

THE WRITTEN EXPRESSION QUESTIONS

(PAPER TOEFL® TEST AND COMPUTER TOEFL® TEST)  

Written expression questions that test your knowledge of the correct way to express yourself in English writing appear on both the paper TOEFL test and the computer TOEFL test. Each question consists of one sentence in which four words or groups of words have been underlined. You must choose the underlined word or group of words that is not correct. Look at an example of a written expression question from the paper TOEFL test.

Example from the Paper TOEFL® Test

A nerve is actually many nerve fiber bound together.

A B C D

In this example, you should notice that the plural quantifier *many* is accompanied by the singular noun *fiber*. *Many* should be accompanied by the plural noun *fibers*. You should choose answer (C) because answer (C) is not correct.



Now, look at an example of a written expression question from the computer TOEFL test.

Example from the Computer TOEFL® Test

Venus emits very intense radio waves of thermally origin.

In this example, you should notice that the adverb *thermally* is used to describe the noun *origin*. The adjective *thermal* should be used to describe the noun. You should click on the word *thermally* to answer this question because *thermally* is not correct.

PROCEDURES FOR THE WRITTEN EXPRESSION QUESTIONS

(Paper TOEFL® Test and Computer TOEFL® Test)  

1. **First, look at the underlined words or groups of words.** You want to see if you can spot which of the four answer choices is *not* correct.
2. **If you have been unable to find the error by looking only at the four underlined expressions, then read the complete sentence.** Often an underlined expression is incorrect because of something in another part of the sentence.

Next, you should move on to the language skills. The following language skills will help you to implement the appropriate strategies and procedures in written expression questions on both the paper TOEFL test and the computer TOEFL test.

EXERCISE 20: Each of the following sentences has one or more prepositional phrases between the subject and verb. Circle the prepositional phrases. Underline the subjects once and the verbs twice. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- C 1. The climbers (on the sheer face) (of the mountain) need to be rescued.
- I 2. The interrogation, conducted (by three police officers) have lasted for several hours.
- _____ 3. The tenants in the apartment next to mine is giving a party this evening.
- _____ 4. The president, surrounded by secret service agents, is trying to make his way to the podium.
- _____ 5. The buildings destroyed during the fire are being rebuilt at the taxpayers' expense.
- _____ 6. Because of the seriousness of the company's financial problems, the board of directors have called an emergency meeting.
- _____ 7. Manufacture of the items that you requested have been discontinued because of lack of profit on those items.
- _____ 8. Further development of any new ideas for future products has to be approved in advance.
- _____ 9. The scheduled departure time of the trains, posted on panels throughout the terminal buildings, are going to be updated.
- _____ 10. Any houses built in that development before 1970 have to be upgraded to meet current standards.

SKILL 21: MAKE VERBS AGREE AFTER EXPRESSIONS OF QUANTITY

A particular agreement problem occurs when the subject is an expression of quantity, such as *all*, *most*, or *some*, followed by the preposition *of*. In this situation, the subject (*all*, *most*, or *some*) can be singular or plural, depending on what follows the preposition *of*.

All (of the *book*) was interesting.

SINGULAR

All (of the *books*) were interesting.

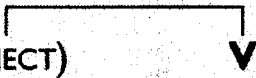
PLURAL

All (of the *information*) was interesting.

UNCOUNTABLE

In the first example the subject *all* refers to the singular noun *book*, so the correct verb is therefore the singular verb *was*. In the second example the subject *all* refers to the plural noun *books*, so the correct verb is the plural verb *were*. In the third example the subject *all* refers to the uncountable noun *information*, so the correct verb is therefore the singular verb *was*.

The following chart outlines the key information that you should understand about subject/verb agreement after expressions of quantity:

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT AFTER EXPRESSIONS OF QUANTITY	
<div><div><div>all</div><div>most</div><div>some</div><div>half</div></div></div> <div>OF THE (OBJECT) </div>	
When an expression of quantity is the subject, the verb agrees with the object.	

EXERCISE 21: Each of the following sentences has a quantity expression as the subject. Underline the subjects once and the verbs twice. Circle the objects that the verbs agree with. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- C

1.

The witnesses saw that most of the fire in the hills was extinguished.
- I

2.

Some of the animals from the zoo was released into the animal preserve.
3.

All of the students in the class taught by Professor Roberts is required to turn in their term papers next Monday.
4.

Half of the food that we are serving to the guests are still in the refrigerator.
5.

We believe that some of the time of the employees is going to be devoted to quality control.
6.

All of the witnesses in the jury trial, which lasted more than two weeks, have indicated that they believed that the defendant was guilty.
7.

She did not know where most of the people in the room was from.
8.

