

# Which English test, from where you are

Duolingo, TOEFL and IELTS compared for students inside Afghanistan and in the region, with a six-week plan and free preparation.

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د انگلیسي ژبې ازموینې · آزمون‌های زبان انگلیسی

Test availability changes — confirm with the provider before paying.

Ariana Nexus Academy mentors mark writing and run speaking practice for Academy students.

07

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Prepared by Hassan Ukasha · Reviewed by Ariana Nexus Academy

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# Which English test to take, from where you are

The test is not the hard part of your application. Choosing the wrong one, or taking it too late, is what costs Afghan students places.

## THE SHORT ANSWER

Inside Afghanistan, in most cases: the Duolingo English Test, taken at home.

If you need a test that every university accepts without question and you can reach Kabul or Kandahar: TOEFL iBT.

IELTS is not offered inside Afghanistan. Do not plan around it unless you are already travelling.

## The four options

| TEST                  | WHERE YOU CAN TAKE IT                                                                                                                   | LENGTH            | ACCEPTED BY                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Duolingo English Test | At home, on a computer with a camera and a stable connection                                                                            | About one hour    | Several thousand universities, including many of the most selective. A minority still refuse it — check each university's page. |
| TOEFL iBT             | Test centres operate in Kabul (Kateb University, Avicenna University) and Kandahar (male candidates only). Check ETS for current dates. | About two hours   | Universally accepted.                                                                                                           |
| IELTS Academic        | Not offered inside Afghanistan. Nearest centres are in Pakistan, Iran and India.                                                        | Under three hours | Universally accepted; required by some UK and Australian routes.                                                                |
| PTE Academic          | Not offered inside Afghanistan; available in the region                                                                                 | About two hours   | Widely accepted in the UK, Australia and Canada; less so in the U.S.                                                            |

Test availability changes. Confirm on the test provider's own site before you pay for anything.

## Roughly what scores correspond to each other

Use this to translate a university's requirement into a target on the test you can actually take. It is an approximation, not an official conversion.

| REQUIREMENT LEVEL                              | TOEFL IBT | IELTS   | DUOLINGO |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Typical minimum for admission                  | 78–80     | 6.0–6.5 | 105–115  |
| Comfortable for most universities              | 90–100    | 7.0     | 120–130  |
| Selective universities and most scholarships   | 100–110   | 7.5     | 130–140  |
| The most selective, and some graduate programs | 110+      | 8.0+    | 140+     |

## The Duolingo English Test in practice

| WHAT           | DETAIL                                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Equipment      | A laptop or desktop with a working camera and microphone. Phones and tablets are not allowed. Borrowing a laptop for ninety minutes is worth doing properly. |
| Connection     | The test is unforgiving about interruption. Test your connection at the hour you plan to sit it, not at a quiet hour.                                        |
| Room rules     | You must be alone, in a quiet room, with a clear desk. Nobody may enter. Your ears must be visible; no headphones. No notes, no paper, no phone in the room. |
| Identification | A passport or a government identity document with a photograph, in the same name you use on every application.                                               |
| Results        | Usually within about two days, and you can send them to an unlimited number of universities at no extra cost.                                                |
| Retakes        | Permitted, with limits per period. Universities see the score you send, not every attempt.                                                                   |
| Cost           | A fee applies and is set by the provider; it is generally lower than TOEFL or IELTS. Fee assistance exists for some candidates — see document AN·AC·2026·08. |

### THE TWO FAILURES WE SEE MOST

A family member walking into the room. The test is voided, the fee is lost, and the retake costs weeks. Tell everyone in the house the hour before.

A name on the test that does not match the name on the application. Register in your passport spelling, exactly.

## Free preparation that actually raises a score

| SKILL            | WHAT TO DO, DAILY                                                                                         | FREE RESOURCE                                                                    |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Listening        | 30 minutes of unscripted English at natural speed, with the transcript afterwards                         | BBC Learning English; university lectures on YouTube; podcasts in your own field |
| Reading          | One article a day, timed, then write three sentences on it from memory                                    | BBC, Reuters, Al Jazeera English; any university's undergraduate reading list    |
| Writing          | One 300-word response every second day, then rewrite yesterday's after reading it aloud                   | Any prompt list; Ariana Nexus Academy mentors mark writing for Academy students  |
| Speaking         | 10 minutes speaking aloud to a recording, then listening back. Most students have never heard themselves. | Your phone's voice recorder; a study partner on a call                           |
| Vocabulary       | 10 words a day in sentences, not lists. Academic word lists first.                                        | Quizlet; the Academic Word List; the glossary in AN·AC·2026·10                   |
| Test familiarity | One full practice test a week, timed, under real conditions                                               | Each provider's own free practice test — take it before you pay for the real one |

## A six-week plan, if your test is close

| WEEK | FOCUS                                                                                                                  |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Take a full free practice test under real conditions. Record the score. This number is the only honest starting point. |
| 2    | Attack the weakest section only. Two hours a day on it, thirty minutes on each of the others.                          |
| 3    | Speaking and writing: record and rewrite daily. Send two writing samples to your mentor.                               |
| 4    | Second full practice test. Compare to week one. Adjust.                                                                |
| 5    | Timing and stamina. Full sections at speed. Practise the room setup you will actually use.                             |
| 6    | Light review, sleep, and the real test early in the week so a retake is still possible before your deadline.           |

## Test-optional, waivers and exemptions

- Many universities are test-optional for the English requirement if your medium of instruction was English — ask your school or university for a "medium of instruction" letter; it is a single page and it is free.

- Some universities waive the English test where testing is genuinely unavailable in the applicant's country. Afghanistan qualifies at several institutions. Ask the admissions office in writing, politely, and keep the reply.
- Some run their own online interview or internal assessment instead. Always cheaper and often easier than a commercial test.
- A conditional offer with a language-course requirement is a real offer. Do not discard it because it is not unconditional.

## Sending your scores

- Send scores directly from the test provider to the university. A PDF you email yourself is not accepted as official by most institutions.
- Send them at least two weeks before the deadline. Score delivery is not instant and the delay is not an excuse a portal accepts.
- Keep your score report number, your test date and your registration name in the same folder as your documents.
- Scores expire — usually after two years. Check the expiry against the start date of your program, not your application date.

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1717 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, 10th Floor, Washington, D.C. 20006

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