

TOEFL Writing Sample Paper 08

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 Case Against Pluto's Demotion

In 2006, the International Astronomical Union (IAU) reclassified Pluto as a "dwarf planet," reducing the number of planets in our solar system to eight. Many astronomers argue this decision was a mistake and that Pluto should retain its planetary status.

First, Pluto possesses the primary physical characteristic of a planet: it is large enough for gravity to have shaped it into a sphere. Objects that are spherical are geologically complex and distinct from irregularly shaped asteroids or comets.

Second, Pluto has a complex system of five moons. Having natural satellites is a trait typically associated with major planets like Earth, Mars, and Jupiter. The presence of moons suggests that Pluto is a significant gravitational force in its region of space.

Finally, critics argue that the IAU's new definition of a planet is arbitrary. One of the new requirements is that a planet must "clear its neighborhood" of other debris. However, if this rule were applied strictly, even Earth or Jupiter might fail, as they both have asteroids (Trojans) near their orbits.

Listening Lecture: (Read for 2 minutes)

Lecture Highlights (Audio Summary)

The professor supports the IAU's decision and refutes the arguments in the reading:

- **Size and Scale:** Being round is not a rare trait. There are dozens of objects in the outer solar system, like the asteroid Ceres or the distant Eris, that are spherical. If we call Pluto a planet based on shape alone, we would have to add dozens of new planets to our maps.
- **Relative Mass:** While Pluto has moons, it does not dominate them. For example, Pluto's largest moon, Charon, is so large compared to Pluto that they actually orbit each other. This is different from "real" planets, which are much larger than their satellites.
- **Orbital Dominance:** The "clearing the neighborhood" rule is about mass. Pluto is only a tiny fraction of the total mass in its orbit, which is filled with thousands of other icy objects in the Kuiper Belt. In contrast, Earth and Jupiter are millions of times more massive than the asteroids near them.

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're talking about lifestyle choices in the modern world. Some people believe that we should always follow our most ambitious career dreams, even if it means working long hours and sacrificing personal time. Others think it's more important to focus on realistic goals that allow for a better work-life balance and time for hobbies. Which approach do you think leads to a more fulfilling life?"

Alice: "I believe we should follow our most ambitious dreams. Great achievements in science, business, and art only happen when people are willing to give 100% of their effort. If everyone just settled for a 'comfortable' life, society wouldn't progress as quickly. The satisfaction of reaching a major goal is worth the temporary sacrifice of leisure time."

Mark: "I disagree. We are living in an era of burnout. People who focus only on ambitious career goals often realize too late that they've missed out on their health and relationships. I believe that having diverse hobbies and spending time with family is what actually makes life meaningful. A career is just one part of who we are, not our entire identity."

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 argues that Pluto should be considered a planet because it is spherical, possesses moons, and because the IAU criteria are supposedly arbitrary. The professor, however, supports Pluto's reclassification as a dwarf planet, countering each point in the reading.

First, while the passage claims that being spherical makes Pluto a planet, the professor points out that this characteristic is not unique. Many other objects in the solar system, such as Ceres and Eris, are also round. If shape were the only criterion, the number of planets would increase to an unmanageable level, making the "planet" label less meaningful.

Second, the reading mentions Pluto's five moons as evidence of its planetary status. The professor disputes this by highlighting the relationship between Pluto and its moons. Unlike major planets, which significantly outweigh their satellites, Pluto is nearly equal in mass to its largest moon, Charon. This unique "double-system" dynamic differentiates it from true planets.

Finally, the professor defends the "clearing the neighborhood" rule, which the reading calls arbitrary. She explains that this rule is about the mass of the object relative to its surroundings. While Earth and Jupiter dominate their orbits despite having some nearby asteroids, Pluto represents only a tiny fraction of the debris in the Kuiper Belt. Because it lacks this orbital dominance, it cannot be classified as a major planet.

Task 2: Academic Discussion Task

In my opinion, prioritizing a healthy work-life balance is far more fulfilling than chasing hyper-ambitious career dreams. While I appreciate Alice's point that ambition drives societal progress, I believe that the modern definition of success is often too narrow, focusing solely on professional output.

As Mark suggested, the rise of burnout in our society proves that the "ambition at any cost" model is unsustainable. A person who works eighty hours a week to achieve a dream might reach the top of their field, but they often do so at the expense of their physical and mental health. I have seen many colleagues reach high positions only to feel a sense of emptiness because they have no interests outside of their jobs. In contrast, pursuing a variety of hobbies and maintaining strong social bonds provides a more stable and long-term form of happiness. Furthermore, having a life outside of work can actually make a person more creative and productive when they are at their desk. Therefore, I believe we should aim for realistic professional success that leaves room for personal enjoyment.