In spite of what was decided at the meeting, half of the procedures was not changed.
9.

I was sure that all of the questions on the test were correct.
10.

Most of the trouble that the employees discussed at the series of meetings was resolved within a few weeks.

SKILL 22: MAKE INVERTED VERBS AGREE

We have seen that sometimes in English the subject comes after the verb. This can occur after question words (Skill 15), after place expressions (Skill 16), after negative expressions (Skill 17), after omitted conditionals (Skill 18), and after some comparisons (Skill 19). When the subject and verb are inverted, it can be difficult to locate them, and it can therefore be a problem to make them agree.

(Behind the house) was* the bicycles I wanted.
(Behind the houses) were* the bicycle I wanted.

In the first example it is easy to think that *house* is the subject, because it comes directly in front of the verb *was*. *House* is not the subject, however, because it is the object of the preposition *behind*. The subject of the sentence is *bicycles*, and the subject *bicycles* comes after the verb because of the place expression *behind the house*. Because the subject *bicycles* is plural, the verb should be changed to the plural *were*. In the second example the subject *bicycle* comes after the verb *were* because of the place expression *behind the houses*. Because the subject *bicycle* is singular, the verb should be changed to the singular *was*.

The following chart outlines the key information that you should understand about subject/verb agreement after inverted verbs:

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT AFTER INVERTED VERBS	
<div><div><div>question</div><div>negative</div><div>place</div><div>condition (no if)</div><div>comparison</div></div></div> <div><div>V</div><div>S</div></div>	
After question words, negative expressions, place expressions, conditions without <i>if</i> , and comparisons, the <i>verb</i> agrees with the <i>subject</i> , which may be after the <i>verb</i> .	

EXERCISE 22: Each of the following sentences contains an inverted subject and verb. Circle the word or group of words that causes the subject and verb to invert. Find the subject and verb that follow these words. Underline the subject once and the verb twice. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- C

1.

Only once

this morning

were

the letters

delivered

by the campus mail service.
- I

2.

Around the corner and to the right

is

the rooms

that have been assigned to that program.
3.

What in the world

is

the children

trying to do?
4.

John would be studying the chapters

were

he able to get hold of the book.
5.

This chapter

has

many more exercises

than do the next one.
6.

The computer programmer

was

unaware that there was so many mistakes in the program he had written.
7.

Seldom in the history of television

has

two new comedies

been so successful in one season.
8.

How many huge mistakes

have

the teacher actually found in the research paper?
9.

The new phone system

is

able to hold far more messages than was the phone system that had previously been used.
10.

In the parking lot south of the stadium

was

the cars

that were about to be towed.

SKILL 23: MAKE VERBS AGREE AFTER CERTAIN WORDS

Certain words in English are always grammatically singular, even though they might have plural meanings.

Everybody are going* to the theater.

Even though we understand from this example that a lot of people are going to the theater, *everybody* is singular and requires a singular verb. The plural verb *are going* should be changed to the singular verb *is going*.

The following chart lists the grammatically singular words that have plural meanings:

SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT AFTER CERTAIN WORDS				
These words or expressions are grammatically singular, so they take singular verbs:				
<i>anybody</i>	<i>everybody</i>	<i>nobody</i>	<i>somebody</i>	<i>each (+ noun)</i>
<i>anyone</i>	<i>everyone</i>	<i>no one</i>	<i>someone</i>	<i>every (+ noun)</i>
<i>anything</i>	<i>everything</i>	<i>nothing</i>	<i>something</i>	

EXERCISE 23: Each of the following sentences contains one of the words that are grammatically singular but have plural meanings. Underline these words once and underline the verbs twice. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- I

1.

It is impossible to believe that somebody actually admire that man.
- C

2.

Each of the doctors in the building needs to have a separate reception area.
3.

The president felt that no one were better suited for the position of chief staff advisor.
4.

Everybody participating in the fund-raiser are to turn in the tickets by 8:00.
5.

Because of the low number of orders, nothing has to be done now.
6.

Every time someone take unnecessary breaks, precious moments of production time are lost.
7.

Anybody who goes to the top of the Empire State Building is impressed with the view.
8.

Every man, woman, and child in this line are required to sign the forms in order to complete the registration process.
9.

It is nice to believe that anything is possible if a person tries hard enough.
10.

The company reiterated to reporters that nobody have been dismissed because of the incident.

EXERCISE (Skills 20–23): Underline the subjects once and the verbs twice in each of the following sentences. Then indicate if the sentences are correct (C) or incorrect (I).

