

Academic IELTS Guidelines

"The best writers are people who read most and the best speakers are those who listen best"

IELTS has four papers:

	Number of sections	Number of total items	Time allowed (total 2:40 hr + 11-14 minutes speaking)	IELTS 9-band scale
Listening	4 sections	40 items	30 minutes + 10 minutes transfer time	27 points = 6.5 30 points (75%) = 7
Reading	3 sections	40 items	60 minutes	33 points = 7.5
Writing	2 tasks	150 and 250 words	60 minutes	
Speaking	3 parts		11 to 14 minutes	

1. LISTENING TEST

Overview of the listening test

- The Listening test is the first part of the IELTS examination and consists of four recorded sections. The level of difficulty increases through the paper:
 - **Section 1:** you will hear a dialogue between **two speakers** in a social or semi-official context. One of the speakers may be seeking factual information such as names or dates which you will have to identify or note down. Alternatively you may have to select the right picture, fill in a form or complete some notes. Only in section one of the test, you will hear the example plays twice
 - **Section 2:** You will hear one person giving a talk on a topic of general interest. As well as listening for specific information, you may be asked to interpret the speaker's ideas. You will therefore need to follow the talk carefully and be prepared to separate the main ideas from the supporting detail.
 - **Section 3:** you will have to follow a conversation with more than two speakers in an educational or training context. It is important that you are able to distinguish between the different speakers as well as understand what they are saying.
 - **Section 4:** a university-style lecture or talk.
- **There are 10 questions in each section** and you will be given time to read these questions before you listen to each part. You may find that each listening section is accompanied with two different sets of questions. The 4 sections consume 30 minutes and you will be given 10 minutes at the end of the test to copy your answers onto the answer sheet (total 40 minutes).
- **The question types vary** and focus on a variety of different listening skills:
 1. Multiple-choice questions
 2. Short answer questions
 3. Notes/ table/ form/ flow chart/ sentence/ summary completion
 4. Diagram labelling
 5. Matching
 6. Classification
- **Particular areas you should focus on in your practice are:**
 - Listening for specific information, such as dates and place names
 - Listening for details
 - Understanding gist (general idea)
 - Understanding speaker attitude/opinion
 - Listening to a variety of English through TV, radio, computer and songs helps improve understanding of intonation and discourse, as well as vocabulary and grammar

Listening Module – Typical Mistakes

- Confusing letters on spelt out words: p/b, j/g, e/i
- Writing numbers and currencies wrongly: 15/50, \$/£

How to approach the listening test:

1. **Listen to the introduction** to know about the general topic and to know which set of questions you should look at. The listening test consists of four sections. Each section is divided into two set of questions separated by a pause given to look at the next set of questions except in section four in which there is no pause, so look through all the questions from 31 to 40 in the time you are given before section four
2. **During the pauses** (start once the recording mention which set of questions to look at, and continue reading while playing the example until the recording mention again which set of question to answer):
 - **Read the rubric** and underline the number of words requested in case of note making questions (the limit includes all words- including articles & preposition). Often the best answer is just one word, even if the rubric says you can use up to three. If more than one question is included in a single MCQ; then underline the number of options requested e.g. "Questions x-y: Choose two letters A-E"
 - **Look through the questions**
 1. Follow the order of the item numbers, concentrate on the sentence opening or question, underline any key words and think of synonyms and parallel expressions that you may hear in the recording; for example, if you read in the questions "on foot", you might expect to hear "walking/running" in the recording
 2. In table completion tasks, look at the column headings to get an idea of what to listen fore then read across the rows from left to right following the order of the item numbers, and not up and down the columns.
 3. When you are given a diagram, it is essential to locate your starting point first.
3. **As you listen to the recording:**
 - The questions always follow the order of information in the recording. While listening, answer the questions on the question paper and wait until the end of the test to transfer your answers. You have ten minutes for this which is plenty of time.
 - You do not need to understand every single word you hear. Pick up on the most important words and phrases which carry meaning. Listen for signposting language such as "...and secondly", "moving to the next point", "...and most importantly". Answer items are often pronounced clearly, stressed or repeated. If a speaker whispers or mumbles the words, it's probably not the correct answer.
 - Do not automatically write the first thing you hear that sounds right. Wait until the speaker complete his (her) sentence. There are sometimes distractors (incorrect option shown as a possible answer) while the correct answer comes later.
 - In questions where you have to write word(s), the word(s) you need for the answer will always be in the recording. You should write the word(s) exactly as you hear it. If the word you choose is not grammatically correct, you have chosen the wrong answer.
 - After answer any question, have a look at the next two questions, so if you miss the immediate question you may catch the succeeding one. Don't panic if you miss it all. Look at the key words in the questions and listen for key words in the recording and if you hear a word that fits one of the words in the questions, pick up from that point and find your place again.
 - At the end of each section, the speaker in the recording tells you that you have some time to check your answers. You may, preferably, study the subsequent set of questions and postpone checking your answers to the 10 minutes at the end of the listening test.
4. **When you transfer your answers to the answer sheet:**
 - Make sure that you follow the same numbering as the questions on the question paper.
 - Make sure that your answer keeps to the word limit stated in the test paper.
 - Check that the words you have written make sense in the context, are grammatically correct and are correctly spelt.

