Magoosh

TOEFL Vocabulary Comics

Learn words with comics!

What is Magoosh?

Hi there, and welcome to our eBook! Magoosh is a test prep startup based in Berkeley, CA. We help you prep for the GRE, GMAT, SAT, and of course, the TOEFL! You can read our blog [here](#) and learn more about our TOEFL lesson videos [here](#).

Our [online TOEFL prep](#) offers:
- over 100 TOEFL video lessons
- practice questions
- material created by expert tutors
- e-mail support
- personalized statistics based on performance
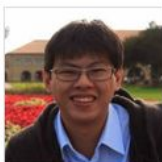- access anytime, anywhere from an internet-connected device

[magoosh.com/toefl](#)

Why Our Students Love Us

These are survey responses sent to us by students after they took the TOEFL. All of these students and many more have used the Magoosh TOEFL prep course to improve their scores!

What was your overall score on the actual TOEFL?	102
What was your reading score?	27
What was your listening score?	23
What was your speaking score?	24
What was your writing score?	28

How did Magoosh help you?
I used it to find how the flow and the structure of the test is like. I did not have a lot of time to prepare for the test so reading the official ETS book was not advisable. I wanted something quick, interactive and not too pricey. I am glad that I turned to Magoosh! The videos, especially on the writing section gave really good tips and I am proud to say, it is the section that I scored the highest!
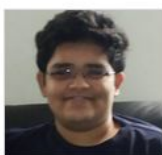
What was your overall score on the actual TOEFL?	103
What was your reading score?	26
What was your listening score?	25
What was your speaking score?	24
What was your writing score?	28

How did Magoosh help you?
Magoosh TOEFL is really good and i especially loved the reading and listening questions.

What was your overall score on the actual TOEFL?	110
What was your reading score?	27
What was your listening score?	27
What was your speaking score?	28
What was your writing score?	28

How did Magoosh help you?
Primarily, Magoosh taught me the test much faster than I ever would if I had to do it by myself. Considering I had very little time, and that I had very good experience with Magoosh previously with their GRE product, I thought I'd give it a go. From the time I had registered, I had about 3 weeks to my TOEFL.??

Being a non-native speaker, it helps to have your academic background in English medium--which I did. So, what I needed was to learn the TOEFL i.e. the test pattern, the kind of questions, how to practice (especially note-taking!), what counts as a good answer, etc. Mr. Lucas Fink of Magoosh did a great job at breaking every section down and explaining the best ways to prepare for and tackle them. Additionally, it was nice to see they had quite a lot of well-made grammar lessons to help those not quite as adept in English, especially in their sentence-making.

Although many tend to overlook the need to learn the test, I believe it is crucial to anyone who wants to attain a good score. And for that, I highly recommend prepping with Magoosh. They have helped me familiarize with and understand the TOEFL very quickly--all from the comfort of my home.

Who wrote this eBook?

All of the awesome comics in this book were illustrated by our TOEFL blogger, David Recine, with additional help from Lucas Fink, our TOEFL expert.

We hope you enjoy these comics as much as we do! :)

Introduction

Vocabulary is incredibly helpful for all four sections of the TOEFL (reading, listening, speaking, and writing), so it's important to study! But sometimes, reading word lists and flipping flash cards gets boring -- and if you're bored, it's pretty tough to retain what you've learned.

In this eBook, we're going to help you memorize and review vocabulary words with the help of mnemonic devices. To make these words more fun and memorable, these mnemonics will be illustrated with entertaining comics. We'll cover words from the following groups:

- Life Science Words
- Animal Words
- Financial Words
- Structure Words
- Words that Sound the Same
- School Life Words
- Spoken English: "Chances Are"
- Prefixes: Un-, Under-, and Inter-

Hopefully, you'll enjoy reading this eBook and learn some new words in the process!

Life Science Words

The TOEFL loves animals. Indeed, many sections of the TOEFL include an animal-related reading or lecture. In fact, the TOEFL loves *all* life science. Even TOEFL readings on other topics may mention life science in some way. For this reason, it's important to learn life science words. Here are six common words to get you started.

Organism/Organic

These two words are closely related. **"Organism"** is a noun that means any living thing. A mushroom, a tree, a dog, and even a germ are all organisms. **"Organic"** is an adjective. It means related to living things. Wood is an organic building material, for example. Metal is not organic, because it doesn't come from a living thing.

*TOEFL Example: Phytoplankton is a single-celled **organism** that is the fundamental component of plankton, a common organic food in many marine ecosystems.*
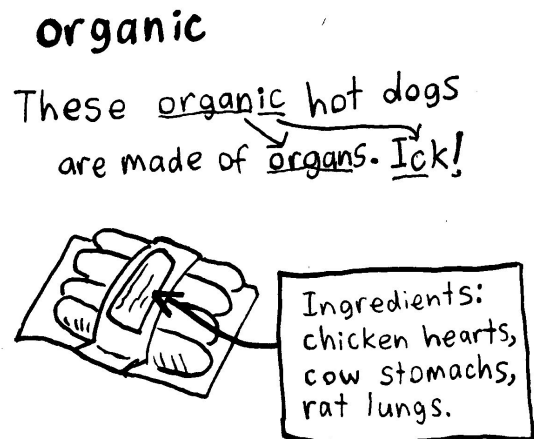
Species

A **species** is a group of animals, plants, or other living things that are very similar. Members of a species reproduce to make new members of the same species. You belong to the human species. Chimpanzees look like humans in many ways, but are a different species, because they cannot make human babies. Oak trees and elm trees are different species. Oak tree seeds will only grow into oak trees, and elm tree seeds will only become elm trees.

*TOEFL Example: There are reportedly more than 440 **species** of shark in the world.*

Vegetation

"Vegetation" refers to any kind of plant. It is related to a word you may know: vegetable (foods like carrots, lettuce, potatoes, etc…). The difference

between "vegetation" and "vegetable" is that not all vegetation can be eaten. You wouldn't eat a tree, for example. And of course, some plants are poisonous.

