



Kev's English Podcast: Episode 17: Which English test is right for you?

In this episode I answer a question I am asked many times by my students. Which exam is best or "easier"?

If you want to ask me directly for more details, you can do so below

If you want lessons, click here <https://www.italki.com/en/teacher/1078268>

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Hello and welcome to Kev's English Podcast, Real English, every week.

Hello, hello, it's Kevin here. Welcome to Kev's English Podcast, episode number 17, I think it is.

It's been a while, I'm sorry that I'm not making episodes as often as I should, but it's summertime, I'm not in so much, there's not so much work on I talk, well, anywhere for teachers in summertime, so I'm out and about, I'm not staying in in the house when the sun is shining outside. Maybe when we get into September, when the new term starts, I'll be making podcasts on a regular basis and videos as well, but it seems over summertime nobody's too interested, so I'm over to the hiatus as it were. Now anyway, for today this is something that I had a couple of new students last week on my talkie, and this is to answer one of their questions.

So what I want to talk about today is the different English examinations that you can actually take. Now I teach all, you know, IELTS, TOEFL, PTE, the OET, the Cambridge exams, etc. So what I'm going to do, I'm going to compare the three most common exams that people ask me about, IELTS, TOEFL and the PTE, because that's what my students have been asking me.

But before I do, I'll just mention a couple of other examinations. Now I've got lots of medical professionals who want to take a particular exam and they have to take one called the OET, the Occupational English Test. So this is if you're a healthcare professional, so I've had doctors, nurses, veterinarians, pharmacists, etc.

There's 12 different categories for the OET, and essentially that's an English exam, but it's got the listening, reading, writing and speaking sections, but it's all based on medical English. Okay, so I sometimes get people asking about OET and IELTS. If you're a medical professional, usually a

doctor, if you're a veterinarian, a pharmacist, I would recommend taking the OET.

That's what it's for. Unless you've got a specific need to take the IELTS test, if you're healthcare, if you're working in healthcare and you want to get a job in England, because it's accepted in England, America, Australia, New Zealand and some parts of Canada, so if you want to work in those countries and you're a doctor, that's the examination that you need to take. If you have any questions about that, you can contact me on italki and I'll be happy to explain.

So that's the first thing. The second thing I want to mention is about some people taking general English want certification to prove their language abilities. Now, the IELTS, TOEFL and the PTE test, they're not a certificate.

They're an examination score that has a, well, an expiry date, usually of a couple of years. So, if you're a professional and you want a certificate that lasts a lifetime for your English, then you want to look at the Cambridge examinations. So, you've got the CPE, the proficiency exam, that's at C2.

You've got the CAE, advanced, that's at C1. And you've got the FCE, which is upper intermediate, at B2. So, if you're a language teacher or somebody who needs a professional certification of your language abilities without an expiry date, check out the Cambridge exams.

You can go to cambridgeesl.org or just look up University of Cambridge site and you'll find all the examinations there. So, they are a certificate, no expiry date. I'm not going to explain the differences.

There's some minor differences between those exams, the IELTS, TOEFL and the PTE, but like I say, if you've got any particular questions, you can send me a message and I'll be glad to explain. So, you've got the OET if you're a healthcare professional. If you want a professional certification of general English, you want the Cambridge examinations.

OK. Now, for most of the students that I get now, they want to go to university or they want to apply for a residence permit or visa or etc. So, they're in Europe or Asia and they want to go and study in America or in Europe or the UK.

Or they want to emigrate to go and live in Canada or Australia, say. So, in those cases, you've got the IELTS, the TOEFL and the PTE test. Now, for university admission, we're talking about the IELTS.

That's the International English Language Testing System. And that's generally applicable for the UK and Europe, though increasingly, they will accept it in Australia and Canada and some colleges in America will accept it as well. Now, that's administered by the British Council and the University of Cambridge and the IDP, which is the Australian organisation.

OK. Then you've got the TOEFL test, the test of English as a foreign language administered by ETS. That's a specifically North American examination.

Now, that was originally only intended for the North American situation or context. If you want to go to college in America, you need to take a graduate exam. You need to take the GRE or the GMAT and take the TOEFL as a proof of your language ability.

Then you've got the PTE, the Pearson test of English. Now, this is mainly for Australia, though some other countries and other places will accept it. But this is mainly for Australia.

Ah, so there's quite a lot to get through and talk about, and I'm not sure what the best way to present this is. So, right. The main question that a lot of people ask me, they say, right, Kev, which is the easiest examination, IELTS, TOEFL or the PTE? So if it's for immigration, you've got IELTS and the PTE.

If it's for college, you need admission, you've got IELTS and TOEFL. Okay. Now, what I always say is, it's not which is easier, though some think the PTE is easier.

It's about which exam suits you best. So let me briefly explain. Now, they all have... Now, I'm not going to go into every single detail here of the amount of, you know, of what's the timing for the reading, what's the timing for the listening, the number of question types, etc.

You can find that information out on the internet, or again, you can send me a message and I'll be happy to explain. I just want to talk about, in general, which exam you need to choose. So the first thing is, which exam does the institute or organisation you are applying to accept? Now, sometimes people also say that they want to take a certificate to put on their CV or resume.

And it's the same kind of question. I always ask which exam is recognised in your country, in your particular field. So if you apply for a job and on your CV or resume, you've got the IELTS test or the PTE test or whichever test, is that test likely to be recognised by whom or by whom you are applying to? There's no point in taking an exam if nobody understands what it is or what it means.

