

## The story behind "Ultra-Targeted TOEFL Grammar"



Yeah, there's a story! Grammar books never have stories, so it seems like a nice change. If you don't know me, I'm Jaime Miller – an online teacher who helps ambitious students perfect their English for TOEFL, especially for the speaking and writing sections.

When I started teaching TOEFL in 2010, I didn't really know anything about the expectations of TOEFL. For a long time, I learned about the exam with my students (that might scare you if you need a high score, but I guarantee it's happening all around the world). Back then, just like my students, I was overwhelmed by TOEFL books that are big enough to be telephone directories. I'm so glad that time is over!

It took years for me to develop a deep understanding of exactly what impresses TOEFL graders. Over time, I learned that normal TOEFL prep, English grammar books and even the billions of websites don't have the right kind of practice to target fast improvement in speaking and writing scores. Slowly, slowly, I started making my own practice material – and then it grew, like a snowball, into this book.

**Nowadays, with 6-8 weeks of online lessons, I can help an advanced student get scores of 105+, even if they never took TOEFL before and just got scores of about 90 on their first practice test.** That kind of improvement isn't typical, but it's possible when a strong, motivated student focuses on the right things. *Ultra-Targeted TOEFL Grammar* is one of the many things I teach to my private students.

I thought about selling this book (I mean, you can buy less useful TOEFL grammar books in stores) and I wondered if you might ignore the value of this because it's free, but after a lot of soul-searching (that means "thinking time"), **I decided to give this to you completely free.** Why? Because every day I hear how badly people need English to make their lives better. The truth is **English needs you** and I am convinced that the world (or at least your little corner of the world) will be better if you communicate more clearly, live your talents and share your knowledge with your communities.

With everything I produce for TOEFL, I aim to add something new to available TOEFL study materials. If you compare the few TOEFL grammar study materials currently in bookstores, I am confident that you'll find that *Ultra-Targeted TOEFL Grammar* is different in many ways. **Please trust that this book is gold – and check back often to make sure you get the most recent version.**

I hope that you find it useful. Make sure to share this with a good friend!

Best wishes,

Jaime

For the newest version, regularly check [www.JaimeMiller.com/grammar](http://www.JaimeMiller.com/grammar)

## What kind of student will benefit from this?

If you're studying for TOEFL at all, you should review everything at least briefly. I have used the same activities with both advanced and intermediate students.

All the grammar here are topics that everyone needs to get 24+ on writing, and 26+ on TOEFL speaking. If you learn these things and use them flawlessly in speaking and writing, you have the grammatical structure to get a great score (then, you just need to add some sophisticated and spicy vocabulary, and you have the recipe for total success).

If you're trying to study alone, I respect that. However, you still need some guidance from a native speaker who can keep you on track. Ask a tutor or trusted friend to evaluate your English and find patterns in your mistakes.

True Story of Failure: During my first year in Turkey, I tried to teach myself future verbs. Simple, right? In my living room, I studied the form of future, I filled half a notebook (wrongly!) conjugating dozens of verbs hundreds of times, and then I practiced speaking that mistake, and then I took that mistake to the streets. I used it with Turks. I was so thrilled! They understood me! Right, of course they did, they are experts in their language, of course, but it was a couple months before a compassionate secretary told me, "Jaime, my dear, you're saying it wrong..." I was shocked. I was embarrassed. I went home and cried. ☺ Seriously! That experience taught me many painful truths:

- 1) If native speakers understand you, only 1 in 200 will tell you there's an error.
- 2) Studying alone might be cheap, but it has risks. Minimize those risks as often as possible.
- 3) It takes a long time to "unlearn" the mistake and "relearn" the right thing.

Make sure that if you do study alone, that a qualified person is helping to monitor your English at least once a week. If you already have a teacher, ask him/her to focus on the issues in this book. That will guarantee that your speaking and writing scores improve.