- Make sure you include unit of measurement (e.g. currency symbol for money) if this is not already given on the question paper. You don't need to write the full form (e.g. centimetres) – the abbreviated form or the symbol is fine (cm).
- In diagram labelling tasks You don't need to write the articles (e.g. a/the)
- For table completion, notes are generally used, so articles, verbs, etc. can often be omitted

2. READING TEST

Overview of the reading test:

- **The test has three reading passages;** each is accompanied by a set of questions (40 questions in 60 minutes). There is no extra time given at the end to transfer your answers to the answer sheet.
- **There may be more than one type of question in each set.** For example:
 1. Multiple-choice questions
 2. Short answer questions
 3. Notes/ table/ form/ flow chart/ sentence/ summary completion
 4. Diagram labelling
 5. Matching
 6. Classification
 7. Paragraph headings
 8. Identifying the writer's claims or views (True/ false/ not given, or yes/ no/ not given)
 9. Locating information in paragraphs

Particular areas you should focus on in your practice are:

- Using synonyms, parallel expressions, summary words etc. to help you locate information.
- Reading skills such as skimming (getting the main ideas) and scanning (locating a specific piece of information) and reading for details (thinking about the meaning of every sentence)
- Improve your general reading through book extracts; the editorial section of newspapers; feature articles; journals; general interest magazines

How to approach the reading test:

1. **Skimming** (getting the main ideas):
 - a. Look carefully at the title and subtitles (or the diagram and its title) to get a quick overview of what the text is about
 - b. Read the first paragraph completely.
 - c. Read the first sentence of each remaining paragraph thinking about the main type of information it contains then dip into the text looking for:
 - Proper nouns (names) and numbers (dates)
 - Qualifying adjectives (best, worst, most, etc.)
 - Typographical cues (capitalized words, italic, boldface, underlining, asterisks, etc)
 - d. Read the final paragraph completely
2. **Look at the first set of questions;** read the instructions carefully, underline the key words and think of synonyms to locate the information in the text (don't expect to find the exact word in the text)
3. **Scanning** (searching to locate a specific information): move your eyes rapidly over the text to find a paragraph with related key words.
4. **Reading for details:** when you find the part that has the information you seek, read that part carefully and think about the meaning of every sentence
5. **Continue in the same way with the subsequent sets of questions.** Each set of questions may cover one section of the passage, or the whole passage. If one set of questions covers just one part of the text, the next set often follows on in the text. In summary completion tasks, title of the summary may help you to locate the information in the text.

6. **At the end of each passage, consider transferring your answers** onto the answer sheet and check that your answers make sense and grammatically correct. If paragraphs are labelled with letters, take care not to confuse those with the chosen answers letters

Tip strips for the different reading test task types

- **In multiple-choice questions**, the number of choices may change from one set of questions to the other, so read the instructions carefully.
- **In questions where you have to choose words from the passage**, use the words in exactly the same form in which they appear. Make sure that your answer keeps to the word limit stated in the test paper. Hyphenated words count as one word. Numbers can be written in words or figures (in both cases a number counts as one word).
- **When completing sentences using words from a box**, remember that the sentences follow the order of information in the passage
- **True/false/not given** questions focus on factual information, while **yes/no/not given** questions focus on opinions rather than facts.
- Even if a statement is “**Not Given**” there will be some related information in the passage; however, it will not be possible to find information about all parts of the statement.
- **When matching headings to paragraphs**, look through all the headings after skimming each paragraph; you may find a heading that you have already used fits a later paragraph better. Number of items are usually less than the number of the paragraphs, so some paragraphs may have no matching information.
- **Matching questions** might be difficult and time consuming. You may consider postponing such questions to the end of the reading test or the end of that section (remember that you have 20 minutes for each section)

3. WRITING TEST

Overview of writing test:

