

# **The TOEFL iBT® via Reverse Engineering: An Exploratory Study of the Reading Test Components**

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**Abstract:** This study analyzed the TOEFL iBT® Reading Test's test specifications via reverse engineering, by utilizing straight RE and critical RE. According to Fulcher & Davidson (2007), Reverse Engineering (RE) is “an analytical process of test creation that begins with an actual test question and infers the guiding language that drives it, such that equivalent items can be generated.... This helps us understand better what we are after (p. 57). RE enables users of a test to scrutinize the concealed blueprint by examining test specifications of a respective test. Furthermore, “perhaps reverse engineering is at the basis of everything. It is extremely difficult to be truly original in a test question” (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 58). Thus RE can be useful that the procedure will help perceive a test from different angles, for example, from the examiner's perspective and the test taker's perspective; in other words the face validity of the test. The Test of English as a Foreign language (TOEFL) is used to measure the English proficiency and it is created by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). In order to analyze the test specs, a sample TOEFL iBT reading paper which is provided by ETS was reverse engineered. As a result of RE, it was found out that the TOEFL iBT reading paper is comprised of different types of questions to test the meaning, grammar, logic, structure and the content of paragraphs; and usually the reading passages are based on academic contents and therefore it tests the academic reading ability of test takers. Also it was found out that the most important purpose of performing RE is to give an opportunity for test users to look at the hidden version of the reading test (which is not available to the public) and let them utilize that knowledge in order to prepare for the test. By so doing, a positive washback can be produced. Thus, while preparing students for the test, teachers can make the test takers more familiar and friendly with the test they're about to face in due course.

## **Selected References**

ETS. TOEFL iBT® Test Questions. Retrieved February 9, 2018, from

<https://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/SampleQuestions.pdf>

Fucher, G., & Davidson, F. (2007). *Language testing and assessment*. London: Routledge.