TOEP and help you prepare.

TOEP Scoring and Results

Test takers are assessed in the following six categories:

Phonetic & Phonological Competence	Fluency/Speech Flow	Rhetorical Organization
Grammatical Competence	Lexical Competence	Question Handling

There are three possible results:

Pass: Students who earn a pass are eligible to hold a TA or AI position.

Conditional Pass: Students who earn a conditional pass may hold a TA or AI position for up to two quarters while concurrently enrolled in approved English language instruction¹. The two quarters they are permitted to serve as a TA or AI are only allowed *once*, after the first conditional pass is received. *For example, if you receive a conditional pass then work as a TA for two quarters, if you then retake the TOEP and receive another conditional*

¹ Students who are required to complete English language instruction in order to hold a TA position can meet with a member of the IAE staff to discuss options for completing the instruction requirement.

pass, you will not be eligible to continue working as a TA until you receive a pass on the TOEP.

Fail: Students who earn a failing score have not met the English language requirements for a TA or AI position. They are encouraged to take graduate-level ESL courses and/or participate in support programs provided by IAE.

Students have the option to meet with a member of the IAE staff in the weeks after the exam if they would like to receive feedback and talk about next steps.

Disqualification

If you are disqualified during the exam, you will not receive a score, and you will not be permitted to retake the exam until the following quarter. You may be disqualified for any of the following reasons:

1. **Failure to prepare for all parts of the exam.** You must be prepared to complete all three sections to receive a score.
2. **Failure to meet the minimum time requirement for section 2 or section 3.** The minimum amount of time for section 2 is five minutes, and the minimum amount of time for section 3 is eight minutes. If you finish either section early, you will be asked to continue the section. If you are then unable to continue the section until the minimum length of time, you will be disqualified.
3. **Failure to choose an appropriate topic.** The topic for section 3 must be a basic academic topic that a general undergraduate audience will be able to understand.
4. **Excessive reliance on outside materials.** Do not memorize another individual's work and present it as your own. Your presentation must be in your own words. Students who are disqualified for this reason may be reported to the [Office of Student Support and Judicial Affairs](#) and be subject to disciplinary sanctions up to and including dismissal from the University of California.

Retaking the TOEP

Students may not take the TOEP more than once per quarter. Students who wish to retake the TOEP must complete approved English language instruction² before each retake.

TOEP Schedule and Registration

The TOEP is offered at the beginning of the academic year and at the end of each quarter. The TOEP schedule is made available on the IAE website a few weeks prior to testing at <https://iae.ucdavis.edu/graduate/toep>. Students can join the IAE Grad Mailing List at

² Students who are required to complete English language instruction in order to hold a TA position or retake the TOEP should meet with a member of the IAE staff to discuss options for completing the instruction requirement.

<https://iae.ucdavis.edu/graduate> to receive an email when the TOEP schedule is posted or follow IAE on Facebook @IAEgrad.

Accommodations

Please contact IAE at iae@ucdavis.edu if you have a documented disability and may need accommodations during the TOEP. For more information about disability services, please visit the UC Davis Student Disability Center.

Additional Information

Please email iae@ucdavis.edu if you have any questions not answered by this guide. You can also watch a series of informational videos about the TOEP at <http://iae.ucdavis.edu/graduate/TOEP.html>.