

Series Preface

Success on the TOEFL® Internet-based Test (iBT) depends on skills that the iBT does not directly test. In particular, aspiring iBT candidates need practice with English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. It is possible to practice these basics incidentally by working with typical iBT-preparation books, but only if you are already close to TOEFL® competence. Otherwise, the preparation books will simply be too hard. It's a circular problem: You can't practice the basics because you haven't got enough competence in the basics. The books in the University of Michigan Press's *Step Up* series are meant for students whose grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills are not yet sufficient for full-scale TOEFL® preparation. As the title indicates, we are hoping to provide platforms from which a pre-TOEFL® student can work toward earnest preparation for the test.

Grammar instruction is at the foundation of *Step Up*, the platform on which vocabulary and pronunciation lessons are set. The selection of grammar points for each unit has been determined by functions commonly elicited on the iBT. For example, the writing and speaking sections of the iBT are likely to ask a test-taker to express preferences and opinions. Unit 6 addresses modals of suggestion/necessity and real conditionals because these features are very handy in such expressions. The vocabulary and pronunciation topics in Unit 6 proceed from the same iBT-related function and relate closely to the grammar points. Of course, the expression of preferences and opinions is likely to figure into passages for the reading and listening sections of the iBT as well.

As currently planned, the *Step Up* series will include at least two volumes: basic and intermediate. Nigel A. Caplan's intermediate volume appears first in the series. This is meant for students who are not too far from handling the English on the iBT—but who are not quite there. This volume pauses to explain lexico-syntactic features of English that are taken as understood in most iBT-prep books. It offers practice in language points that, though basic, may not be firmly under control by students planning to take the test.

The vocabulary used in this intermediate volume may seem at times a bit advanced, even iBT-like. This is necessary and fitting for many reasons. As experienced teachers of English for Academic Purposes know very well, even grammatically shaky students can post significant gains in receptive vocabulary. Progress in this area helps ratchet forward the student's exposure to grammatically diverse discourse and serious, substantive texts, like those on the iBT.

Seriousness and substance are constant attributes of the texts in the *Step Up* series.

Just as philosophers since Cicero have noted that personal virtue entails gravitas—the ability to be taken seriously—so students look for a certain no-nonsense quality in TOEFL®-prep materials. This does not mean the practice passages are dour and inaccessible, but it does mean they can claim topical significance. The iBT entertains only academic content, so there's no point in setting a TOEFL®-prep course by any other lights.

This goes deeper than so-called face validity. Yes, tone is part of it. It is important for students to believe that even a basic-skills textbook treats them with respect; their motivation is likely to rest on that belief. The real test, however, is in whether students are more viable candidates for the iBT after using *Step Up*. We are confident they will be, and we hope you enjoy traveling with them in that direction.

—Lawrence J. Zwier, Series Editor

Grateful acknowledgment is given to the following individuals for lending their voices to the audio: Jay Banerjee, Lindsay Devine, Pat Grimes, Badria Jazairi, and Jeremy Sobczak.