IELTS essentials

Introduction

Below is a selection of essential elements you will come across in the academic version of the IELTS exam.

It is important to keep examples of the elements below as you study for your own development and revision purposes.

Cause and effect: these two elements often go together, and sometimes occur with problem and solution. You can express causes in many different ways, e.g., *as a result of*, *because of*, *resulting from* and effects, e.g., *leads to*, *causes*, *produces*, *results in,* etc. You can use causes and effects to explain/develop ideas/concepts and arguments in the Speaking and Writing tests and you also need to be able to notice/recognise them in all their variations in the Listening and Reading tests. See *Navigating* and *Predicting* in IELTS strategies.

Classification: you can classify information in order to compare or evaluate it more easily. You are asked to classify information in the Reading test, e.g., events relating to dates, items relating to classes, etc. You also encounter classification when you have to complete information in tables in the Listening and Reading tests. In Writing Task 1, you can use classification to group data to compare and contrast it, and in Writing Task 2, you classify/group/sort ideas into, e.g., causes, effects, example, general statements/conclusions, problems, reasons, solutions, etc., in order to write about them.

Comparison and contrast: you can use comparison and contrast language structures for Task 1 to compare and contrast the size of various items. You can also use such language to express you opinion/position/stance. You need to recognise when people are comparing ideas.

Evaluation: you can evaluate or say what you think about something such as an item, an event, an idea/concept, etc., in different ways. You can use: adjectives, e.g., (it is) important/harmful/essential; comparisons and contrasts, e.g., more/less important/beneficial than. You do not always have to say *I think/In my* opinion, etc.

Exemplification: you can give examples in many ways, e.g., *For example/For instance, in Germany, … like Germany, … in countries such as Germany.* You do not always have to use devices like *for example,* etc. You can say: *In Germany, people* ….

It is essential to use examples in writing and in speaking in order to make things more concrete, e.g., *currency such as dinars or dollars/infrastructure such as roads and bridges*, and give a context for your ideas. It helps the reader/listener to: activate their own schemata; clarify what you are saying and give a point of reference. As you use examples yourself, you can begin to notice/recognise where they are likely to appear in a sentence or paragraph.

General vs. specific statements: you use general statements to state what you are going to write or talk about and to summarise what you have written or talked about.

In Writing Task 1, for example, you need to write an overview of the data, etc., and in Writing Task 2, you need to be able to write topic sentences to introduce a paragraph. In Writing Task 1, the overview is followed by specific information as proof of the overview or leads to a conclusion regarding the specific data. In Writing Task 2, the topic sentence is followed by an explanation or proof of the topic sentence, i.e. *state and prove.* Note that general statements are also used to: conclude paragraphs, summarise ideas/concepts within paragraphs and to conclude essays and articles. It is necessary to notice/recognise both kinds of statements and where they are likely to occur in all parts of the exam. See *Navigating* and *Predicting* in IELTS strategies.

Opinion/Position/Stance/View: you can express your views in many ways, e.g., *I think/believe, In my opinion*, but you can also express your opinion by using adjectives, e.g., *important* and by comparison and contrast, e.g., is *a better way*, *the best way to.* See *Evaluation* and *Comparison and Contrast.* You also need to be able to use and notice/recognise opinions, etc., in all aspects of the exam, e.g., in Writing Task 2 and in the Reading test. For the latter, see *Navigating* and *Predicting* in IELTS strategies.

Problem and solution: these two elements often go together. Problems may be presented in many forms, e.g., *the cost of living is increasing/Living standards are decreasing.* You come across problems in all aspects of the IELTS examination, e.g., Writing Task 2, the Listening test and Speaking Part 3. Solutions can be expressed in many ways as well, e.g., *The government should/can/could reduce taxes/The best way is for the government to reduce taxes.* Measures, suggestions, proposals and recommendations can be used to present solutions. Being able to recognise the two elements of this relationship is important in navigating reading, writing and spoken discourse. It is important to recognise the location of solutions relative to problems. See *Prediction* in IELTS strategies.

Process: a process involves steps/stages and phases, which you can highlight using words and phrases like *then, next, at this stage*. You can encounter processes in Writing Task 1, Listening and Reading. For Writing Task 1, you need to describe the stages, etc., in a process and highlight them. In Reading and Listening tests, you need to be able to notice and recognise the stages in a process, which may not always be highlighted as clearly as in your own writing.

Purpose: you can express a purpose by using linking devices such as: *to, in order to, so as to, so* and *so that*. You use a purpose to show the result you want to achieve. A purpose is different from a result, which can happen whether you want it or not. It is important to state purposes to show why your ideas/concepts or suggestions are important.

Reasons: you can express a reason by using linking devices, e.g., *because, since, as, for;* the preposition *with,* e.g., *with the change in weather.* You can also use phrases like *this is because,* and by expressing a purpose, e.g., *to, in order to, so as to, so* and *so that*.

Reasons are used in writing and speaking to explain and support ideas. You need to use them in Writing Task 2 and also in all parts of the Speaking test. You need to be able to notice/ recognise reasons given by writers in the Reading and Listening tests. See *Navigating* and *Predicting* in IELTS strategies.

Time: you can express time relationships using dates, e.g., *in 2017, Up to 2017, prior to 2017, it wasn't until 2017, it was only after 2017, between 2000 and 2017*. You use them when describing data, etc., in Writing Task 1, and you use them to highlight time in Writing Task 2, e.g., *Until recently, Before 2008*. In the Reading test, you have to be able to notice/ recognise and process the occurrence of events relative to each other. You may, for example, have to classify events, etc., into periods. See *Classification, Navigating* and *Predicting* in IELTS strategies.