## Will studying this book guarantee S26 and W24?

Grammar is part of your Language Use score on TOEFL's speaking and writing sections. Remember, they also evaluate your Topic Development, Delivery and Organization. Grammar is not the only thing they test, but grammar is the foundation of clear communication... SO (1) if your vocabulary is advanced enough, (2) if your mind thinks fast enough and logically enough, and (3) if you can communicate your ideas in the time that they give you, then yeah, this book has the grammar that you need. I can't guarantee that you will remember it perfectly (see my true story above) but this grammar will put you on the right track.

## "if" sentences (first / second conditional)

	"First"	"Second"
<b>Why we use it:</b>	When we talk about a real future possibility.	When we make a wish for any time (not just the past; we can be talking about now, or a situation in general). "Second" is very flexible and VERY commonly used. If you aren't sure which if to use, use "Second."
<b>Where you need it on TOEFL:</b>	Speaking, Task 1 or 2 when you justify your opinion  Speaking, Task 5 when you explain your opinion and the consequences of the wo/man's actions	Speaking, Task 1 or 2 when you justify your opinion  Writing, the independent (2 <sup>nd</sup> ) essay when you justify your opinion
<b>Grammar formula</b>	If + present simple .... will + verb	If + past simple... would + verb
<b>Basic example</b>	If he signs up for the class, he will be able to graduate on time.	If my town had better roads, peoples' lives would be more comfortable.
	If he doesn't register for the class, he will have a problem getting enough credits later.	If there was a subway, we would save even more time commuting to work.

### How you should study this:

On the following six pages, there's a lot of practice and explanation. You can choose from speaking or writing practice.

Quickly scan the title headings and decide which parts you would benefit from studying.

## Common mistakes

The biggest mistake people usually make with “if” sentences is that they mix up or blend the grammar formulas for “First” and “Second.” **Rule: Don't mix the formulas. The formulas must stay separate.**

It's confusing to use present simple with would, or past simple with will. Here are some examples of **mistakes**:

- ✘ If he signs up for the class, he would be able to graduate on time. → correct: he will be able to
- ✘ If he didn't register for the class, he will have a problem. → correct: If he doesn't register
- ✘ If he not sign up for the class... → correct: If he doesn't sign up
- ✘ If he sign up for the class... → correct: If he signs up...

## Common Phrases for “Second” Conditional

In the beginning, students usually don't realize all of the weird and different ways that we use “would” so I wanted to show you some very useful options for your TOEFL essays and speech.

- ✓ This would be... / It would be...
- ✓ There would be... (this is the second conditional version of “there is / there are”)
- ✓ This would help / cause / make... (for when you want to explain a potential result of a dream situation)
- ✓ If I were there... (yes, it's true that there is this one weird, acceptable mistake in English)
- ✓ We would have to ... (for when you want to talk about potential/hypothetical obligation)
- ✓ I could... (this is related to “can”, so if you want to talk about ability, use this)
- ✓ It would probably + verb... (for when you want to make a guess but you're not certain)
- ✓ It might + verb... (an alternative for making a guess, but when you're not certain)

**Example of an extended "Second" Conditional dream paragraph**

Trust me, you need "if" everywhere. Here are some very explicit prompt examples of when TOEFL asks you to use "if."

- "Imagine your friend is coming to your town. What would you do with this person?"
- "If you had to choose between working at a big company or a small one, what would you prefer?"
- "Imagine that a large shopping center will be built in your neighborhood. Would you support or oppose this?"

All of these prompts are very obvious places to use "if." Let's use the last prompt about the shopping center to write some sentences:

