TOEFL speaking practice

Typical interview tasks and a structure for a timed answer, written for this page

Interview A: studying (the practice below)
Situation: a student survey about how people study. 1. Think of the last time you studied for something difficult. What was it, and how did you prepare? 2. What was the hardest part, and why? 3. Some people say studying with friends works better than studying alone. Do you agree? Why or why not? 4. Some universities give students a free afternoon each week with no classes. Do you think that is a good idea?

Interview B: a job on campus
Situation: you are applying for a part-time job at the university library. 1. Tell me about a time when you helped someone with a problem. What happened? 2. What did you learn from that experience? 3. Some people think students should work while they study. Do you agree? Why or why not? 4. Should libraries stay open all night during exam weeks? Explain your view.

A structure for a 45-second answer
1. Answer in one sentence (about 5 seconds): I think it depends, but mostly yes. 2. Give your reason (about 15 seconds): The main reason is that... 3. Add one example (about 15 seconds): For instance, last year I... 4. Finish in one short line (about 5 seconds): So that's why I think... Stop when the time is up, even in the middle of a sentence. A clear answer with one example is better than three ideas that are not finished.

The same answer at B1 and at B2
Question: Do you think a free afternoon without classes is a good idea? B1: Yes, I do. Students can rest, and they can finish their homework. For example, I always need more time for my projects. B2: I think it's a good idea, mainly because students need time to study on their own. In my case, I often spend a whole weekend on one project, so a free afternoon would take a lot of pressure off.

1. Answer the first question about studying

Think of the last time you studied for something difficult. What was it, and how did you prepare?	Last month I studied for a chemistry exam. I made a plan for each week, and every evening I did old exam questions.
Tell me about a time when you helped someone with a problem.	A classmate lost her laptop before a deadline. I lent her mine, and we worked on her project until midnight.

The last time I studied for something difficult was...	First, I made a plan. Then I...	I prepared by doing practice questions every day.

2. Say what was hardest and why

What was the hardest part, and why?	The hardest part was the formulas, because there were so many and they looked alike. I had to test myself every day.

The hardest part was..., because...	What made it difficult was that...	I struggled with..., so I...

3. Give your opinion about studying with friends

Some people say studying with friends works better than studying alone. Do you agree? Why or why not?	I partly agree. Friends can explain things you don't understand, but sometimes we talk too much and study too little.

Some people think students should work while they study. Do you agree?	Yes, if the job is small. A few hours a week teaches you to manage your time, but more than that can hurt your grades.

I partly agree. On one hand..., but on the other hand...	I think so, mainly because...	I don't think so, for two reasons.
The main reason is that...		

4. Add an example when he asks

Can you give me a specific example?	Yes. Last year a friend explained a physics problem to me in five minutes. But the next day, we only talked about the weekend.

For example, last year I...	For instance, when I was...	A good example is...
In my experience,...		

5. Answer the last question and say why

Some universities give students a free afternoon each week with no classes. Do you think that is a good idea? Why or why not?	I think it's a good idea. Students can rest or catch up on work, and they feel less stressed. I would use it to study on my own.
Should libraries stay open all night during exam weeks? Explain your view.	Yes, I think so. Many students study best at night, and at home it's often too noisy. A quiet place helps a lot.

In my opinion, it's a good idea because...	I'm in favor of it, because...	That's why I think...
To sum up,...		

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