*TOEFL Example: The biologists observed the eating habits of many nearby species for more than a year. They determined that no two species ate the same part of the local **vegetation**.*
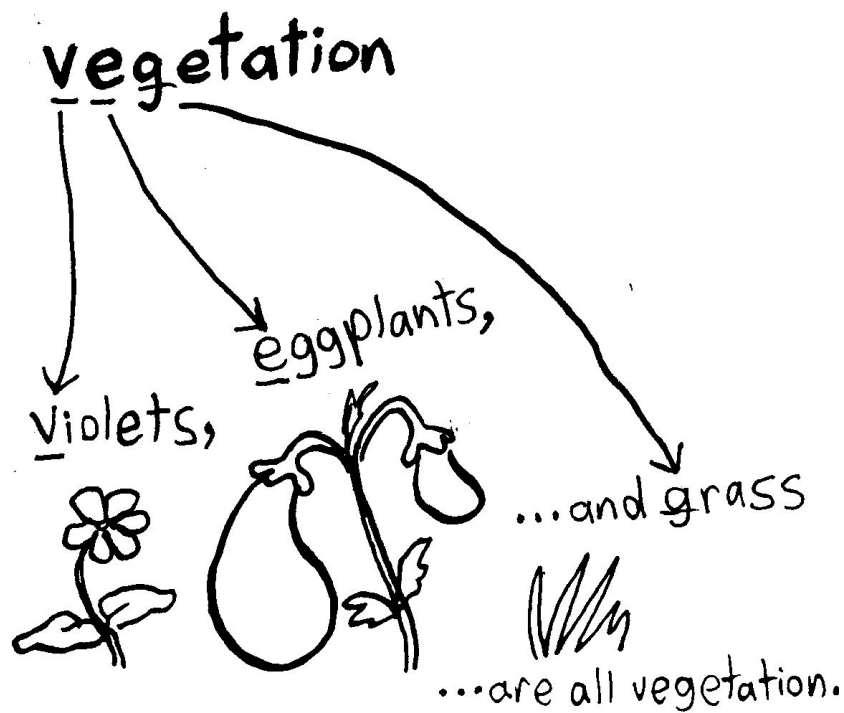
Microscopic

"Microscopic" is the one other adjective in this series of words. (The other one being "organic" at the beginning of this list.) **"Microscopic"** means too small to be seen by the human eye. This word can refer to anything that is too

small to be seen, whether it is organic or not. However, on the TOEFL and in academic writing, **"microscopic"** often refers to tiny, single-celled organisms.

*TOEFL Example: There are about 1000 species of **microscopic** organism that live on human skin.*
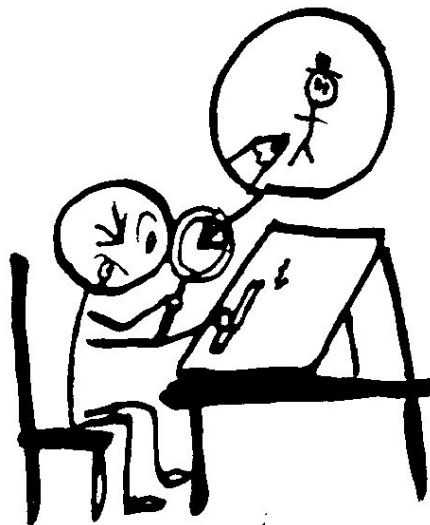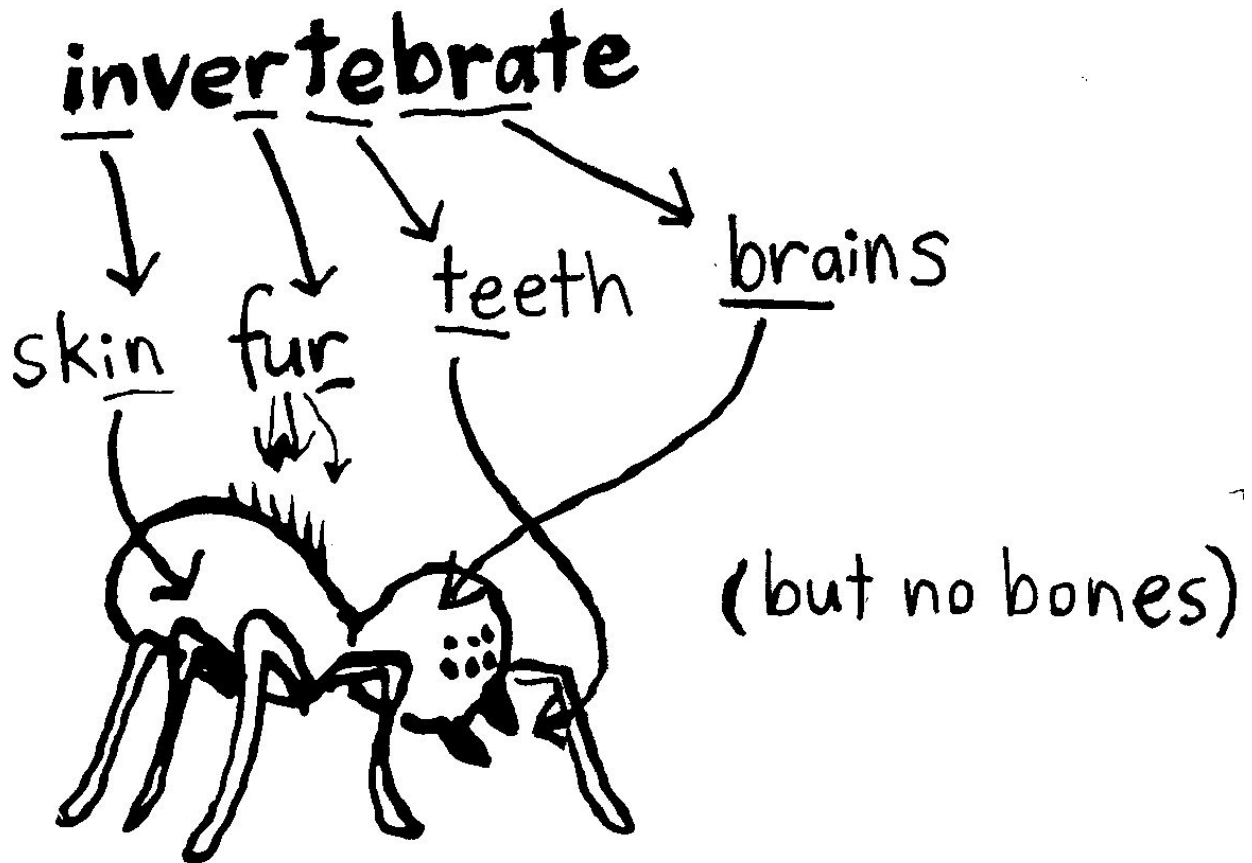

Invertebrate

An **invertebrate** is an animal with no bones in its body. Common invertebrates include the earthworm, the spider, and the octopus. (The opposite word of this is "**vertebrate**," meaning an animal that has bones.)

TOEFL Example: The majority of earth's animals—up to 97% by one estimate—are **invertebrates.**

invertebrate

skin fur teeth brains

(but no bones)

Animal Words

As we mentioned above, the TOEFL loves animals. But, that's a little ambiguous. The TOEFL doesn't love animals the same way you might love animals (that is, if you're an animal lover!). It's more scientific than that. Specifically, the TOEFL texts and lectures often include one topic about a species of animal. Very often that text or lecture is about the animal's behavior, evolution, population, or biology—that is, how the animals act, how they've changed over time, how many of them there are in which places, or how their bodies work.