**Note: This is not a perfect TOEFL essay; it just helps you creatively practice the grammar.**

Logic / Purpose for writing	Actual paragraph that I write:
First, the writer wants to explain how her neighborhood is right now. Without this background information, her explanation about supporting or opposing the plan isn't clear.	<p>My neighborhood in Waikiki is a beautiful place. I feel very lucky to live in such a place but I'm not the only one who likes it. Every year, millions of tourists come to lie on the famous beach, play in the water, and enjoy our tropical paradise.</p> <p>[Note! The writer uses present simple to make generalizations.]</p>
Second, she wants to explain the imaginary impact of the shopping center on her neighborhood.	<p>If they <u>built</u> another shopping center, the economy in Waikiki <u>would</u> change. It <u>might</u> be more expensive. The prices for hotels and going to the beach <u>would probably</u> increase. Visitor costs <u>would</u> increase. Current visitors <u>would</u> be unhappy. We <u>would have to</u> attract higher class visitors who <u>could</u> pay for the new services.</p> <p>It <u>would probably</u> be a tropical shopping mall. I hope architects and designers <u>would</u> involve Waikiki scenery. If such an owner <u>had</u> creativity, it <u>would be</u> successful, I think. However, if it <u>looked</u> like a mainland shopping mall, it <u>wouldn't</u> be good.</p> <p>A new shopping center <u>would</u> disturb the nature's conditions and beautiful scenery. It <u>would</u> be ugly looking. People <u>couldn't</u> play on the beach, walk there, or enjoy the sunsets anymore.</p>

**Now it's your turn! Type 3-4 paragraphs about what would happen in YOUR neighborhood.**

### "if" practice for Speaking, Task 1

Below are some examples that I give about how you could use "if." Please remember that these are flexible and I always recommend being spontaneous and creative at TOEFL (because in real life, you need to be spontaneous and creative when you communicate).

**There are lots of different kinds of universities. Which kind of university would you like to go to? Why?**

*Jaime's example, using "if" as an intro sentence:* If I went to university again, I would choose a larger university. Actually, I went to a small university and it was good because I got a lot of personal attention, but unfortunately, the class selection was pretty limited. We didn't have the choices that my friends at big universities had. If I were at a bigger university, I could study a wider variety of subjects, and that would be interesting. (This needs to be about 2 sentences longer to fill 45 seconds.)

*It's your turn! Speak your answer, record and listen to it. Write if you're not comfortable.*

**People have different ways of escaping the stress and difficulties of modern life (i.e. reading, gardening, exercising). What do you think is the best way of reducing stress?**

*Jaime's example, using "if" as an extra sentence:* When I get stressed, I like to go to the gym to relax. I spend a lot of time sitting at the computer and sometimes I'm sore just because I sit still for so many hours every day. Like today, if I don't go to the gym later and run for half an hour, I'll probably feel really bad. (This needs to be 3-4 sentences longer to fill 45 seconds.)

*It's your turn! Speak your answer, record and listen to it. Write if you're not comfortable.*

**What are the qualities of a good roommate? Give reasons and examples to support your explanation.**

*Jaime's example, using "if" as an extra sentence:* Oh wow! Uhm... I definitely wouldn't want to have a roommate again anytime soon. It was one of the most challenging parts of being in college and I wouldn't want to go back to that time of arguing with people... but if I had to choose a roommate, I would look for someone quiet and clean. And actually, I wouldn't want to choose a friend, because I've lived with friends and unfortunately lost friendships because of that. So what I'm saying is that I think it's better to live with someone I'm not that close with, but who is still similar to me.

*It's your turn! Speak your answer, record and listen to it. Write if you're not comfortable.*

## "if" practice for Speaking, Task 2

**Some people take their vacations at luxury resorts, while others prefer staying in cheap hotels or hostels. Which type of vacation do you prefer?**

*Jaime's example, using "if" as an extra sentence:* When I go on vacation, I definitely prefer to stay in a nice hotel, but not a luxury resort. The truth is that I don't like tours or resorts that much because it's hard to feel the local culture in those places. A good hotel in the center of the city would be much better, and it would probably be more comfortable and safer than somewhere cheap. One time I stayed in a really cheap place and it was horrible, dirty and loud. I didn't feel relaxed at all, so now I'm willing to pay more. The other thing is that I love eating and trying new food and so if I stayed somewhere not too expensive, I could still eat really high-quality food without spending a ton on my whole vacation.