- **Task 1** – presenting information from a diagram
 - You are given a task based on some graphic or pictorial information. You are expected to write a descriptive report of at least 150 words on the information provided. You are advised to spend approximately 20 minutes on this task (15 minutes for writing and five minutes for counting words and making corrections).
 - You could get any of the following or a variation on these formats: line graph, pie chart, bar chart, table, diagram of how something works or diagram of a process. There may be more than one of these in the task.
- **Task 2** – a discursive piece for an educated reader
 - You are expected to produce a written argument on a given topic and to organise your answer clearly, giving some examples to support your points. You will have to write at least 250 words and, as Task 2 is longer than Task 1, you are advised to spend approximately 40 minutes on this task and 20 minutes on the first task.

Criteria of high IELTS band answer

Writing task 1	Writing task 2
1. It is over the minimum word length and covers all the questions in the task	
2. A good range of vocabulary and grammar is used with no repetition or grammatical errors	
3. Paragraphs are used to organize you points (never write your answer in bullet points)	
4. It has a paraphrased introduction and conclusion (don't copy words from the question paper)	
5. It uses appropriate linking structures between sentences and contains a balance of simple and complex structures (it is poor style to repeatedly use certain linkers. Native speakers frequently use simple words to link ideas together like this, these/those and such).	
6. focuses on the main trends (groups and compares the main set of data) and supports these with figures	6. Ideas are developed and supported with evidence
7. It describes the information rather than trying to explain it	7. It discusses both points of view and clearly states the writer's opinion

Tip strips for the writing test:

- Leave time to check your answer for careless mistakes at the end. Check for spelling mistakes, verb and subject agreement, singular/plural nouns, and the flow of your writing.
- Consider doing task two before task one. Task two carries twice as many marks.

How to approach writing task 1:

1. **Planning:** read the question and underline the key words that you may use to create your ideas and think of synonyms to use in rephrasing. Make a list of the main features and decide about the main idea of each paragraph. Make sure to address all the questions in the task.
2. **Introductory paragraph:** Introduce your answer by stating the purpose of the graph (or the overall function of the process). The diagram labels often give you names and other words but you need to produce your own words- consider changing the form from a noun to a verb:
 - **The graph describes** the changes in the proportion ...**It also compares...**
 - The diagram illustrates the process by which... is produced
3. **Three paragraphs on the main features:** focus on the main trends and support them with figures. connect and compare data using the appropriate verbs, adjectives, adverbs and linking structures:
 - **Describing trends:**
 - **According to this graph, it is evident that** the overall trend was consistently upwards.
 - There was a consistent upward/downward trend
 - This trend continued/ was reversed

 - **Looking at the graph in more detail**, however, we can see that...
 - In contrast, however, we can see that...
 - There was significant/ dramatic (marginal / slight) rise ...
 - This figure then increased significantly/ dramatically (marginally/ slightly)

 - **From this point onwards**,
 - it fluctuated between...
 - it hovered around...
 - it remained constant at...
 - It progressively increased/ rose

 - **Eventually it / It then**
 - decreased / dropped to hit the lowest point (hit a trough) at approximately ...
 - peaked at (rocketed/surged to a high/peak of) nearly/almost...
 - plummeted/ slipped back to a low of ...

 - **It is also noteworthy that** male respondents were about 10 years older than their female counterparts
 - **Describing processes:**
 - The process consists of ...stages.
 - First, the...is produced by...when it...
 - This is then extract... and pass through... before (making)...
 - Finally, it is...
4. **Concluding paragraph:** summarise the main features or trends:
 - **Overall, the key points to note are that...** together with...

How to approach writing task 2:

