

TOEFL Writing Sample Paper 07

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 Decline of Sea Otter Populations

Sea otters are small mammals that play a critical role in the coastal ecosystems of North America. Recently, their populations off the Alaskan coast have declined rapidly. Many scientists believe that environmental pollution is the primary cause.

First, researchers have pointed to known pollution sources, such as oil rigs, along the Alaskan coast. Water samples taken in the area show increased levels of chemicals that can weaken the otters' immune systems, making them more susceptible to disease and indirectly resulting in their deaths.

Second, the decline of other sea mammals, such as seals and sea lions, in the same areas suggests a broader environmental issue. Since pollution usually affects an entire ecosystem rather than just one species, it is the most logical explanation for why multiple populations are shrinking simultaneously.

Finally, the pollution hypothesis explains the uneven pattern of the decline. In some locations, the population has dropped significantly, while in others it remains stable. Scientists suggest that ocean currents create "hot spots" of high pollutant concentrations, leading to these localized collapses.

Listening Lecture: (Read for 2 minutes)

Lecture Highlights (Audio Summary)

The professor argues that the decline is actually caused by increased predation by orcas (killer whales), not pollution:

- **Absence of Carcasses:** If pollution or disease were killing the otters, bodies would wash up on the shore. However, almost no dead otters have been found. This suggests they are being eaten by predators in the open water.
- **Dietary Shift:** Orcas traditionally hunt larger whales. However, as whale populations declined due to human hunting, orcas were forced to change their diet to smaller mammals like seals and sea lions. Once those populations were depleted, the orcas turned to sea otters.
- **Shallow Water Protection:** The uneven decline is actually due to geography. In areas where otters live in shallow, rocky waters, orcas cannot reach them, so those populations remain stable. The decline only happens in deep-water areas where orcas can easily hunt.

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: "This week, we are discussing educational priorities for young children. Some argue that primary schools should spend more time teaching young students (ages 5-11) technology and computer skills to prepare them for the future. Others believe that it is more important for schools to focus on music and art at this age. If you were designing a curriculum, which area would you prioritize?"

Alice: "I believe technology should be the priority. We live in a digital age, and the earlier children become 'digitally literate,' the better. Learning to code or use software isn't just about jobs; it teaches logical thinking and problem-solving. If we don't prioritize tech in primary school, children may fall behind before they even get to high school."

Mark: "I disagree. Children already spend too much time in front of screens at home. Primary school should be a place where they develop their creativity and emotional intelligence through music and art. These subjects help with fine motor skills and provide a necessary balance to a world that is becoming increasingly automated and technical."

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 suggests that environmental pollution is the main cause of the declining sea otter populations in Alaska. However, the professor in the lecture disputes this, providing evidence that the decline is actually due to predation by orcas.

First, the reading points to chemical pollutants that weaken the otters' immune systems. The professor challenges this by noting that if otters were dying from disease or chemicals, their bodies would wash up on beaches. Because very few carcasses have been found, it is more likely that they are being consumed by predators, leaving no remains behind.

Second, the passage argues that the simultaneous decline of seals and sea lions points to an ecosystem-wide pollution problem. The professor provides an alternative explanation, stating that orcas changed their hunting habits. Because their traditional prey—large whales—became scarce, orcas began eating smaller mammals like seals. When those populations dropped, the orcas moved on to sea otters as a new food source.

Finally, while the reading claims ocean currents create concentrations of pollution that cause uneven population drops, the professor attributes this pattern to accessibility. She explains that orcas are too large to swim into shallow, rocky areas. Therefore, otters in those locations are protected, while those in deeper waters are easily hunted, resulting in the uneven decline mentioned in the text.

Task 2: Academic Discussion Task

In my opinion, primary schools should prioritize music and art over intensive technology training. While I recognize Alice's point that digital literacy is important in the modern world, I believe that the developmental needs of children aged 5 to 11 are better met through creative expression.

At this young age, children are already exposed to technology in almost every aspect of their lives outside of school. As Mark pointed out, the classroom should serve as a space for alternative types of growth. Engaging with music and art fosters divergent thinking and empathy, skills that are much harder to teach later in life compared to computer software. For example, learning a musical instrument has been shown to improve mathematical reasoning and discipline in a way that simply using a computer does not. Furthermore, if we focus too early on technical skills, we risk stifling a child's natural imagination. A balanced education should ensure that children develop a strong emotional and creative foundation before they move into the more specialized technical training of their teenage years.