

THE NEW

Prepare for IELTS

GENERAL TRAINING MODULES

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Preparation
for the new
Speaking test

5 complete
practice tests for
the new IELTS test



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Unit 1

Introduction to the IELTS test

Part 1: About the IELTS test

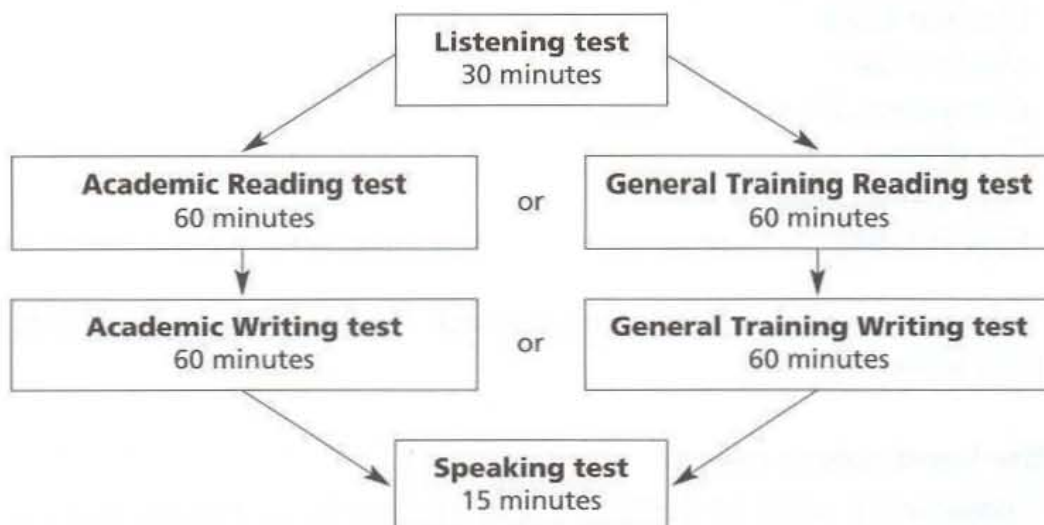
Not only has English become an international language, it is used by more and more people around the world as a medium of post-school study. To help universities and colleges select students with sufficient English skills to succeed in their courses, the IELTS test was introduced in 1989 to assess “whether candidates are ready to study or train in the medium of English”. It is now used for this purpose around the globe.

Depending on the course of study that students plan to take, students must elect to sit either the Academic IELTS test or the General Training IELTS test. This choice must be made when applying to sit the test. The Academic IELTS test is necessary for students who plan to study at university (undergraduate or postgraduate courses), and will test the student’s ability both to understand and to use complex academic language. The General Training IELTS test is required by other institutions, such as colleges and high schools, for courses that require less complex language skills, and is also used as a general test of English proficiency e.g. for immigration purposes in Australia and New Zealand.

The Test Format

There are four subtests, or modules, to the IELTS test: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Students must sit all four subtests. While all students take the same Listening and Speaking tests, they sit different Reading and Writing tests, depending on whether they have selected the Academic IELTS test or the General Training IELTS test.

On the day of the test, the four subsections will be taken in the following order:



The Speaking test may even take place a day or two later at some test centres.

The Listening test lasts for about 30 minutes. It consists of four sections, played on cassette tape, in order of increasing difficulty. Each section might be a dialogue or a monologue. The test is played once only, and the questions for each section must be answered while listening, although time is given for students to check their answers. **Unit 2** of this book contains five practice Listening tests, recorded on the accompanying cassette tape.

The Reading test lasts for 60 minutes. Students are given either an Academic Reading test, or a General Training Reading test. Both tests consist of three sections, and in both tests different question types are used to assess students' comprehension. In both tests the sections are in order of increasing difficulty. **Unit 3** of this book contains five Reading practice tests.

The Writing test also lasts for 60 minutes. Again, students take either an Academic test, or a General Training test. Students must perform two writing tasks, which require different styles of writing. There is no choice of question topics. For more detail and Writing practice tests, turn to **Unit 4** of this book.

The Speaking test consists of a one-to-one interview with a specially trained examiner. The examiner will lead the candidate through the three parts of the test: an introduction and interview, an individual long turn where the candidate speaks for one to two minutes on a particular topic, and a two-way discussion thematically linked to the individual long turn. This interview will last for approximately 11-14 minutes. For more detail, turn to **Unit 5** of this book.

How the test is marked

Each module is marked on a scale from 1 up to 9. These bands are given according to highly detailed marking guidelines. These marking guidelines are not made public, but correspond roughly to the following descriptions:

- 1 Non User
- 2 Intermittent User
- 3 Extremely Limited User
- 4 Limited User
- 5 Modest User
- 6 Competent User
- 7 Good User
- 8 Very Good User
- 9 Expert User

The test results form will show the mark for each module as well as an average (overall) band score.

