

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, Unit 7 addresses the function of giving opinions. This is specifically tested in the writing and speaking sections of the iBT. It also often appears in reading and listening passages. In this book's Unit 7, then, we present relevant grammar (comparatives), vocabulary (opinion words), and pronunciation skills (word stress).

The *Step Up* series includes at least two volumes: basic and intermediate. They explain lexico-syntactic features of English that are taken to be understood in most other iBT-prep books. They offer practice in language points that, though basic, may not be firmly under control by students planning to take the test. This Basic volume addresses the texts and exercises appropriate for beginning-level students. The Intermediate volume is meant for students who are not too far from handling the English on the iBT but are not quite ready for it yet.

The vocabulary may seem at times a bit advanced. 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 they can claim topical significance. The iBT content is academic, so the content in any TOEFL®-prep course should be as well.

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

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—N.A.C.