Below are five words that are commonly used in the context of zoology (the study of animals)—words you might not use in everyday English, but are very possibly going to show up on your test.
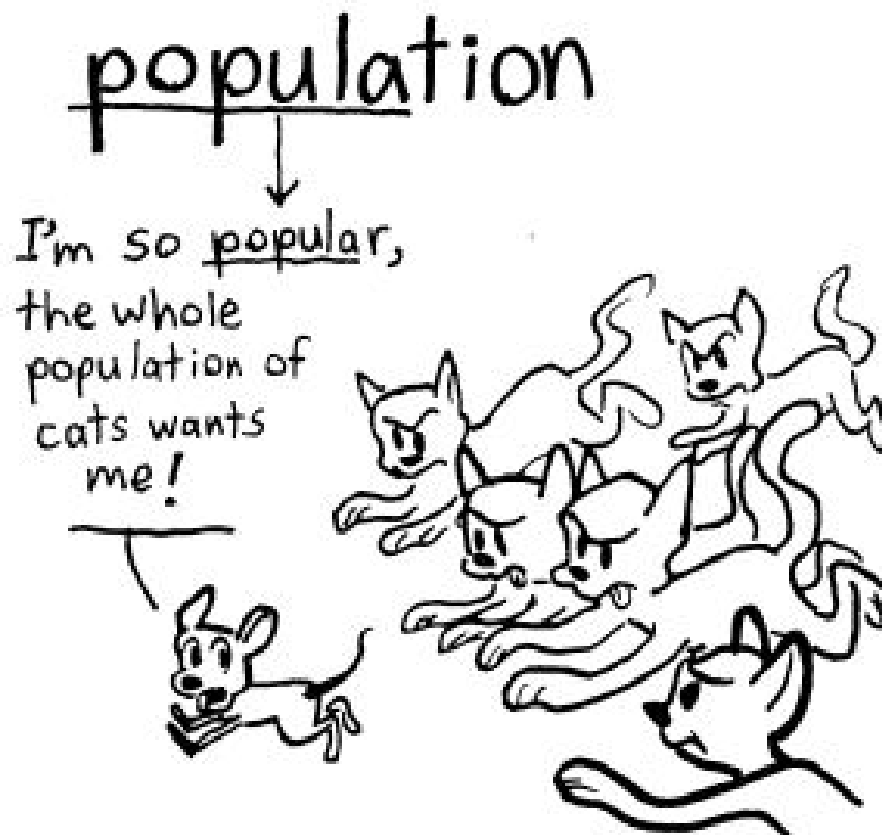
Population

This is a pretty common word, so it's a good word to start this list with. There are a couple different meanings of **"population"** that are important for the TOEFL. First, it can mean the number of animals (or people) in a certain area.

The **population** of Tokyo is over 13 million, for example. That's 13 million people; I don't know how many animals there are. The other meaning is the actual group of people or animals, not just the number.

TOEFL Example: Habitat destruction has broken many animal populations into smaller, isolated communities, which can cause problems for reproduction and growth.

Habitat

If you didn't know this word when we used it in the example sentence for "population" above, then you're in luck. Let's define it here.

"Environment" is a more common word which, in some sentences, can mean the exact same thing as **"habitat."** Both refer to the place where a certain animal lives. It includes the surrounding plants, the weather, and the other animals. The biggest difference between the two words is that "environment" can be used to mean the whole world or even a place where nothing lives—it's not just about the animals—whereas **"habitat"** refers only to a specific place where a specific animal lives.

TOEFL Example: *As settlers travelled across the U.S., they moved through the bison's ideal habitat, prairie, and so they had a lot of opportunities to hunt.*

Migrate

If you live in a place that sees snow in the winter, you know where many people travel when it gets cold: sunny places. Those people aren't so different

from many animals. When the winter comes on, they move to another area where it's warmer and there's more food.

In a sense, "to **migrate**" just means "to move," but it's used specifically when many, many animals are moving at one time and for a specific purpose.

TOEFL Example: The blue whale migrates further each year than does any other whale—or for that matter, any other animal—travelling over 12,000 miles annually.

Thrive

There are many ways to judge success as a human. For animals, it's much simpler—don't die. If you live to an old age and have many children, you are a

successful animal. (Clearly, some people would say this is true of humans, too.)

That is what "thriving" is, especially the part about having many children. When a species thrives, the population grows.

TOEFL Example: Although humans are afraid of the health hazards caused by continued radioactivity at Chernobyl, many animal species are now thriving in the abandoned cities and towns.

Predator/Prey

These two words aren't related in their roots, but the meanings are closely connected. If you know one word, you should know the other, too.

A "predator" is an animal which hunts and eats other animals. Usually, it's used in the context of the specific animal that is hunted.

"Prey" is what the predator hunts. Prairie dogs are *prey* for many different *predators*.

TOEFL Example: When a species that serves as both predator and prey in a certain habitat disappears, the effects can be significant, as its prey will thrive, and the population of its predators will shrink.

predator

A predator has bread, so it can eat a prey sandwich

prey

The prey prays it won't be eaten.

Financial Words

Cash. Dough. Moola. We have a lot of slang for money in English, probably because it's one of the most important parts of our lives. And we even have an old expression that says that fact, too: "Money makes the world go around." If there was no money, everything would stop.

The TOEFL is not a test of your knowledge of slang, of course. You don't need to know those words I started with. But you *might* need a number of other words that describe how we use money.

Below are four relatively academic words. You'll see these in newspapers often, and possibly in lectures, conversations, or texts in the TOEFL, too.

(to) Invest

"To invest" is similar to "to spend," but there's one very important difference. When you invest, you expect something good to happen *later*. Usually, when we invest money, we expect to get more money back after some time. For

example, if you had invested in Apple Inc. before they created the iphone, you would have a lot more money today.

But we also use the word "invest" for things other than money, especially time and energy. For instance, you'll have to invest a lot of time in your TOEFL studies if you want to see a big increase in your scores.

TOEFL example: Have you heard the university is finally going to invest in new equipment for the chemistry labs? It's about time!


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(a) Class

"Class" is a great word because it has a few different meanings. Obviously, one of those meanings is related closely to school. But more generally, it is a

group of things that all have something in common. In other words, it is a category.

In terms of money, a "class" is a group of people who have similar incomes (who earn similar amounts of money). You might hear about the "upper class," for example, meaning rich people, while the "lower class" is made of people who don't have much money.

