

What Separates TOEFL Speaking Score Bands: Delivery

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THREE FINDINGS

- 1 Every delivery signal is higher in higher bands, and fluency moves most: about 50 to 81 of 100 from the 2.0 to the 4.5 band.
- 2 Pace and length rise too, about 83 to 135 words a minute and 58 to 91 words, but faster is not always better: the 140–159 wpm bucket had the highest average score (3.5 of 5), and faster buckets scored lower.
- 3 "Pause less" is the wrong lesson. Answers with zero detected pauses had the lowest average score (0.91 of 5, $n = 851$), because no pauses usually means barely any speech.

CLASSROOM DRILL

Fast versus finished

10 minutes, pairs

1. Each student answers the same question twice: once as fast as possible without stopping, once pausing between ideas but finishing every idea with a reason or example.
2. The partner notes which version was complete and easier to follow.
3. Discuss: pausing between ideas is normal; what matters is whether the answer says enough, clearly.

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Real Take an Interview answers on LingoLeap since January 2026, aggregated by AI score band; bands below 2.0 are excluded because very short answers create speech-rate artefacts. Delivery signals come from automatic speech assessment and scores from LingoLeap's AI grader; neither is ETS scoring, and both describe LingoLeap practice data only. Observational: these are associations, not a recommended speed or pause count.

Source: lingoleap.ai/research/toefl-speaking-fluency · Data: CC BY 4.0 (aggregate numbers only)

Cite: He, R. (2026, September 14). What separates TOEFL Speaking score bands: Delivery (Version 1.0). LingoLeap.
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