

WRITING SKILLS

The following skills will help you to implement these strategies in the Writing section of the *iBT* TOEFL test.

INTEGRATED TASK

Writing Skill 1: NOTE THE MAIN POINTS AS YOU READ

In the integrated task in the Writing section of the *iBT* TOEFL test, you will be asked to read an academic passage as part of the task. In this part of the integrated task, it is important for you to be able to read an academic passage of 250–300 words and take notes on the main points of the reading passage in a short period of time. Look at the following example of a reading passage that is part of the integrated writing task.

Reading Passage

It is common knowledge that **forecasting** is an attempt by meteorologists to determine what weather will be like in the future. **Hindcasting** is the opposite of forecasting, an attempt to determine what weather was like in the past. Meteorologists wish that records of weather had been kept in full for at least a few millennia, but it has been only in the last century that detailed records of the weather have been kept. Thus, meteorologists need to hindcast the weather, and they do so by using all sorts of information from other fields as diverse as archeology, botany, geology, literature, and art. These pieces of information from other fields that are used as a basis for drawing conclusions about what the weather must have been like at some point in the past are called **proxies**.

As you read the passage, you should take notes on the topic and main points of the reading passage. Look at these notes on the topic and main points of the reading passage.

TOPIC OF READING PASSAGE: hindcasting (trying to determine what weather was like in the past)

main points about hindcasting:

- detailed weather records kept for less than a century
- proxies (information from various other fields) used to hindcast weather

These notes show that the topic of the reading passage is hindcasting, which means trying to determine what the weather was like in the past; the main points about hindcasting are that detailed weather records were kept for less than a century and that proxies, which are pieces of information from various other fields, are used to hindcast weather.

The following chart outlines the key information you should remember about dealing with the reading passage in the integrated writing task.

NOTING THE MAIN POINTS IN THE READING PASSAGE	
TOPIC	Make sure that you understand (and take notes on) the <i>topic</i> of the reading passage.
MAIN POINTS	Then focus on (and take notes on) the <i>main points</i> that are used to support the topic of the reading passage.

WRITING EXERCISE 1: Read each of the following passages, and note the *topic* and the *main points* that are used to support the topic.

1. Read the passage. Take notes on the main points of the reading passage.

The Sahara is a massive desert, the world's largest, in fact. It is approximately equal in size to the United States and covers more than 9 million square kilometers. It is more than 5,500 kilometers from east to west and 2,000 kilometers from north to south.

The Sahara has a very dry climate. The average annual rainfall is not even 10 centimeters, and many areas receive less than 2 centimeters per year. In the very driest places, it rains only about once a century.

There is little surface water in the Sahara. The Nile River does run through the Sahara, and there are some oases there, but otherwise the surface is dry. Of the oases in the Sahara, about 90 are large enough to support tiny villages.

2. Read the passage. Take notes on the main points of the reading passage.

It is very common in English for one word to have many different meanings. This condition, where one word has different meanings, is known as **polysemy**. (This term comes from *poly-* meaning "many" and *sem-* meaning "meaning.")

Sound is one such polysemic word. As a noun, it refers to a noise (as in a *loud sound*) or a body of water (as in *Puget Sound*). As an adjective, it can refer to a state of health (as in *sound mind and body*). It can also be an intransitive verb (as in *sound angry*), a transitive verb (as in *sound the alarm*), or part of a verb phrase as an outburst (as in *sound off*) and an inquiry (as in *sound out*).

You may think that the word *sound* is a truly wondrous polysemic word. After all, its definitions cover seven pages in one major dictionary and include 19 meanings as a noun, 12 meanings as an adjective, 12 meanings as a verb (some transitive and some intransitive), 4 meanings in verb phrases, and 2 meanings as an adverb.

But what about the extraordinary word *set*? It looks like such a short, simple word, only three little letters in all. However, if you look it up in an unabridged dictionary, you will find at least 57 meanings for *set* when it is used as a noun and over 120 meanings when it is used as a verb.

3. Read the passage. Take notes on the main points of the reading passage.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead is known for her groundbreaking research on the effects of culture on gender roles. Her working hypothesis was that if gender behavior was the effect purely of biology, then what was considered masculine and feminine would be the same in all cultures. If gender behavior differed in different cultures, this would demonstrate that gender behavior resulted from culture rather than biology.

To test this hypothesis, Mead studied three different societies in New Guinea. The first society that she studied was the Arapesh. In this society, she observed that behavior by men and behavior by women were remarkably similar. She found that both men and women exhibited characteristics that are traditionally considered feminine: they were sensitive to each others' feelings and expressed emotions.

The second society that she studied in New Guinea were the Mundugumor, which was a society of headhunters and cannibals. The society was the opposite of the gentle and feminine Arapesh. In this second society, both men and woman exhibited characteristics that are traditionally considered male: they were harsh and aggressive.

In the third society that she studied, the Tchambuli, Mead found that males and females exhibited very different types of behavior. What was unusual was that the roles were the opposite of what we have come to expect. Mead found that in this society, the men were emotional and submissive to the women, and the women were dominant and aggressive.

Based on these findings, Margaret Mead came to the conclusion that culture, more than biology, determines gender behavior.