

Does Length Raise TOEFL Academic Discussion Scores? Data

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THREE FINDINGS

- 1 Under 100 words is the real risk. Only 49 of 3,692 answers (1.3%) were under 100 words, and they averaged 20.51 of 30, against 24.71 for 100-124 words.
- 2 Past about 175 words, extra length stopped helping: below 175 words each extra 50 went with +1.34 points; from 175 up the slope was -0.01. The highest group mean was 25.55, for 175-199 words.
- 3 Above 100 words the effect is small: the correlation between length and score is $r = 0.13$, so length accounts for about 2% of the variation in score.

CLASSROOM DRILL

Content, not count

15 minutes, individual then pairs

1. Students write an Academic Discussion answer in 10 minutes.
2. They highlight every sentence that adds a new reason, example or response to a classmate, and count words only after that.
3. Partners check: an answer under 100 words needs one more developed point; an answer well past 175 words should cut repetition, not add more.

READ THIS BEFORE YOU USE IT

3,692 of LingoLeap's published sample answers, scored by LingoLeap's AI grader (not ETS) and retrieved 2026-09-26. The samples average 25.2 of 30, stronger than typical. Observational: longer writers may simply be stronger writers, so length is not a lever to pull.

Source: lingoleap.ai/research/academic-discussion-length · Data: CC BY 4.0 (aggregate numbers only)

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