1. **Planning:** Read the question and underline the key words that you may use to create your ideas:
 - a. Make a list of main arguments (or pros and cons If the topic has two sides). Make sure to address all the questions in the task
 - b. Decide on your position
 - c. Decide about the main idea of each paragraph
2. **Introductory paragraph:** general statement about the subject then thesis statement re-phrasing the question. An introduction can include a sentence stating your position (plainly and forcefully):
 - 1- There is always some **controversy** over whether...or ...
 - 1- A **popular** belief is that...
 - 2- **Generally** speaking, It is certainly **true** that...
 - 2- **Generally** speaking, There is **little evidence** to support the argument that...
3. **Three paragraphs on your main arguments:** make more than one point in each argument then make a new argument and so on:
 - **Explain/Example:**
 - 3- This is **obvious/evident** from....
 - 3- This is **probably** due to...
 - 4- A good **example** of this is.. /Take, for example,..
 - 4- In my personal **experience**, for instance,..
 - **Compare/Admit:**
 - 5- In **comparison**, nevertheless/obviously, ...
 - 6- **Admittedly**, however, the disadvantages of such a policy would be considerable
 - 7- For example, this **fails to take into consideration** the...
 - 8- Secondly, it is **unrealistic** to think that...
 - 9- Another **argument** put forward is that...
 - **Make a new argument:**
 - 10- In terms of **other solutions**, perhaps we need to think more carefully about...
 - 11- Obviously, **one way** to do this would be for the government to pay...
 - 12- In addition / furthermore, there is the **issue** of the...
 - 13- Another **possible** major cause is...
4. **Concluding paragraph:** sum up your argument and state your position plainly and forcefully
 - 14- **To sum up**, for the reasons explained above **I think** that the advantages of... are far outweighed by the disadvantages.
 - 14- **In conclusion, I think** that the proposed above would certainly have more long-term disadvantages than benefits for society
 - 15- In **other words**,.../ To be more precise,...
 - 16- This would have large **impact** on society as a whole (altogether)

4. SPEAKING TEST

Overview of the speaking test:

- IELTS speaking test consists of 3 parts in total 11-14 minutes as follows:

	Time	Interaction
Part 1 Introduction and interview	4-5 minutes	The examiner will begin with some introductory questions to which you should reply briefly and clearly. Then you will be asked a few questions, on familiar topics , to which you should reply as fully as possible.
Part 2 Individual long turn	3-4 minutes	The candidate is asked to give a short talk on a topic written on a card. The examiner will hand you some paper and a pencil to make notes. The candidate has a minute to prepare and then speaks on the topic without stopping for 1-2 minutes. After you have given your talk, the examiner may ask you one or two related follow-up questions which you should answer briefly
Part 3 Two-way discussion	4-5 minutes	The candidate is presented with more abstract questions broadly linked to the topic introduced in Part 2, and is encouraged to engage in extensive discussion

- Assessment is based on 4 criteria:

1. Fluency & Coherence (how clearly and fluently you can express ideas and information)
2. Lexical Resource (the range of vocabulary you can use)
3. Grammatical Range & Accuracy
4. Pronunciation

General approach for the speaking test:

1. **Listen to the question forms and the words** that the examiner uses.
2. **If you don't understand the examiner**, you can ask him or her to repeat the question:
- Sorry, could you repeat the question, please?
3. **Do not rush** – always begin your answer with an opening expression to give yourself a little thinking time. If you're not sure about the answer, it is not necessary to give clear strong opinions (unlike the writing paper)
4. **Look at the examiner**. Act excited. Don't speak very fast or very slow. Speak loudly enough for the examiner to hear you and try to pronounce your words clearly. Don't worry about being perfect
5. **Take the initiative and try to make more than one point** in your answer (Introduction, explain, example, compare, proverb, summary comment):

1. Introduction	Well, actually...it depends (every man to his taste); I would say that... Well, I'm not quite sure, but in my opinion, far and away the most ...
2. Explain/ Example	My main reason for saying this is that... Or to put it another way... But there's also something else to consider... Take, for example,... It's hard to say, but in my experience... Consider telling a story, using the "Five Ws & One H" questions Consider telling a proverb... You know the saying...
3. Compare/Admit	If we compare...to In comparison, watching football is much more exciting I suppose it's pretty similar to what happens in most countries
4. Summary	So it's difficult to generalise, but my personal conclusion would be

How to approach speaking part 1:

- The first question is usually about your home town or your studies/work. Then you may get questions on any general, everyday topics, such as: reading material, forms of transport, types of building, weather, types of celebration, hobbies/interests, types of entertainment and types of scenery.
- Model answers for speaking part 1:
 - **Home town:**
 - It is the capital of Egypt. It is the largest city in the Middle-East and Africa.
 - It is along the Nile River, which is one of the longest rivers in the world
 - Cairo is the economic and industrial centre of Egypt. It has the oldest and largest film and music industries in the Arab world. There are lots of means of transport - even a subway system
 - It has many tourist attractions; the top one is the Egyptian Museum; which contains an extensive collection of ancient Egyptian antiquities
 - I suppose the heart of the city is the old town, which is fascinating historic town and is really lively at night. The people are generally friendly. Cost of living is fairly reasonable
 - Like many other mega-cities, the traffic is crawling; it suffers from overcrowding and high levels of pollution
 - **Work:**
 - I'm currently working as ...
 - It's a very fulfilling career
 - It gives me a great deal of job satisfaction
 - And it pays very well
 - My plan is to move to the UK.. for further development of my career
 - **Family:**
 - I'm married and I have got 5 daughters
 - I've got 3 brothers- one of them is full brother and the other two are half-brothers. In addition, I have got an older sister who really looked after me when I was younger. I also have two step brothers.
 - I wouldn't say that we're that close-knit family, we get on well enough but we don't see that very much of each other except at the normal family gatherings.
 - My more extended family is huge- I think I have over 50 first cousins
 - **House:**
 - I live in a modern detached house in one of the eastern suburbs of the city
 - It's got a great garden with lawns, shrubs, flowerbeds. Everything.
 - The neighbourhood I live in is, I guess, quite affluent
 - **Hobbies:**
 - One of the things I really enjoy is exchanging the opinions
 - I used to love playing tennis, but these days I simply do not have the time.
 - Yes, I often watch TV/ Yes, I do. My favorite program is called Discovery. It is not science fiction but a documentary on real life events and happenings. For example, it had a program on the latest eclipse of the sun that occurred at the end of the year.