*It's your turn! Speak your answer, record and listen to it. Write if you're not comfortable.*

**Some people like to read classic works of literature. Others prefer watching film versions of the same stories. Which do you prefer and why? Include details and examples in your explanation.**

*Jaime's example, using "if" as an extra sentence:* When I was younger, I really loved reading books and I used to think that watching the movie version of the book was like cheating. Hehe. But now that I'm working, I don't have as much time and I appreciate that Hollywood is helping me out! I was watching Game of Thrones a few months ago, and I actually thought about buying the book because I loved the series so much – but I think it's like five books or something like that. If I buy the books, I doubt I'll actually even have time to read them. So I haven't bought them yet, and I probably won't.

*It's your turn! Speak your answer, record and listen to it. Write if you're not comfortable.*

**Some people love buying the latest cell phones and technological gadgets. Others don't mind using older technology. Which do you prefer? Include details in your explanation.**

*Jaime's example, using "if" as an extra sentence:* I really like to have new – but not the newest – technology. This is because I'm not the world's most careful person. I have dropped my phones so many times so if I buy something nice, it's very possible that it will break. I know I'd be really frustrated if I spent a lot of money on a phone and couldn't use it.



## Speaking, Task 5 Style Opinions

Imagine that you heard some Task 5-style dialogues with the following scenarios. After you explain the problem and the potential choices, it's your time to explain your opinion. Using "if" is a great way to keep things interesting, say something specific and boost your score here. If you have Speaking Confidence, you can use the Workbook pages for Module D / Task 5 to get even more useful practice after you finish these exercises.

**Task 5-style scenario: The woman needs to choose where to live next year. Her friend says she should live off campus because she will have a lot of freedom, but she doesn't have the money for a car and she doesn't like the public bus.**

*Jaime's guesses, using "if" as an extra sentence:* I think the woman should stay on campus, even though her friend is pushing her to move. If the woman moves off campus, she will have transportation problems because she doesn't have a car. She said that she hated the bus, so if she doesn't have the money for a car, then she'll probably be unhappy every day.

*Can you remember what Jaime said? Cover the page and try to speak Jaime's words.*

**Task 5-style scenario: It's time for final exams at school and everyone is really stressed and has very little time. The man's roommate is using his belongings. The roommate used the man's blank paper, computer, and favorite cup in the kitchen. His friend says he should talk with his roommate and try to fix the problem, or find a new roommate, or move out.**

*Jaime's guesses, using "if" as an extra sentence:* I definitely think the man should not try to find a new roommate at this point. Like he said, it's finals time, and if he looks for a roommate, he probably won't find one because everyone is too busy studying. He might be able to talk with the director of Residence Life and find an empty room. But honestly, I think he's probably just sensitive because of stress. The best solution is probably just to confront his roommate but also stay patient and be understanding. **I mean, it's just paper and a cup...**

*Can you remember what Jaime said? Cover the page and try to speak Jaime's words.*



### Writing, Independent Topics

**Some people think that they can learn better by themselves than with a teacher. Others think that it is always better to have a teacher. Which do you prefer? Use specific reasons to develop your essay.**

*Jaime's justifications, using "if" as an extra sentence:* If a student doesn't have help when she learns a new language, it's very possible for her to teach many mistakes to herself. Later, it will be more difficult for the student to unlearn the mistakes. Because of this, it's important for a student to have the guidance of a teacher, especially when they're learning a language. On the other hand, a student needs to be personally motivated to learn. Even if a teacher monitors a student's progress, there's no guarantee that the student will actually learn.

*What do you think? Write a few sentences that are specific generalizations.*

**If you could change one important thing about your hometown, what would you change?**

*Jaime's justifications, using "if" as an extra sentence:* If I could change something about my town in Northern California, I would build a better public transportation system. Currently, there is no bus system and everyone drives cars. It's a completely unsustainable lifestyle, especially because it's a rural area and people live miles from grocery stores, schools, and their jobs. If people didn't have to drive, they would pollute less. This would lead to better air quality. I also think that people would have more free time because they wouldn't have to spend so much time driving.