- _____ 1. The contracts signed by the company has been voided because some stipulations were not met.
- _____ 2. Ten miles beyond the river was the farmlands that they had purchased with their life savings.
- _____ 3. Each package that is not properly wrapped have to be returned to the sender.
- _____ 4. She would not have to enter the house through the bedroom window were the keys where they were supposed to be.
- _____ 5. The proposal brought so much new work to the partnership that there was not enough hours to complete all of it.
- _____ 6. The box of disks for the computer have been misplaced.
- _____ 7. It is disconcerting to believe that every possible candidate has been rejected for one reason or another.
- _____ 8. Only once have there been more excitement in this city about a sporting event.
- _____ 9. Bobby has a bigger bicycle than does the other children in the neighborhood.
- _____ 10. If nobody have bought that car from the dealer, then you should return and make another offer.

TOEFL EXERCISE (Skills 20–23): Choose the letter of the word or group of words that best completes the sentence.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. Among bees _____ a highly elaborate form of communication.</p> <p>(A) occur
(B) occurs
(C) it occurs
(D) they occur</p> | <p>2. _____ heated by solar energy have special collectors on the roofs to trap sunlight.</p> <p>(A) A home is
(B) Homes are
(C) A home
(D) Homes</p> |
|---|---|

Choose the letter of the underlined word or group of words that is not correct.

- _____ 3. Each number is binary system are formed from only two symbols.

A
B
C
D
- _____ 4. Scientists at the medical center is trying to determine if there is a relationship between saccharine and cancer.

A
B
C
D

- _____ 5. On the rim of the Kilauea volcano in the Hawaiian Islands are a hotel called the Volcano Hotel.
A B C D
- _____ 6. The great digital advances of the electronic age, such as integrated circuitry and a microcomputer, has been planted in tiny chips.
A B C D
- _____ 7. There are many frequently mentioned reasons why one out of four arrests involve a juvenile.
A B C D
- _____ 8. Kepler's Laws, principles outlining planetary movement, was formulated based on observations made without a telescope.
A B C D
- _____ 9. Only with a two-thirds vote by both houses are the U.S. Congress able to override a presidential veto.
A B C D
- _____ 10. Of all the evidence that has piled up since Webster's paper was published, there is no new ideas to contradict his original theory.
A B C D

TOEFL REVIEW EXERCISE (Skills 1-23): Choose the letter of the word or group of words that best completes the sentence.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1. _____ several unsuccessful attempts, Robert Peary reached the North Pole on April 6, 1909.</p> <p>(A) After
(B) He made
(C) When
(D) His</p> | <p>4. _____ of economic cycles been helpful in predicting turning points in cycles, they would have been used more consistently.</p> <p>(A) Psychological theories
(B) Psychological theories have
(C) Had psychological theories
(D) Psychologists have theories</p> |
| <p>2. The musical instrument _____ is six feet long.</p> <p>(A) is called the bass
(B) it is called the bass
(C) called the bass
(D) calls the bass</p> | <p>5. Hospital committees _____ spent weeks agonizing over which artificial kidney candidate would receive the treatments now find that the decision is out of their hands.</p> <p>(A) once
(B) that once
(C) have
(D) once had</p> |
| <p>3. One problem with all languages _____ they are full of irregularities.</p> <p>(A) when
(B) so
(C) is that
(D) in case</p> | |

Choose the letter of the underlined word or group of words that is not correct.

- _____ 6. More than half of the children in the 1,356-member district qualifies for reduced-price or free lunches.
A B C D
- _____ 7. Five miles beyond the hills were a fire with its flames reaching up to the sky.
A B C D
- _____ 8. Kettledrums, what were first played on horseback, were incorporated into the orchestra in the eighteenth century.
A B C D
- _____ 9. When is a flag hung upside down, it is an internationally recognized symbol of distress.
A B C D
- _____ 10. The Museum of the Confederation in Richmond hosts an exhibition which documenting the origins and history of the banner that most Americans think of as the Confederate flag.
A B C D

PROBLEMS WITH PARALLEL STRUCTURE

In good English an attempt should be made to make the language as even and balanced as possible. This balance is called “parallel structure.” You can achieve parallel structure by making the forms of words as similar as possible. The following is an example of a sentence that is not parallel:

I like to sing and dancing.*

The problem in this sentence is not the expression *to sing*, and the problem is not the word *dancing*. The expression *to sing* is correct by itself, and the word *dancing* is correct by itself. Both of the following sentences are correct:

I like to sing.
I like dancing.

The problem in the incorrect example is that *to sing* and *dancing* are joined together in one sentence with *and*. They are different forms where it is possible to have similar forms; therefore the example is not parallel. It can be corrected in two different ways: we can make the first expression like the second, or we can make the second expression like the first.

I like to sing and to dance.
I like singing and dancing.