



Measuring the Power of Learning.™

Why and How ETS Questions Test Scores

The TOEFL® Test

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Preface

The procedures and options described in this booklet apply to score validity cases only and do not apply to testing irregularities*, discrepancies in test taker identification or test taker misconduct.

As a matter of fairness—to test takers and any entity which ETS recognizes as an authorized user of TOEFL scores—ETS reviews test scores that may be invalid. This booklet explains why and how ETS questions test scores when concerns arise about their validity.

Most test scores are reported by ETS without any question regarding their validity. When we are concerned that a test taker's score may be invalid, we invite the test taker to submit information that addresses our concerns. We also make available four options, which are described more fully beginning on page 13, for resolving the matter.

*Testing irregularities refer to problems with the administration of a test. When they occur, they may affect an individual or groups of test takers. Such problems include, but are not limited to, administrative errors (such as, improper timing, improper seating, improper proctoring, technical difficulties, defective materials, defective equipment or the failure of testing staff to comply with test administration policies or procedures) and disruptions of test administrations.

The test taker may:

1. authorize ETS to cancel the questioned scores and receive a voucher to take a TOEFL test without charge; **or**
2. authorize ETS to cancel the questioned scores and receive a refund; **or**
3. ask ETS to send the test taker's file to the score recipient; **or**
4. submit the matter to arbitration (available only for test takers testing in the United States and U.S. territories).

The test taker has the right to initiate legal action. However, the filing of a lawsuit will not necessarily delay the cancellation of scores if ETS determines that they are invalid.

First, Why We Question Test Scores

ETS tests are widely viewed as accurate assessments of the abilities they are designed to measure. As a result, test takers and score recipients count on the validity of the test scores ETS reports. That is why ETS questions test scores when we believe they may be invalid.

Acceptance of ETS Policies

ETS strives to administer tests under secure, standard conditions that afford all test takers equivalent opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. During the registration process, upon arrival at the test center, and prior to the start of the testing session, test takers are required to signify their agreement to accept ETS policies and procedures. As part of that agreement, they acknowledge that ETS has the right to review scores of questionable validity and to cancel scores when there is substantial evidence that they are invalid.

Fairness

ETS recognizes the importance of treating test takers fairly—and we have designed our procedures with fairness in mind. Our communications in cases of questioned scores—including this booklet—are designed to help test takers understand our procedures for reviewing scores so that questions about score validity can be resolved as quickly, economically, and equitably as possible.

The test taker's score record and other documents that are retained at ETS may be released to any entity which ETS recognizes as an authorized user of TOEFL test scores, including without limitation (1) any entity to which ETS

reports scores at the test taker's request, (2) any government agency, including agencies responsible for administration or enforcement of U.S. criminal and/or immigration laws and (3) pursuant to a U.S. or foreign subpoena or required by applicable law. ETS may be required by a score recipient or other third party to release the names of test takers whose scores have been questioned, whether or not these scores are canceled, and the reason for the score cancellation. The information that may be released includes, but is not limited to, identifying information, details of any test security investigation, and details regarding the test center where the test was taken. Typically, the reasons for the disclosure of test taker information include score verification, test security investigations, and investigations by score recipients of possible unlawful activity.

The Score Review Process

Over the years, ETS has developed procedures to review the validity of a test taker's scores. Unless ETS finds substantial evidence test scores are invalid, the scores are reported. If ETS has concerns about the validity of a test taker's scores, we give the test taker an opportunity to respond and select an option for resolving the matter. If the matter cannot be resolved or the test taker elects not to respond by the expiration of the time period indicated in ETS's letter, ETS will cancel the questioned scores.

If before, during or after a review of questionable scores, ETS finds that testing irregularities, discrepancies in test taker identification or test taker misconduct have occurred in connection with a test, ETS may decline to treat the matter under its score invalidity process; in that event, the options available in connection with score invalidity reviews will not be available, even if those options were previously offered.

How Questions Arise

Questions about the validity of test scores may arise from:

- inquiries from colleges, universities, government agencies, or other score recipients about the validity of particular scores (such inquiries often arise from inconsistencies among different measures of the test taker's abilities);
- communications from test center administrators or other test takers;
- other internal or external sources of information.

Although ETS will consider information received from these sources, we do not cancel scores unless we determine for ourselves that there is substantial evidence of invalidity.

Some Types of Information That ETS Considers When Reviewing Scores

Information, including but not limited to, that:

- a test taker may not have worked independently
- test scores are inconsistent with other test scores or other measures of the test taker's abilities
- test content or answers may have been available to the test taker before or during the test administration
- an external source has provided to ETS

Comparisons of, including but not limited to:

- one test taker's answers with those of other test takers
- a test taker's scores with other scores, or scores on different sections of the test
- the handwriting from documents completed on test day with handwriting on other documents

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- the Writing section with that of another test taker(s), and/or published or unpublished source(s)
 - identification documents presented by the test taker on test day with other records
 - the information on test day documents with other records
 - answers changed to match those of another test taker
 - speech/voice in the Speaking section of the test
 - other biometric data

The Initial Review

The ETS Office of Testing Integrity (OTI) is responsible for the initial review of scores. OTI staff consider whether, based on information available to ETS (refer to page 8 and above), there appears to be substantial evidence of invalidity. In each case the OTI prepares a file, called a Score Review Summary, which contains information and documentation relating to its concerns.

