

TOEIC Speaking and Writing Tests Case Study

Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology

In March 2008, JAIST, the Japan Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, encouraged their students to take the TOEIC SW Tests, the TOEIC Speaking and Writing Tests. JAIST was founded in 1990 as the first independent national graduate school to carry out education based on research at the world's highest levels in advanced science and technology. The school has international flavor as shown in the ratio of foreign students, which is about 18% and that of foreign teachers which is about 11%. We interviewed Dr. Akio Makishima, special advisor to the president and head of the Gendai GP, and Dr. Jean Christophe Terrillon, Associate Professor and supervisor of the English Technical Communication Program at JAIST about the interest of JAIST in the background and future vision of the TOEIC SW Tests use.



Dr. Makishima



Dr. Terrillon

—What is the outline of the English Technical Communication Program in JAIST?

Dr. Makishima: The English Technical Communication Program was adopted in 2005 as part of the “Gendai GP”, the “Contemporary Education Needs Support Project” — “The fostering of Japanese who can use English at work” by MEXT, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology, — and launched the following year.

This program aims to help students acquire the following three abilities; “Self-PR skills at international conferences on the world’s most in advanced science and technology,” “Paperwriting skills on practical science and technology in English comparable to native speakers,” and “Technical management and group-including-foreigners-management skills in science and technology companies.”

We provide our students with various types of learning opportunities to meet each student’s need, such as a “Tutoring Service” for learning skills for professional papers and presentations by the area’s experts and native English teachers, an “Interaction Seminar” as a proactive self-PR learning method, and a “Ubiquitous Self-Learning System.”

—How do you utilize the TOEIC Test in your program?

Dr. Terrillon: Every April, when the new school year starts in Japan, we administer the TOEIC Test as a placement test for newly enrolled students and group them into three levels according to their scores.

Advanced Course TOEIC665~990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical Writing • Special Technical Documents • Research Communications
Intermediate Course TOEIC545~660	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphics and Oral Presentations • Technical Documents
Basic Course ~TOEIC540	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic English • Basic Writing Skills • English Conversation • English Discussion

Also, we provide them with the TOEIC Test three times a year in order to keep their English learning motivation.

—Why did JAIST use the TOEIC SW Tests?

Dr. Makishima: That is because both students and teachers need to know the students' speaking and writing ability objectively and accurately. I expect students to recognize their current English proficiency level and make strenuous efforts to acquire English skills for a real workplace.

Dr. Terrillon: It is very important for students to improve their English skills by taking courses offered by the English Technical Communication Program, and by the TOEIC and TOEIC SW Tests. I say this because I have seen several cases in which papers could not be accepted for publication because of their English, no matter how good the research content is. English is an indispensable communication tool for students in any field of science, engineering, or technology in order to be active internationally. Taking courses and tests is a necessary step for one's English improvement.

—How did you feel about the students' test results? How do you think you can use the test in the future?

Dr. Makishima: I would say it is remarkable that international students did quite well on the test this time. For instance, Mr. Nguyen got Speaking Score:150 • Writing Score:170, Ms.Ju got S:140 • W:150, and Ms.Seide got S:180 • W:180, although it was the first time for them to take the test. They say they would like to submit the score when they do job hunting if it is required.

Dr. Terrillon: For us, it becomes possible to view one different aspect of the students' English ability through both the TOEIC and the TOEIC SW Tests. I expect that we could improve our program by analyzing scores as one measure of each student's English improvement. As the number of students taking both tests increases and the data is accumulated accordingly, we will be able to utilize the data for teaching.

—What would you like to tell students in scientific fields learning English?

Dr. Terrillon: The importance of English in scientific fields is crucial. You need both academic and conversational English to conduct world-class research. This is because exchanging ideas with people around the world is very valuable to improve your research and studies, aside from the importance of making and attending presentations. If you exchange conversations on research and studies during coffee breaks at international conferences, you will gain insights and ideas for your own research, which you cannot get from just sitting at presentations.

It's not too much saying that this is the very advantage of attending conferences.

Dr. Makishima: For those who are in scientific fields, research quality is most important. We hope you become globally active researchers and engineers by combining excellent professional expertise and English.

(Interviewed: May 2008)