TOEFL example: Europe in the pre-modern times was organized in what was essentially a class system, dividing the wealthy nobility from the common people.
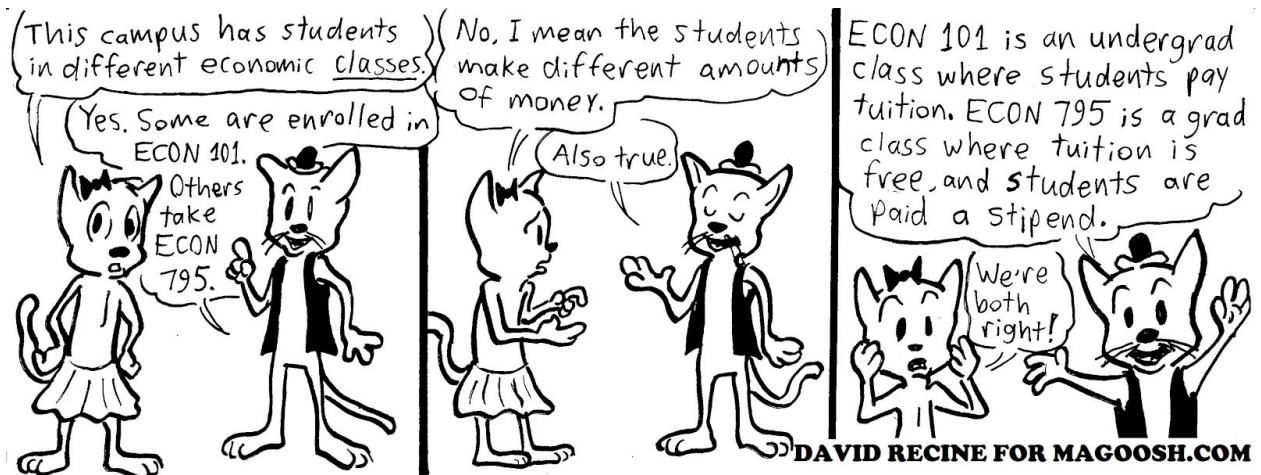

(to be) Economic

First, you should definitely know what "the economy" is. But, what about the word "economic"? That can refer to the economy, of course—you could say

that America has had economic trouble, for example. Be careful not to use it in the same exact way as "financial," though. That word is similar, but "economic" refers specifically to a large scale, whereas "financial" can refer to a very small scale. If I talk about my personal financial situation, then I'm referring to the money I have in the bank. But if I refer to my economic situation, then I'm talking about how much money I have in comparison to everybody else in my country—what economic class I'm in.

TOEFL example: Although the early 1930s were characterized by one of the largest economic downturns in history, that era plays an important cultural role even today.

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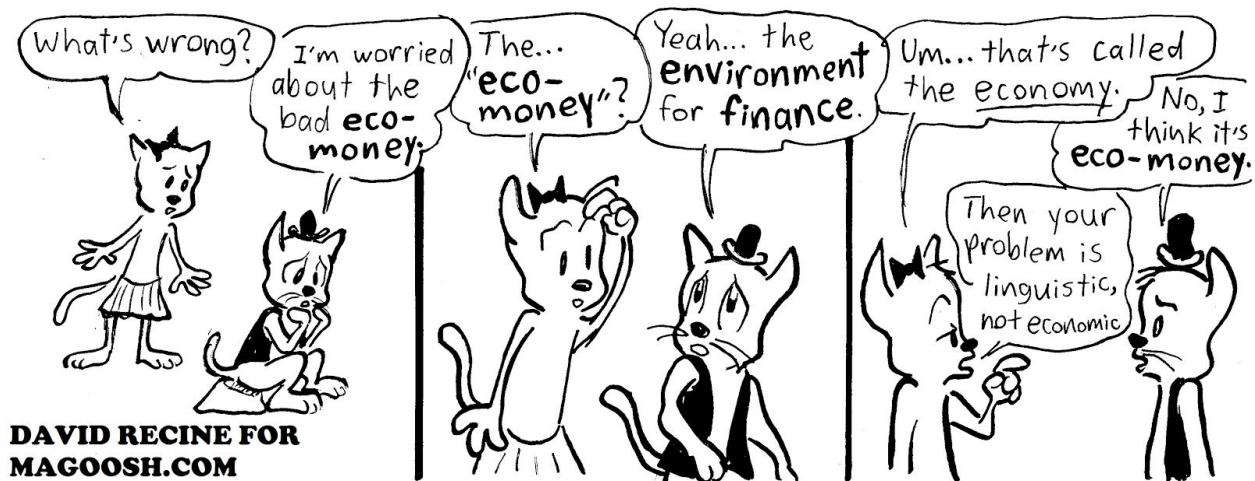
(to) Compensate

"To compensate" basically means "to give in return." For example, if you do work for me, I might compensate you with money. That is, I give you the

money in return for the work.Generally speaking, it means that you receive or do something *positive* to balance something *negative*. The work you do is hard and tiring, but the money you receive in return is useful.

That general meaning fits with another usage of "compensate." It can be unrelated to money and giving/taking. Instead, it can mean that you do a positive thing because you have a flaw. For example, panda bears eat only bamboo, which gives them very little energy. They **compensate** for that lack of energy by eating very large amounts and sleeping often. They don't fix the problem (bamboo still gives very little energy), but they make it okay by doing something else.

TOEFL example: I know that my essay is a little bit short, Dr. Lieberman, but I hoped the amount of research I did would help to **compensate** *for that.*

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Structure Words

Studying structure means understanding how the small pieces join together into one larger whole. And if you have been reading and learning about the TOEFL, then you probably already know that structure is key. It's important for every part of the test (just like vocabulary!): you need to structure your responses in speaking and writing, and you need to hear the larger structures in texts and lectures.

So since structure is so important, it's appropriate that we should look at some common academic vocabulary that relates to structure and organization.

Framework

In a building, a framework is like a skeleton. Inside the walls, around the doors, and under the floors are hard, straight pieces of wood, metal, and/or concrete that keep the building up. If a building has a good, strong framework, it won't fall down.

So when we use the word "framework" to describe an idea or text, rather than a house, we are talking about the very core parts. They are what the details are based on.