If the OTI determines that there is not substantial evidence of invalidity, it terminates the review and provides any scores not already reported to the test taker and designated score recipients.



Any score recipients that have raised questions about the scores are then advised that ETS found no score validity issues that would result in score cancellation.

If OTI staff find substantial evidence that a test taker's scores may be invalid, they notify the test taker and offer a single opportunity to submit additional information that addresses ETS's concerns. Upon receipt of such information, OTI staff refer the Score Review Summary and any additional information supplied by the test taker to the ETS Board of Review (the "Board") for consideration and decision. The Board is an impartial group of ETS professional staff who review questionable scores for test takers who respond to ETS's letter. Board members do not review scores from testing programs for which they have managerial or administrative responsibility.

If the test taker elects not to respond by the expiration of the time period indicated in ETS's letter, the test taker's scores will be canceled without further notice. In this case, there will be no review by the Board.

Test takers are also offered the options of cancellation of the scores and receiving a refund or cancellation of the scores and receiving a voucher for another test date; those options are described beginning on page 13 of this booklet.

Submitting Additional Information

Before questioned scores are submitted to the Board, the OTI provides test takers with one opportunity to submit information addressing ETS's concerns. Test takers may submit any information about their test experience that is relevant. For example:

- Authenticated original documents written prior to the questioned test administration may address questions about handwriting differences.
- In the case of a physical impairment or other disability, the test taker may submit a doctor's certificate or other relevant information.

The Board considers all such information, and in some cases it resolves ETS's concerns.

On the other hand, the Board gives little weight to information that does not specifically address ETS's questions about score validity. For example, character references or testimonial letters do not explain handwriting differences or unusual agreement between the answers of two or more test takers.

When the Score Review Summary Is Submitted to the Board*

The Board meets in rotating panels to review cases. If even one panel member concludes there is not substantial evidence of invalidity, the review is terminated and the test taker's scores are reported.

The Board considers the contents of the Score Review Summary (which, in discrepant handwriting cases, includes a report from an external document examiner retained by ETS) and any information submitted by the test taker. If the Board finds that there is substantial evidence of invalidity, the OTI notifies the test taker. ETS offers four options** before canceling the test taker's scores at this stage, as listed on the following pages. As discussed on page 10 of this booklet, the first two options are also available before the case is submitted to the Board.

*If a test taker elects not to respond by the expiration of the time period indicated in ETS's letter, the test taker's Score Review Summary will not be submitted to the Board and the scores will be canceled.

**The arbitration option is only available to test takers testing in the United States and U.S. territories.

Options Leading to Resolution

Option 1 — Test Taker May Cancel the Scores and Receive a Voucher for a Free TOEFL Test

A test taker may ask ETS to cancel the questioned scores and receive a voucher at no charge for a subsequent test administration. If the scores have already been reported, ETS notifies score recipients or other third parties that the test taker's scores have been canceled.

Option 2 — Cancel the Questioned Scores and Receive a Refund

The test taker may ask ETS to cancel the questioned scores. ETS then removes the scores from the test taker's record and refunds any test fees paid by the test taker. If the scores have already been reported, ETS notifies score recipients or other third parties that the test taker's scores have been canceled.

Option 3 — Send File to Score Recipient

A test taker may authorize ETS to send its Score Review Summary file to a college, university, or other designated score recipient so the institution can make its own decision about using the questioned scores. ETS will not send a Summary, however, unless the recipient agrees to accept it and to protect its confidentiality.

Factors to Consider

Before selecting Option 3, a test taker should consider three factors:

1. ETS *cancel*s the test taker's scores before releasing the Score Review Summary to score recipients and so notifies all recipients to whom the Score Review Summary is sent and all other score recipients. Once the scores are canceled, no further record of them may be obtained from ETS.
2. Not all score recipients are willing to review files and make independent judgments about questioned scores.
3. Score recipients' judgments are not binding on ETS.

Option 4 — Arbitration

A test taker may ask to have a third-party arbitrator, appointed by the American Arbitration Association, determine whether ETS has substantial evidence to support cancellation of the questioned test scores. **The arbitration option is only available to test takers testing in the United States and U.S. territories.**

Requirements

A test taker selecting this option must sign a standard ETS Arbitration Agreement that spells out the procedures that will apply in the arbitration. Arbitration is intended only as an independent review of ETS's decision that there is substantial evidence to support score cancellation. This review is based upon the documents alone. As a result, the arbitrator will review only the information that had been submitted to the Board at the time it decided to cancel the scores. Therefore, the test taker may not submit any information in the arbitration that was not submitted to the Board within the time provided.



Cost

ETS usually pays the cost of arbitration. However, the arbitrator is authorized to charge the test taker up to US\$325 if the arbitrator finds the test taker's position to be frivolous.

Questions About Options

Test takers who have questions about any of these options are invited to contact the OTI for further information.*

Cancellation Procedures

When ETS cancels a test taker's scores, the scores are removed from ETS's files. Any test fee the test taker paid is either refunded or the test taker is issued a voucher. If scores have not already been reported to any score recipients, ETS takes no further action. If the scores have already been reported, ETS notifies the score recipients that the test taker's scores have been canceled.

*Contact information for the OTI can be found on the inside front cover of this booklet.



Advice from Others

Test takers may seek advice from a trusted individual concerning ETS's test score review procedures. OTI staff members are available to discuss the ETS score review process with the test taker or anyone who has been asked by the test taker to help resolve these questions.

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