What do the band scores mean?

There is no pass or fail mark in the IELTS test. The marks, or bands, that a student receives show their ability to use and understand English. However, it is up to

each university and college to decide what bands will be acceptable for entry into each course. This will usually depend on the language requirements for the course, that is, how difficult is the level of language that students are required to use and understand in each course.

The advantages of the IELTS test

The IELTS test is very comprehensive. It rates a student's ability to use English in the four major language skill areas: Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. Each module contains a variety of question types, and all of them are designed to simulate the language tasks that are needed in real life academic and training situations. Thus the scores that a student achieves in the IELTS test will give the student and the institution to which they have applied a clear idea of the student's ability to use English and whether their language skills are strong enough for them to study their desired course, or to fit more easily into the English-speaking community.

The interval between tests

Students may take the IELTS test as many times as they like, but after sitting an IELTS test, they must wait for THREE MONTHS before they can take it again. This is an official rule, but in any case it is unlikely that a student's score will improve in less than three months.

Part 2: For the student: How to prepare for IELTS

In this chapter you will find some suggestions for activities and approaches to help you do your best in the IELTS test. You will probably find it most useful after you have completed one or more of the practice tests in this book.

Analyse your weaknesses

To begin with, read the following statements and tick any that apply to you.

- | | | |
|------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Listening | I cannot listen and read the questions at the same time (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I do not understand what the question is asking me to do (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I do not understand what I hear (L) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Reading | I run out of time and do not answer all the questions (F) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | It takes me a long time to read the passages (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I do not understand what the question is asking me to do (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I do not understand the reading passages (L) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Writing | I am not sure what the question means (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I cannot write quickly enough (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I do not have enough ideas to write about on the topic (L) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I cannot say what I think in English (L) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Speaking | I get nervous and make mistakes (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | The examiner asks me questions I have not thought about before (E) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I do not understand the examiner's questions (L) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| | I feel threatened when the examiner asks me to speak for 1 or 2 minutes (F) | <input type="checkbox"/> |

After each statement you will find a letter: **F**, **E** or **L**. These refer to: **Format**, **Exam Practice** and **Language Practice**. As you read the sections below, you will find suggestions under each heading to help you improve your IELTS score.

Know the Format

An important preparation for the IELTS test is to find out about the structure of the test. What are the sections of the test? Which one comes first? Second? How much time is allowed for each section? How many questions are there? How long must I speak?

These are simple questions to answer, but important. Once you are familiar with the test format, you will be more relaxed. You will be able to focus on answering questions well, rather than worrying about how many questions there are, or how much time is left.

You will find the answers to these questions in the introduction to this book, and (in more detail) in the *IELTS Handbook*, available from test administration centres.

Exam Practice

Once you have found out about the format of the IELTS exam, you need to practise your **exam skills**. These are techniques to help you show off your language skills during the short time you have in the exam.

The first skill to work on is **timing**. You will have to practise reading and writing under time constraints. Practise speed reading every day. Try reading a short passage in a fixed time (for example, set yourself three minutes to read it quickly). You will not understand everything in the first reading, but you will become more used to skimming a text to get a general idea of its main points. Then you can come back to read certain parts of the text with more attention.

Likewise, try writing for a set period of time every day. For this exercise, total accuracy is not necessary; rather you are trying to practise getting your ideas down on paper quickly. Set yourself a different topic each day, such as Computers, the Family, Industry in my country, etc., and write as much as you can for, say, five minutes. Write notes to your friends, or short descriptions of something you have seen. Your speed will improve gradually, and will be very useful in the exam, when you must write a certain number of words for each task in a set period of time.

Another exam preparation is to familiarise yourself with the **question types** used in the IELTS exam. There are many different types, and they do not all appear in every exam. But by knowing some types, you will be familiar with the kinds of tasks you are expected to do, and you will save time because you can interpret the question more easily.

Start with the exams in this book. Do each test under exam conditions, then afterwards look at the tests again. What kind of questions were asked in each section? Multiple choice? Short answers? Matching parts of sentences? Filling in diagrams? Look at the kinds of questions used, and what they are asking you to do. If you had problems with any of them, do them again, slowly, so that you are sure of what you are doing. Then when you sit the real test, you will be more familiar with the kinds of questions asked, and will understand what you have to do more quickly.

Note: always read the questions carefully. Do not assume they will be exactly the same as the practice tests!

Finally, you might think about sitting a real IELTS test "just for practice". You will get to know how it works, and get practice working under exam conditions. Then, when you are ready to take the IELTS test in earnest, you will know about the IELTS format, and will have already practised your exam skills.