TOEFL example: The framework of your essay is very solid, but there are a few interesting ideas which could be better explored—I suggest you expand and explain a bit when you edit it.
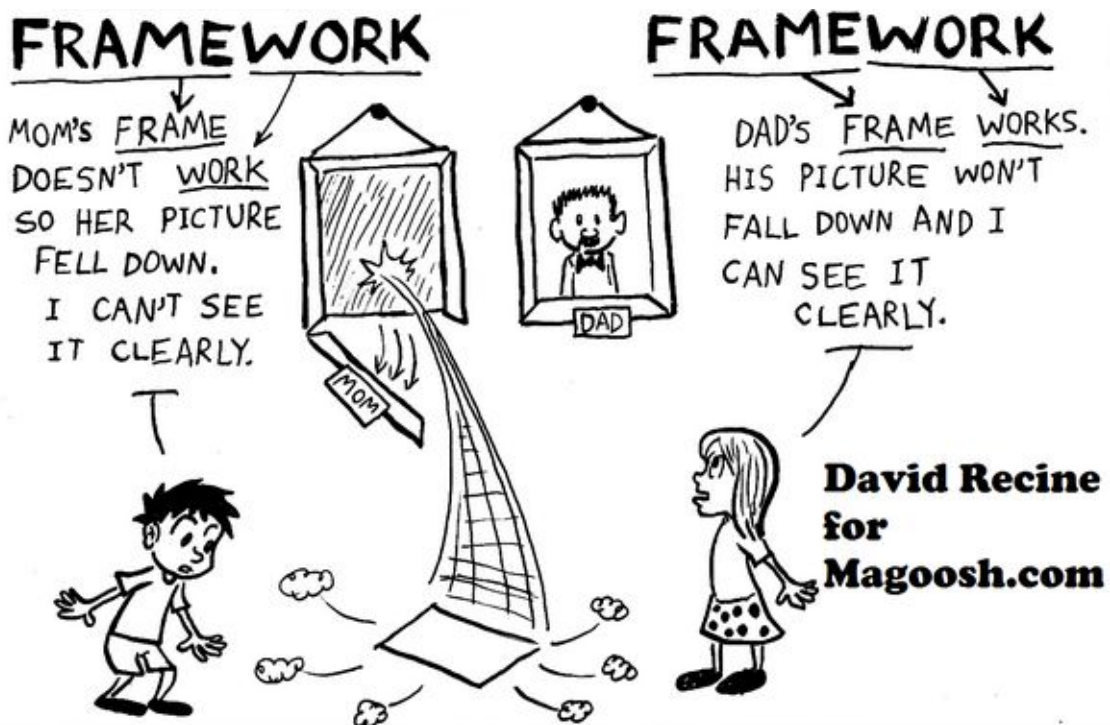

Scheme

There are a couple of different definitions of "scheme," but they're all related—they're based on plans, systems, or drawings of how things work or should work. But a scheme is almost always quite complicated, regardless of which definition you're using. The meaning that were talking about for the TOEFL is very close to the meaning of "system." It describes how many small pieces are connected (and, sometimes, how they have a certain effect by working together). But keep in mind that a "scheme" describes only the system or plan: the actual parts may be *within* the scheme, but they *are not the scheme itself*.

TOEFL example: The scheme we use to categorize life has eight ranks—eight levels—from the more general kingdoms, such as "animal" or "plant", down to the specific species, such as homosapiens (humans).
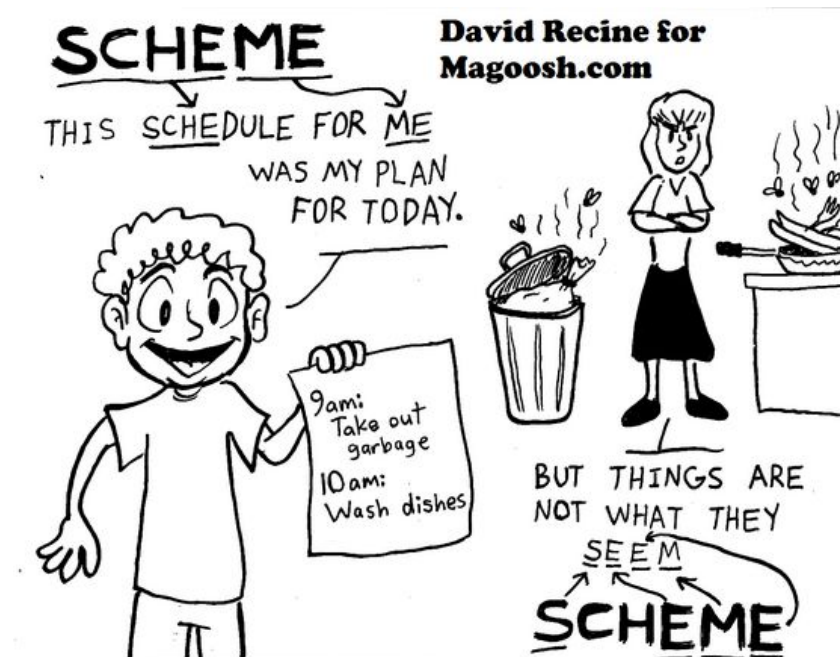
Configuration

The verb "to configure" means to place pieces in a specific shape, to arrange. A configuration, then, is a set of pieces which are put in specific places to have a particular effect. When we talk about a configuration, we are basically talking about which pieces are next to each other and how far apart or close they are.