*What about your hometown? Write a few sentences that are specific generalizations.*

**When people move to another country, some of them decide to follow the customs of the new country. Others prefer to keep their own customs. Compare these choices. Which one do you prefer?**

*Jaime's justifications, using "if" as an extra sentence:* If people don't adopt the customs of their new country, locals will think that the foreigners are rude. In Turkey, everyone takes off their shoes before they go into a home. If someone wore shoes inside, it would be extremely disrespectful because it would make the home dirty, and it would insult the lady of the house. It's clear that there are some customs which should be followed.

*What do you think? Write a few sentences that are specific generalizations.*

## "verb-ing" as an Activity (Subject / Noun)

<b>Why we use it:</b>	When we make generalizations, or describe our opinion about an activity.
<b>Where you need it on TOEFL:</b>	Potentially, on every task on speaking, as well as on the integrated and independent writing.
<b>Grammar formula</b>	Verb-ing + verb + extra info
<b>Basic examples</b>	Cooking is fun / horrible / boring!
	Cooking at home saves money.
	Eating out (in restaurants) wastes money.

### Common Mistakes:

- ☠ Perform the research is important. → Why is it confusing? Because it looks like there are two verbs here – both “perform” and “is.” The only way to eliminate the confusion is to make a proper activity at the beginning – “Performing the research is important.” Now it’s clear.
- ☠ To perform the research is a good idea. → Why is it confusing? Because when we use “to + verb” like this, we are usually shortening the phrase “in order to.”
  - ✓ Correct: [~~In order~~] to perform the research, the department needs to get a better budget. (In other words, if the department gets a better budget, THEN they can perform the research.)
  - ✓ Also correct: The department needs to get a better budget to perform the research. (We can move the phrase to the end because “to perform...” is NOT the subject.)
  - ✓ Correct: The man thinks performing the research is a good idea.
- ☠ Impossible: The man thinks is a good idea performing the research. (This is ultra-confusing because now, we’re missing a subject! We can’t move “performing...”)

If you are writing and you need to choose between “to verb” or “verb-ing” ask yourself...

- Do I mean “in order to” or a result? Yes, ok then use it. No, then change to “verb-ing.”

### Exercise 1:

Speak "verb-ing" in these sentences.

1. (Cycle) \_\_\_\_\_ is fun.
2. (Get) \_\_\_\_\_ a good job is not easy.
3. (Find) \_\_\_\_\_ a parking space downtown is difficult.
4. (Drive) \_\_\_\_\_ is becoming more and more expensive.
5. (Learn) \_\_\_\_\_ about other cultures makes people more tolerant.
6. (Eat) \_\_\_\_\_ fruits and vegetables is good for your health.
7. (Smoke) \_\_\_\_\_ in this area is not allowed.
8. (Have) \_\_\_\_\_ children is a big decision.
9. (Not express) \_\_\_\_\_ anger can create many problems for a person.
10. (Not know) \_\_\_\_\_ the local language makes life very difficult for a foreigner.

### Exercise 2:

Re-write the sentences and make them personal. Be spontaneous and honest so if you hate it, say why. You score higher on TOEFL with past simple. Make 10 quick responses with each of the above topics.

- Speaking score of 22 example: Cycling is a lot of fun. I really enjoy it because it's healthy. And umm... It's nice.
- Speaking score of 26+ example: I really think that cycling is a lot of fun and if I had more time, I'd do it every day. Unfortunately I'm pretty busy but last week I went on a little bike trip with my friends... (blah blah blah + examples and an awesome story)... so that's why I love cycling.

*Speak out loud and record yourself.*

### Exercise 3:

Get some TOEFL speaking tasks for 1 or 2, or independent writing prompts. Think about how you would answer. There's a 99.99% chance that you can make a sentence like this about your topic.

### Exercise 4: Advanced

If you already completed the "if" practice in the previous section, you can challenge yourself by making "would be" comparisons that will knock the socks off the TOEFL graders.

- Example of a basic sentence: Cycling in Istanbul is pretty stressful.
- Super impressive: Cycling in a small town would be a lot easier than cycling in Istanbul.

*Use the ideas from Exercise 1 to make spontaneous comparisons. Speak out loud! Record!*