

TOEFL Writing Sample Paper 04

Task 1: Integrated Writing Task

Time: 20 Minutes — Recommended Length: at least 150-225 words

Task Instructions:

- Read the passage below and take notes on the main points.
- Listen (or read the summary) of the lecture provided in the box.
- Write a response explaining how the lecture's points specifically challenge the arguments made in the reading passage.

Reading Passage: (Read for 3 minutes)

The Purpose of the Great Zimbabwe Enclosures

Great Zimbabwe is a massive stone complex built in Southern Africa between the 11th and 15th centuries. While its scale is undeniable, its purpose remains a mystery. Three main theories have been proposed.

First, some historians argue that the complex served as a military fortress. The thick, high stone walls would have provided an ideal defense against invading tribes, allowing the inhabitants to retreat behind the "Great Enclosure" during times of war.

Second, others suggest the site was a royal palace. The intricate stonework and the size of the structures indicate that they were designed to reflect the power and prestige of a ruling king and his family, separating them from the common people.

Finally, a third theory posits that the site was a religious center. The presence of a tall, conical tower inside the enclosure suggests it was used for rituals or as a shrine to honor ancestors or deities, similar to religious monuments in other cultures.

Listening Lecture: (Read for 2 minutes)

Lecture Highlights (Audio Summary)

The professor disputes the traditional theories regarding the Great Zimbabwe site:

- **Defense Flaws:** If the site were a fortress, it would need a reliable water supply inside the walls to survive a siege. No such water source exists. Furthermore, the walls have many gaps and no battlements for archers to defend from.
- **Social Evidence:** Archaeological evidence shows that the "common people" actually lived inside the enclosures as well. There is no evidence of a social divide that would suggest it was an exclusive royal residence.
- **Practical Tower:** The "conical tower" shows no signs of religious offerings or ritual use. Instead, its design is nearly identical to traditional grain silos used in the region. It was likely a massive storehouse to show off the community's agricultural wealth.

Question:

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they cast doubt on the specific points made in the reading passage.

Task 2: Academic Discussion Task

Time: 10 Minutes — Recommended Length: at least 100 words

Professor Miller: "Today we're discussing university policies on student attendance. Some institutions have a 'compulsory attendance' policy, where students lose points or fail a course if they miss too many classes. Other universities believe that as long as a student passes the exams, attendance should be optional. What do you think? Should attendance be a mandatory part of a student's grade?"

Alice: "I believe attendance should definitely be mandatory. University is about more than just reading a textbook; it's about the discussions that happen in the classroom. When students skip class, they miss out on different perspectives from their peers and the chance to ask the professor questions in real-time. It also helps students build the discipline they'll need for their future careers."

Mark: "I disagree with Alice. University students are adults and should be treated as such. If a student can master the material through independent study and perform well on the exams, they shouldn't be 'punished' for not sitting in a lecture hall. Mandatory attendance policies are often just a way to hide the fact that a professor's lectures aren't engaging enough to attract students naturally."

Question:

Write a response to the professor's question. In your response, you should express and support your personal opinion, contributing to the discussion in your own words.

Solutions-

Task 1: Integrated Writing

The reading passage presents three theories regarding the purpose of the Great Zimbabwe enclosures: that they served as a military fortress, a royal palace, or a religious shrine. The professor, however, challenges each of these claims by providing specific archaeological and practical evidence.

First, the reading suggests the high walls were designed for military defense. The professor refutes this by noting that a fortress requires an internal water supply to withstand long-term attacks, which the Great Zimbabwe lacks. Additionally, the walls lack battlements or defensive positions, making them practically useless for soldiers in a conflict.

Second, the professor disputes the theory that the complex was a palace intended to isolate royalty. She explains that archaeological findings indicate that a wide variety of people, including commoners, lived within the enclosure. This contradicts the passage's claim that the structure was built to separate a prestigious elite from the rest of the population.

Finally, the professor challenges the idea that the conical tower was a religious monument. She points out that there is no evidence of ritual activity associated with the tower. Instead, she argues it served a practical purpose as a grain silo. In that culture, a large store of grain was a symbol of communal wealth and success, rather than a place for religious worship.

Task 2: Academic Discussion Task

In my opinion, while I understand Alice's point about the value of classroom discussion, I believe that university attendance should be optional rather than mandatory. I strongly agree with Mark that students at this level are responsible adults who should have the freedom to manage their own time based on their personal learning styles.

Mandatory attendance often creates a "performative" environment where students are physically present but mentally disengaged just to earn a grade. This can actually disrupt the classroom experience for those who truly want to be there. Furthermore, some students have external responsibilities, such as part-time jobs or family obligations, that may conflict with a rigid schedule. If a student can demonstrate a deep understanding of the subject matter through a final exam or a research paper, their physical presence in a lecture hall becomes irrelevant to their academic success. Universities should focus on the quality of learning outcomes rather than the number of hours spent in a seat. Therefore, the choice of how to engage with the material should be left to the individual student.