TOEFL example: Our DNA—the genetic material that determines what we look like and, more generally, who we are—is all made of the same four chemical building blocks; it's the configuration of those pieces that makes us unique.
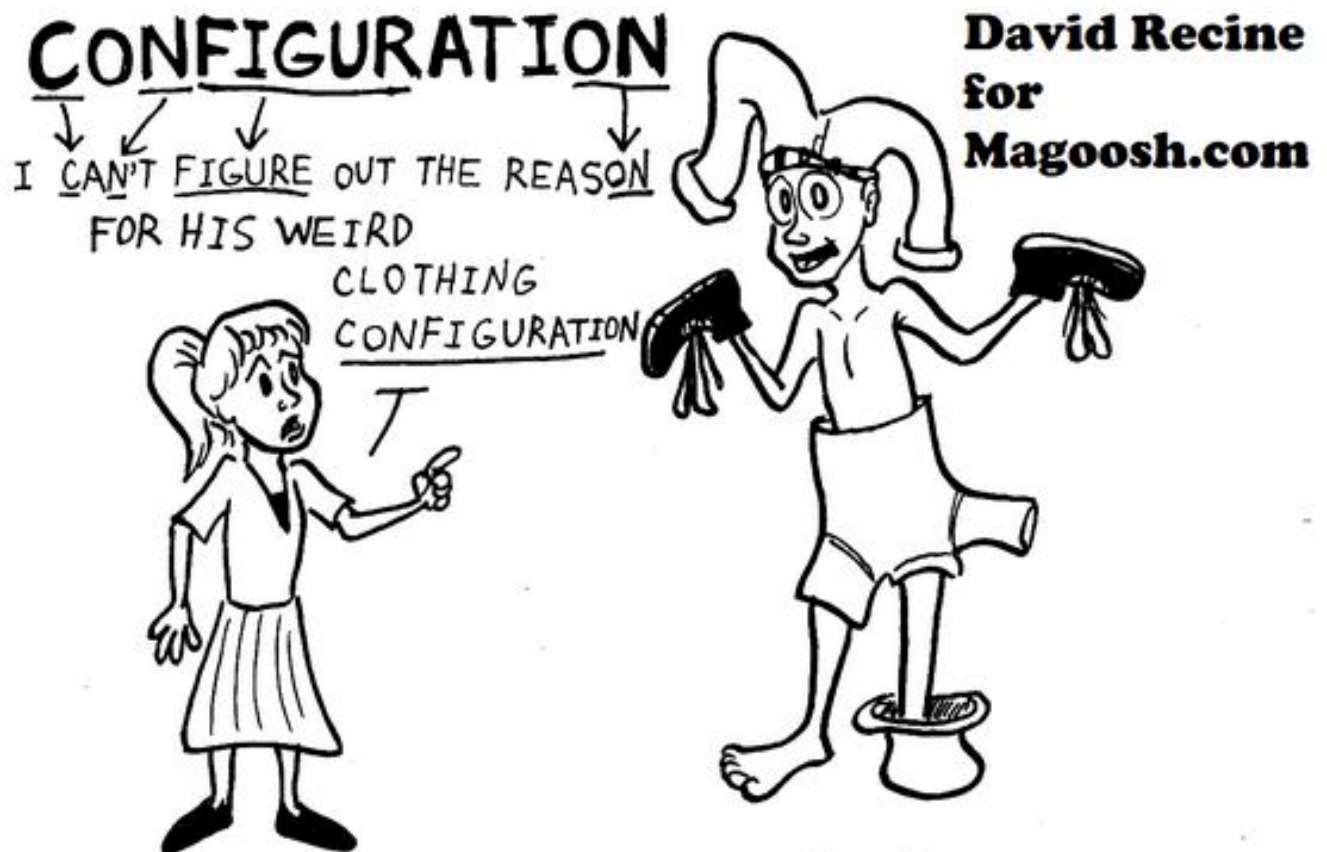
Composition

Whereas a "configuration" and a "scheme" only describe the abstract relationships, not including the actual physical pieces, a "composition" does include those physical parts. Something's "composition" is what it's made of and how much of each part there is. If you look at the back of a bottle of shampoo, you will find a list of ingredients that detail its composition, for example. But "composition" isn't limited to describing what parts there are; it also describes the amount and, sometimes, the placement of the parts. A photo's composition, for example, includes where each color or object is in the picture.

TOEFL example: In order to determine the age of a painting, we can analyze the composition of the paints that were used, because over time, artists have switched to different types of paints made from new sources of color.

Words That Sound the Same

One of the hardest parts of learning a second language is telling the difference between similar words. Words may sound almost the same or look almost the same, but have very different meanings. Mistaking words on the TOEFL can hurt your score. Here are 3 word pairs that are easy to confuse!

Discrete and Discreet

"Discrete" is a TOEFL word—"discreet" is not. The word "discrete," with the "e" *after* the "t" at the end of the word, means "separate" or "not the same." You might say, for example, that all of the pairs of words in this blog post have *discrete* meanings.

If we put the "e" before the "t," though, in the word "discreet," the meaning is completely changed; "discreet" means careful and unnoticeable, not to reveal a secret.

For example, when in grade school, I sat next to a girl who would *discreet*ly look at at my paper during tests in order to copy my answers.
One way to remember the difference is that "separa**te**" and "discre**te**" both end with "-te," whereas "secr**et**" and "discre**et**" both end with "**-et**."


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Principle and Principal

These words are different not only in their spelling and meaning, but also in their grammatical use. "Principle" is a noun, while "principal" is usually an adjective. A "principle" is a basic belief, rule or idea. It is a fundamental, key part of something larger.

For example, one of the principles of good writing is to be clear. That is an important, basic rule—if you do not write clearly, people will not understand you. Or we could say that one of the principles of science is to prove ideas with experiments. The word "principal," on the other hand, means "main" or "most important." For example, John Lennon and Paul McCartney were the *principal* songwriters of the Beatles. Other people also helped write Beatles songs, but those two were the most important.

You can remember this by noting that "ru**le**" and "princip**le**" both end in "-**le**," while "m**a**in" and "princip**a**l" both contain an "**a.**

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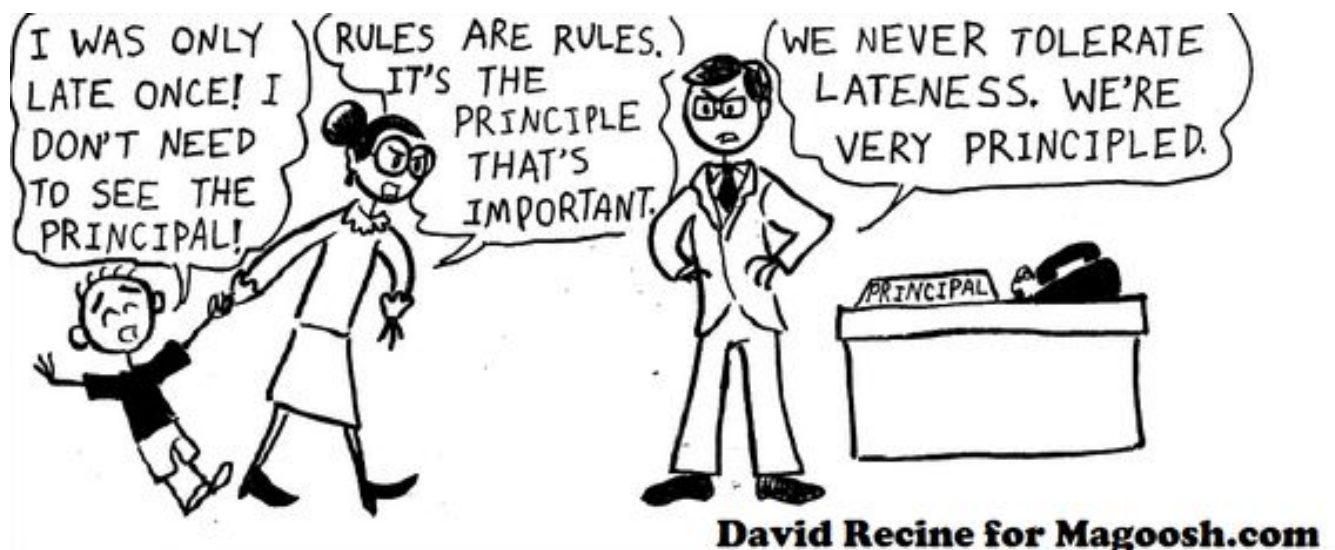
Proceed and Precede

These two verbs are sometimes pronounced a little differently, but often they sound the same. But notice the beginnings of each word: "pro-" and "pre-" are very different.