If this is not possible, you can ask other students who have taken the IELTS test about their experience, and find out which tasks they think require the most preparation.

Language Practice, in class and on your own Preparation for IELTS: General Training Modules

This is where the hard work lies. Exam practice and knowing the format will help you in the IELTS test by leaving you free to concentrate on your language skills. However, you will need to work hard to further develop these skills.

The IELTS test measures how well students can perform the language skills needed for study. To do this, it uses the kinds of tasks that might be found in real-life situations. Therefore, you will not be able to simply memorise answers. Your IELTS score will be a reflection of your language ability, and to do well, you will have to work on your language skills. To achieve the IELTS score you want will require hard work, usually with the help of a teacher.

Class Work

In class your teacher will be introducing and extending a range of skills, all essential for the IELTS test. These will include:

- Speaking: pronunciation and intonation practice, fluency practice, using and understanding common phrases, interacting with other speakers, speaking for an extended time on a particular topic, discussing that topic.
- Listening: recognising voice tone (questions, surprise, etc.), listening for keywords, listening for general information, listening for numbers, listening for discourse markers (*firstly, secondly, Or I could say that another way, the most significant result was that ...*).
- Reading: skimming (to get a general understanding), scanning (looking for specific information), vocabulary development, summarising, determining the writer's attitude and opinion.
- Writing: adjusting style according to purpose, writing paragraphs, introductions and conclusions, using conjunctions and reference, organising information within a text, using supporting evidence to prove a claim.

Make the most of the work you study in class by reviewing it regularly. Re-read your class notes; note carefully any areas where you had problems. Work on them again and see your teacher if you still have questions. Try to use new vocabulary in your writing compositions, or in conversation. Practise grammatical structures in the same way.

Your teacher knows what you need and will try to help you overcome language problems. By going over lessons you will get the maximum benefit from your teacher's skills and work.

Out of class work

Most experts agree that the quickest way to improve in a language is to immerse yourself in it. Therefore, to improve your English skills, try to get into as many situations where you and other people are using English.

This may be difficult if you live in a non-English speaking country. However, try to find English interest groups, go to English films and listen to English on the radio. Read English books and magazines.

In an English-speaking country this is much easier. Wherever there are people, you will be able to use and understand English. English books and magazines will also be easier to obtain. Try to spend as much of your day as possible using English. You will probably end up dreaming in English, too!

A final word

The practice tests in this book are designed to help you understand the nature of the test. You cannot use your results in these tests to accurately predict your performance in a live IELTS test where you will be doing an examination with all its attendant stresses. You can, however, get to know the form of the test very well.

With all this preparation - getting to know the format of the IELTS test, practising exam techniques, class work and private study - you will be ready to do your best in the IELTS exam.

Try also to relax, and do some activities that you enjoy. An occasional break from your studies will give you fresh energy and motivation to continue studying hard.

The day of the test

After all your preparation for the IELTS test, follow these simple suggestions to ensure your test day goes smoothly.

- Plan to arrive early (perhaps half an hour). Then if you have unexpected transport problems or some other delay, you will have extra time to sort them out before the test starts. There is nothing worse than arriving late, upset and flustered, when you need all your mental energy for the exam.
- Don't worry about the parts of the test that are finished, or those yet to come. Concentrate fully on the module you have in front of you.
- Use your time carefully. Don't spend too much time on any one answer; if you do, you may not answer the other questions properly. Don't finish quickly, then sit doing nothing. In the time remaining, check your answers - you might change a wrong answer to a right answer and gain extra marks.

The Listening test

- Before each listening section is played, read the questions through quickly. The vocabulary (and any diagrams) will give you some idea of what you are about to hear.
- Note what kinds of questions you must answer: filling in numbers, choosing a description, finding the speaker's opinion. You will then make the most of what you hear, because you will know what to listen for.

The Reading test

- You have one hour to answer questions on three sections, so divide up your time - perhaps 15 minutes for the first section, 20 minutes for the second section, and 25 minutes for the third section (the sections get harder as you go on, so you might like to spend more time on the last one).
- As a general strategy, do not start by reading the passage. You do not yet know what information you are looking for, and you will waste precious time if you try to read and understand everything.

Firstly, read the heading of the text. This will give you a very general idea of what the passage is about.

Secondly, quickly read through the questions. How many questions are there relating to this text? What kind of questions are they? (sentence completion, diagram completion ...). This will help you focus when you read the text, as you will have some idea what to look for.

Thirdly, turn to the reading passage, and read it through quickly. The purpose here is to get a general understanding of the passage - you do not need to understand every detail.