

Do TOEFL Templates Hurt Your Score? 3,692 Answers Measured

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THREE FINDINGS

- 1 Template openers are normal. 36.2% of 3,692 Academic Discussion answers open with a stock phrase, and 55.8% use one somewhere; the most common are opinion framers such as "In my opinion".
- 2 No penalty appeared. Answers that open with a template scored 25.198 of 30 against 25.158 for those that do not: +0.04 points (95% CI -0.12 to +0.20). The Language Use sub-score was the flattest of the three.
- 3 One opener is a warning sign. Answers opening "When it comes to..." (n = 75) averaged 23.573, 1.585 below the baseline, across all three sub-scores: a marker of weaker writing, not proof the phrase causes it.

CLASSROOM DRILL

Frame, then fill

10 minutes, individual then pairs

1. Students start an Academic Discussion answer with any opener they like, such as "In my opinion,".
2. The very next sentence must give a specific reason or example of their own, not another stock phrase.
3. Partners check each other: underline the opener, then the first sentence of real content. If there is a second formula before the content, cut it.

READ THIS BEFORE YOU USE IT

Scores come from LingoLeap's rubric-trained AI grader, not ETS's e-rater, on 3,692 published sample answers. The data is observational and measures opening phrases only, not memorised paragraphs. It shows no detectable penalty; it does not show that templates help.

Source: lingoleap.ai/research/templates-and-ai-scores · Data: CC BY 4.0 (aggregate numbers only)

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