The prefix "pro-" means "forward," so it makes sense that "to proceed" means to continue forward, to not stop. It can be similar to "progress." For example, technological improvement has *proceeded* very quickly in the last 50 years.

But "precede" has the prefix "pre-," meaning "before." So this word means "to come before." Usually, dark clouds *precede* rain storms, for instance.
One way to remember this is by simply remembering those prefixes, of course. "**Pro**ceed" is similar to "**pro**gress," whereas "**pre**cede" refers to something that comes before, like a "**pre**fix."

School Life Words

Listening recordings on the TOEFL contain both academic and non-academic vocabulary. The non-academic vocabulary is usually related to life on a university campus, so it's important to study school life words. In this section, we'll present the words a little differently. First, we'll introduce all of the words and their definitions, and then we'll use all of the words in one, longer comic.

Well Rounded

Having a good amount of variety or a good balance of different things.

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TOEFL example: Try to write essays on as many different subjects as possible; professors like to see well-rounded writing.

Broad Range

A group of things that are varied and different from each other.

TOEFL example: This campus has international students from a broad range of countries, including Latin American, East Asian, and Middle Eastern countries.

Take Advantage Of

Use the opportunities one is given OR unfairly use a person or thing for one's own benefit

TOEFL example: Take advantage of the education you are getting, so that no one can take advantage of you and make you accept a low-paying job.

Versus

Opposing each other. In sports, this can be abbreviated as "vs."

TOEFL example: I really want to go to the Colorado-Nebraska football game on campus, but I'm trying to decide between doing my homework versus going to the game.

Core curriculum

The most important classes in a degree or major

TOEFL example: The core curriculum of my world history degree includes a general writing course and some courses that focus on the two World Wars.

Practical training/skills

Training or skills that help someone do something important or necessary

TOEFL example: The Academic Skills Center on campus can give you practical training for school life. You'll learn practical skills like note-taking and time management.
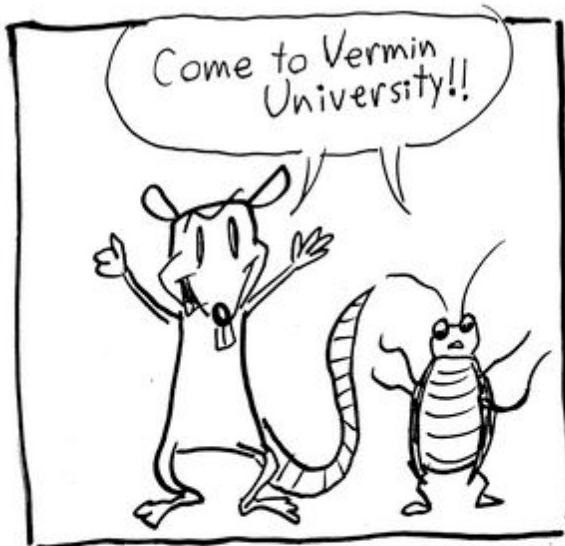
Workforce

A group of people that work

TOEFL example: I can't wait to join the workforce after I graduate. I hope I get a job in the software workforce, because I'm majoring in computer science.

Better off

In a better situation or making a better choice

TOEFL example: After you graduate, you will be better off moving to a bigger city that has more jobs.

Now, read this comic about "Vermin U," a special university for rats and cockroaches. Notice the way characters use the words above.

Spoken English: "Chances Are"

"Chances are" is a common phrase in spoken English. You may hear this phrase in the listening tasks found in TOEFL Listening, Speaking and Writing. You also are very likely to hear this "chances are" once you are studying and living in an English-speaking country.

"Chances are" expresses possibility. The phrase is a shorter way of saying, "It is likely that…" or "It is probably true that…" If the sky is cloudy, you could say "It is likely that it will rain," or you could say "Chances are, it will rain." The second sentence sounds more conversational and more natural. Similarly, the sentence "It is probably true that you will need a high TOEFL score to get into Harvard" can be changed to "Chances are, you will need a high TOEFL score to get into Harvard.

On the TOEFL, you will usually hear "chances are" in a recorded conversation, or in a lecture where a professor is taking a conversational tone. To help you understand how "chances are" works in a conversation, here's a comic strip that shows this phrase in use. Read it carefully. To truly master this phrase, we suggest writing a few conversations of your own that use "chances are." Practice reading the conversations with friends. When you feel ready, start working "chances are" into the real English-language conversations you have.
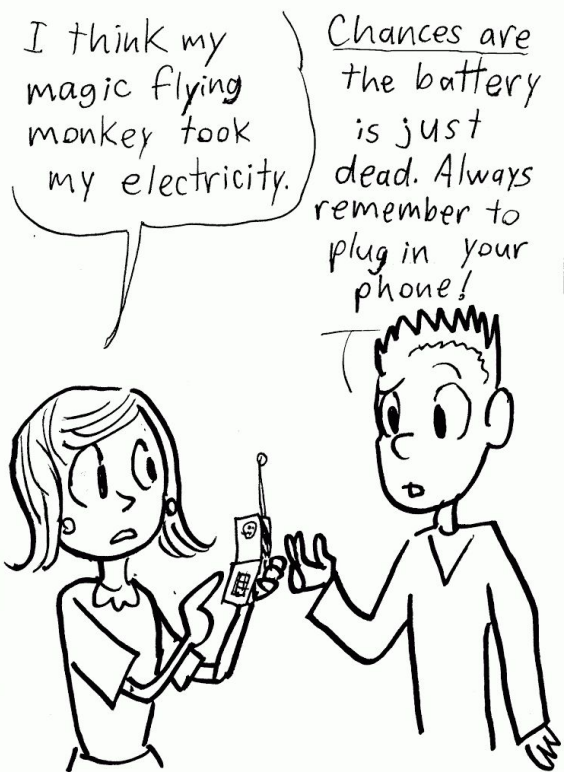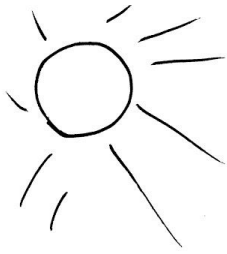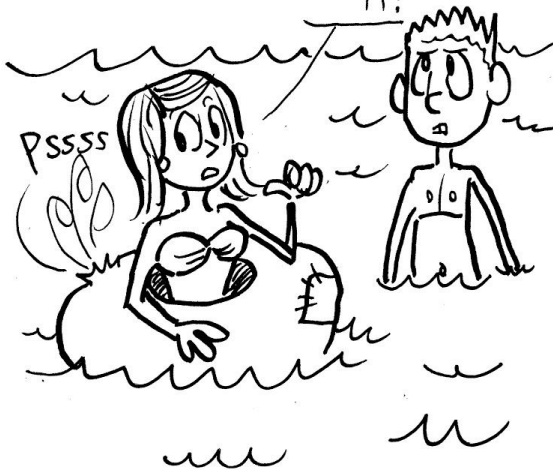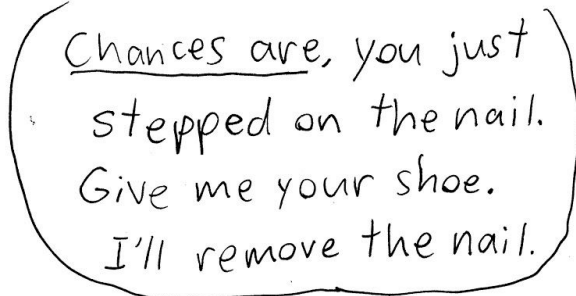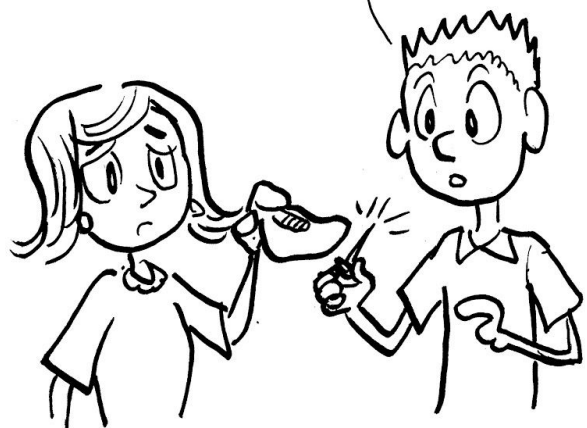
Prefixes: Un-, Under-, and Inter-