So anyway, that's an aside. So all three tests have got listening, reading, writing and speaking. Now the main difference between okay, IELTS and TOEFL.

So the TOEFL test is a North American examination. All the accents are American. All the scenarios are on campus.

So it's all campus, campus, American accents. Now you have to write an integrated essay and you have to write a couple of what they call academic discussions. So, you know, it's different from the IELTS in which you have to write a letter for general training or a report and an essay for the academic IELTS.

So the writing is not too dissimilar. There's some minor points. Again, I'll explain those at a later date.

But the most important thing for the IELTS and the TOEFL is the speaking. So for the IELTS test, you're speaking to a person, an interviewer, examiner. In the TOEFL test, you are not.

You're simply recording responses to different prompts in the examination. So they ask you an independent question. You answer that and you've got to listen to some audio.

A couple of students are talking. You've got to read a text. You've got to talk about that.

Then you've got a couple of lectures and you have to repeat the main bits of information in those. So that's not communicative. You know, the IELTS test, when you're speaking to a person, an interviewer, that's a communicative exercise.

You have to interact or mediate with a real person. So what you've got to think about, so if you're applying for college or uni and you've got a choice of IELTS or TOEFL, all things being equal, it's the speaking section that's the key that you've got to consider. Are you happier speaking to a person? If so, IELTS.

If you don't like speaking to real people, if you're more comfortable making a recording, then the TOEFL test is the test for you. Now, there's different means of accessing these. The TOEFL test, it's mainly online, depending where you are.

You can do it in a classroom or a computer lab. IELTS test, it's mainly in person, though there is the IELTS online version available in some countries. So you need to check out wherever you are.

If you go to IELTS.org or if you go to ETS, I think it's ETS.com or ETS.org, but anyway, you can search for them both. And on the main sites, it'll ask you where you are and it will tell you what format is available to you. Okay.

In some countries, it's not available. I won't name any particular countries, but because of the situation in the world, you can probably guess which countries certain exams might not be available in. I've got some students who have to travel outside of their country to take particular examinations for various geopolitical reasons, which we won't expand on currently, though I'm sure you can probably guess what I'm talking about.

So that's IELTS and TOEFL. So they've all got listening, reading, writing, speaking. Writing's not too dissimilar, but it's a speaking section.

That's the main thing. Now, oh yeah, one more thing. The assessment, the IELTS is all assessed by humans, but TOEFL is not.

You've got a mixture of human and algorithm, algorithmical assessment. So you need to keep that in mind. Now, the third option, the PTE, the Pearson Test of English.

So lots of my students in Australia want to take this because they want to get a good score for their residence permits or visa applications, et cetera. Again, I'm not going to go into all the details of how it's scored. That would be quite a lengthy podcast to do a comparison of every single test, what the scoring is equivalent to.

There's quite a lot of websites where you can find this information out. So what I want to say is that, okay, some people say that the PTE is an easier examination. Well, it's not easy.

Again, it's which suits you best. So again, it's got listening, reading, writing, speaking. The writing is pretty similar.

You have to write an essay and summarise a sentence. And there's different versions of PTE. There's PTE core and there's PTE academic.

But essentially the speaking section, again, you're not speaking to a person. You're making recordings in response to prompts. So you've got to describe an image.

You've got to read aloud a paragraph. You've got to repeat a sentence. You've got to retell a lecture.

And I think it was PTE core. You have to respond to a situation. So that's kind of like the first speaking test in the TOEFL where they give you a situation and a context.

And that, again, is kind of like IELTS speaking part two where they give you a topic on a card. So there's some kind of similarities between these exams. But anyway, the speaking section for the PTE is entirely algorithmically assessed.

So some issues about the technical, you know, how is your microphone too far away? Is it too close? Do you speak too loudly, too softly? But a lot of the... because it's algorithmically, that's an interesting word, algorithmically assessed, as is the speaking for the TOEFL, a lot of it is about the delivery, not just the content, as in how you say it, because the algorithm focusses on particular things. Again, you know, you can find all this out on their respective web sites. So the PTE, as I said, I don't... right, as an English teacher, I don't like it.

I don't like the TOEFL speaking test because it's not assessing one of the main functions of the English language, indeed of any language, which is communication. Mediation. So TOEFL and PTE assess your spoken production, but they cannot assess your spoken mediation because there's no one to mediate with.

You're not speaking to a person. OK, so I'm not very keen on those two particular examinations. As a teacher, I prefer the IELTS test or indeed the Cambridge tests or the OET because you have to interact and mediate with an actual real human being.

Whereas a TOEFL and a PTE, you don't. Now, so it comes down to, as I said at the start, your personality, your characteristics. Are you the kind of person who gets on, that can speak with strangers, etc., or do they make you nervous and shy and anxious? If that's the case, then exams like the PTE or the TOEFL may indeed be the best options for you.

OK, so that's what you've got to think about. You've got to think which exam first is absolutely required for my context. If they say you have to take this particular test, that's what you've got to do.

If you've got some options, whether it's the PTE or the IELTS or the IELTS and the TOEFL, what you need to think about is not which is easier. There's no such thing. It's which suits my particular characteristics and most of it comes down to speaking.

Are you a people person? Would you rather talk to an interviewer? Are you shy, introverted? You would rather speak to a machine. That's your choice. That's what you've got to think about.

OK, right. I hope that gave you some insights. If you've got any questions, you want to contact me directly, you can do.

You can find me on italki. If you're listening on other platforms, I'll put my italki profile link below. OK, hope that helps.

I'll see you, well see, you will hear me the next time. OK, I'll see you later.