

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

Exam Structure

The IELTS tests knowledge of global English, including British, Australian and North American English. The IELTS is available as a paper-based or a computer-based exam, depending on the testing location. It is available in two formats, an academic and a general training testing format. The exam types are the same length and share the same score range.

IELTS Structure		
Section	Description	Topics Tested
Listening	4 sections, 40 items; 30 minutes	Tests listening skills in a variety of global English accents, e.g. British English, Australian English, and North American English.
Reading	3 sections, 40 items; 60 minutes	Tests reading comprehension skills. Choice between <i>Academic Module</i> (for undergraduate and graduate level academic study) and <i>General Training</i> (for secondary education, work, and non-degree training)
Writing	2 writing tasks; 150 words and 250 words; 60 minutes	Tests writing skills. Choice between <i>Academic Module</i> (for undergraduate and graduate level academic study) and <i>General Training</i> (for secondary education, work, and non-degree training)
Speaking	11 to 14 minutes of speaking tasks; can be taken at a separate time	Tests speaking skills with a variety of question types, including general questions, specific questions and abstract questions. Typically, a minute or so is given to think about a response, and then the test taker must speak for a minute or two, depending on the topic or question. Other question types/lengths may apply.

Note, test takers planning to use the IELTS for admission to college or university, especially at the graduate level, must inform the testing center, and must take the Academic Module. Colleges and universities will not accept the General Module for admission purposes for graduate study although some will accept the General Module for undergraduate admission consideration.

Scoring and Score Validity

Because English proficiency can change in a short time, IELTS scores are typically only valid for two years.

Each section IELTS is scored in a range from 1 to 9. 1 is the lowest score, and 9 is the highest.

How the IELTS is used by Universities

The IELTS is used for non-native English speaking international student admission by most British, Australian, Canadian, and other Anglophone institutions outside of the U.S. A growing number of U.S. universities have begun to accept the IELTS for admission; however, as of this writing many might still require the TOEFL score prior to start of classes or shortly after.

While it is not generally advisable to take the test too many times, you may be requested to retake the exam in order to meet minimum standards or to be more competitive for particular programs. Typical score requirements for the IELTS are 5.5 or higher for Undergraduate programs, and 6.5 or higher for Graduate programs. Additionally, certain fields such as Linguistics, Law and others will have higher minimum score requirements.

Test Taking Tips

Listening

One of the best ways to prepare for the IELTS listening section is to listen to English language radio and television programs which are widely available, especially online. While the IELTS won't test your favorite English language sitcom or show, every bit of exposure you get to English will help you on the exam. Try to find educational and scientific broadcasts. Try to listen to a radio or television program regularly for your exam. Try to avoid watching the visual cues on television programs and just focus on the conversations.

After listening to or watching a program, it's a good idea to think about questions that could be asked to test your understanding of the dialogue or conversation on an IELTS exam. Try to remember the topics covered and the details of what people said. This is one of the most fun ways to study for the IELTS and to improve your knowledge of English in general.

Reading Comprehension

For reading comprehension, it's important to get accustomed to reading on a computer screen for the computer-based IELTS. You can not take notes on text when it's on a computer screen, and it may be distracting to scroll up and down at first. Get used to reading things thoroughly on computer screens. This is different than casually surfing the internet. Try to read a few articles in English every day to get comfortable reading on the computer screen. This does make a difference.

Writing

When writing essays don't try to impress the readers by using words or sentence structures that you find difficult. Try to write in a style with which you're comfortable. Answer the question as clearly as possible. Don't worry too much about spelling. English words are often very difficult to spell, as words in English are not typically written exactly the way they sound. Nonetheless, try to use familiar words. You don't need to use big, confusing words to do well on the IELTS essays. A good way to structure your essay is to introduce your point in the first paragraph, state your point, and give examples in the middle paragraphs, and then summarize your point in the last paragraph.

Also, try to use your experiences when answering questions. If you can relate an unfamiliar topic to something you're familiar with, you can write a stronger essay. Remember to stay on topic, though. Try to save the last 5 to 10 minutes of your essay time to review it. The best essays will be clear, and answer the question effectively.

Speaking

The speaking section of the IELTS consists of 11 to 14 speaking tasks. Tasks range from general questions about the test taker, to more specific questions about the test taker, to more abstract questions. Typically, the test taker is given some time to think about a response, and then must speak for a given amount of time.

The best way to prepare for this part of the exam is simply to practice speaking. You may want to have a native or fluent English speaker help you, or if not, you may want to try to imitate the speech of English speaking newscasters. Don't worry too much if you have a foreign sounding accent when you speak English. Just speak as clearly as you can. Don't try to impress the exam with long vocabulary words. Use words with which you're comfortable.

Structuring your Study

Towards the beginning of your preparation, try to review topics broadly. This is the time to refresh your knowledge of English grammar and also brush up on vocabulary. The more English words you know, the better. If you can get a hold of some practice questions, start out just trying to answer the questions, and try to apply the information from your review. Don't worry about timing at first. When you've answered a few questions,

review the answer choices, and try to understand why certain answer choices are correct, and why certain answer choices are incorrect. This will help you eliminate choices when you come across similar questions later.

As your studies progress, try practicing with groups of questions. Start to time yourself, and pay attention to the kinds of questions and topics that are difficult for you. Review any content material with which you continue to have trouble. A wealth of practice material is available at www.ielts.org. There are free materials, as well as materials that can be purchased.

Registering for the Exam

The IELTS is offered in over 300 testing centers world wide and available up to 4 times per month, depending on the center. Registration can be done on line at www.ielts.org.

For students working with IIE on university placement, it is very important that you identify IIE as a score recipient at the time of registration by selecting the Institute of International Education from the 'Professional Bodies' listing to which you would like scores sent.

When to take the Exam

Ideally, students seeking admission for the term beginning in August or September should sit for the IELTS exam in May or June of the preceding year. You will then have an assessment of your English language ability and will have time to prepare further and retake the exam in October or November if necessary. At the graduate level in the U.S., many programs have December application deadline for the following academic year.

Sources

www.ielts.org

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