How to approach speaking part 2 (short talk about a simple topic):

- Read the prompts carefully; **make notes (cover all the prompts) and try to link the topic with a personal experience or story** (explain/clarify, example/story, compare/contrast, saying/proverb, summary comment)
- **Introduce your topic clearly:**
 - I'd like to talk about.../ I'd better start by telling you that...
- **Use signals** to sequence your ideas and indicate how do you feel about the idea:
 - Two main issues, firstly.../ another potential problem.../ in the near future (in the long term)...
 - On the other hand.../ it depends largely on .../ as a result...
 - What I like about... is that/ one interesting thing is that/ unfortunately,.../ inevitable
- **Useful spoken phrases for speaking part 2:**
 - And when I say that ..., I don't mean...
 - ... or anything like that.
 - An example here is ...
 - And to me this was ...
 - I've really no idea. I guess it's in my nature
 - The reason why I enjoyed it so much – and remember it so well – was ...
 - It means different things to different people.
 - For some people it is still an important religious time, but for most it is just a time to be with your family, give presents and eat a lot
- **The follow-up question** will probably only require a yes or no answer and a couple of other words. You may give short answer by simply repeating the auxiliary verb or the verb to be or to do which was used in the question (use the same tense as the question) or better use idiomatic language:
 - More or less
 - No, I wouldn't go that far
 - Yes, I think so (Yes, I think I am)/ No, I don't think so (No, I don't think it does)

How to approach speaking part 3 (discussion of abstract topic):

- Listen to the question and pay attention to the time period you are being asked about. Part 3 questions may ask you:
 - To predict the future (how do you think... will change in the future?)
 - About things that have changed since past (how are... today different from those in the past?)
 - To compare two present-day opinions (do young people and old people have different ...?)
- **Use generalizations:**
 - Generally, I think most people...
 - It depends on the person (every man to his taste), but...
 - In my country, attitudes to...
- **Use signals** to sequence your ideas and indicate how do you feel about the idea
- **Consider using the strategies for developing ideas** (Explain/Examples, Compare/Admit, Summary)
- **Useful spoken phrases for speaking part 3 (questions about abstract topics):**
 - for me that's an easy question to answer – easy because I have strong views on it
 - I don't think there is ONE thing that... So I think it's difficult or impossible to give one simple answer
 - It seems to me that ..., and that is probably ...

Speaking Module- Typical Errors:

- **Holiday ≠ weekend**

Holidays is often an extended period of leisure and recreation, especially one spent away from home or in traveling: **I spent my summer holidays on a farm**

- **What is ... like? ≠ what do you like?**

"What is ... like?" is asking for description: what is the character of the people like in your hometown?

- **Too ≠ very**

"Very" is used as an intensifier to make verbs, adjectives and some nouns stronger and generally indicates a positive implication: **I was very happy to help him out.**

"Too" means beyond what is desirable: **too sick to travel ... Your son is too intelligent for this class**

- **In your lifetime**

It means since you're born (use present perfect in the answer): How has your country changed in your lifetime?

- **Since xxx's time**

It means since xxx was there (use present perfect in the answer): How has England changed since Margaret Thatcher's time?

- **Ceremony vs. festival**

A Ceremony may mark a rite of passage (a ritual event that marks a person's transition from one status to another): wedding, crowning

A festival or gala is an event that is staged by a local community and celebrates unique aspect of that community.

Feasts are religious festivals (e.g. Eid AlAdha)

- **Park vs. garden**

Park is usually public place while garden is private place.