These prefixes have similar spellings and sounds, but distinctly different meanings.

/un-/

Meaning: "Un-" means "not.".

TOEFL Examples:

1) Humans cannot travel to the deepest depths of the sea floor **unaided** by protective gear and breathing equipment.

"Aided" means "helped," so you can know that "unaided" means "not helped." The sentence is saying that without some kind of artificial help, humans cannot go to the deepest parts of the ocean.

2) While recent research shows clear evolutionary links between nematodes and tardigrades, two phylums of very different looking animals, these links were unseen and **unsuspected** a few decades ago.

To "suspect" something means to have an idea that something is true before you have seen evidence or proof of the truth. Combine that with "un-," and you can guess that "unsuspected" means "true, but not known or believed."

Mag**oo**sh

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The sentence states that until recently, no one thought that animals within the nematode and tardigrade phylum shared any common evolution.

/under-/

Meaning: "Under-" means "beneath," "below," or "not enough."

TOEFL Examples:

1) Price-fixing is a controversial economic practice, deemed unlawful in many nations. In this practice, a retailer will sell a product at a financial loss to **undercut** its competitors and try to make them unable to sell that product profitably at all.

We know that "cut" can mean to hurt or wound a person or thing. Businesses are at odds with their competitors, so this meaning of "cut" makes sense. A business is trying to benefit itself at the expense of its competitors. "Undercut" must mean "to damage competitors by going underneath them." Going underneath the competitors how? By selling the product at a lower price than they do, as indicated in the first sentence in this sample.

2) The **understory** of a forest can almost be seen as an ecosystem all its own, full of interdependent organisms, while also linked to the larger ecosystem of the tree trunks and canopy above.

"Story" can mean "a retelling of a series of events," as in a news story or a children's storybook. That meaning doesn't make sense in the sentence above. "Story" can also mean a single floor of a building, as in a ten-story apartment building or a third story office. By looking at the second definition,

you can easily guess that the "understory" of a forest is the floor of the forest beneath the trees.
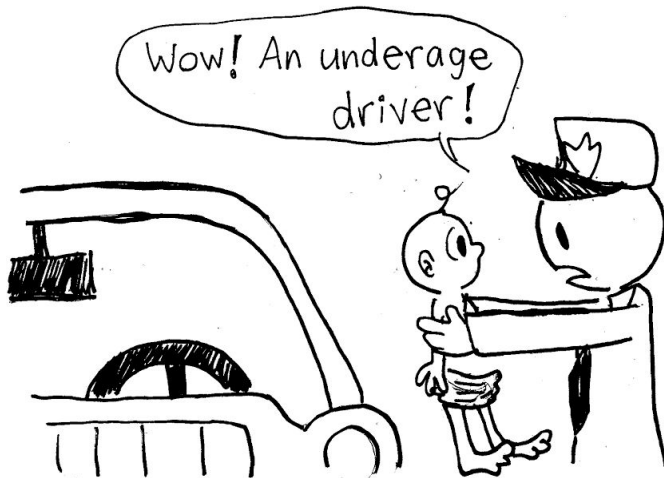
/inter-/

Meaning: ""Inter-" means "between" or "together."*

TOEFL Examples:

1) Have you heard about the new **interlibrary** loan service that is coming to the university? If you need a book that isn't available in the campus library, you can have it shipped in from the library of a different school.

"Library," as you probably know, means "a collection of books that people can borrow." (Occasionally it simply means "a collection of books.") It can be inferred that "interlibrary" means "between libraries" or "libraries together." In fact, in means both of these things. "Interlibrary loan" means the "lending of books between one library and another," which is something that happens when libraries work together.

2) **Interbedded** with the limestone in the bottom of the cave were layers of water that was almost completely sealed off from the cave's atmosphere, virtually lifeless aside from the presence of anaerobic bacteria that can survive without oxygen.

"Bedded" means "laid down." Thus, you can assume that layers of water are laid down together with the limestone.

It's easy to confuse "un-," "under-," and "inter-." If you think you see the prefix "un-" in a word you are not familiar with, look at the letters carefully. You want to make sure you are not just reading the beginning of "under-." Similarly, be prepared to quickly spot the spelling difference between "under-" and "inter-" on the timed reading tasks in the TOEFL.

Because these prefixes are so similar, it can be hard to remember the differences between them. Below are three fun comic strips that can help you better understand these prefixes, what they mean, and how to use them.

Additional Resources

We hope this eBook has shown you that learning vocabulary can be fun. If you're feeling motivated to keep your studies going, here are some more resources:

[TOEFL Vocabulary Flashcards](#)

[Vocabulary PDF](#)

[Best Free TOEFL Resources](#)

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Happy studying!