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The
Speaking Test
of
IELTS

With Ample Samples & Examples

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IELTS SPEAKING TEST

Introduction

The IELTS Speaking Test, which is, indeed, a **one-to-one, eleven-to-fourteen minute, oral interview** between a candidate and an examiner is now in use around the world as a fairly reliable indication of the speaking proficiency of candidates. This is part of an academic and vocational English test, designed by **UCLES** (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate), and jointly managed by the **British Council and IDP Australia**, launched worldwide in 1989. The test justifiably claims that it gives candidates opportunities to demonstrate their oral skills in a variety of situations similar to those deemed to be met in an English-speaking environment. All IELTS candidates, whether they are taking the **Academic or General** Training Modules, have to participate in the speaking test, either on the day of the actual examination, or on a separate day, usually up to two days later, at the discretion of the examination centre. IELTS examiners are teachers who are frequently retrained or recalibrated to follow distinct common standards and rate spoken English on the IELTS scale.

Revision of the IELTS Speaking Test

In the five-phased old version of the speaking test, style and variability of the interviewer input or language, seemingly, worked as an intervening variable which was difficult to control and had a considerable effect on candidate performance (Brown and Hill, 1998), and this, in turn, could put the reliability of the test in jeopardy (Merryless and McDowell, 1999).

Consequently, this warranted pertinent research by UCLES/IDP. The findings of the conducted studies on the IELTS speaking test had tended to confirm the effect of interlocutor language and style on ratings and provided evidence of the effectiveness of the revised three-phased test, particularly, the range of speech functions elicited.

Some further studies were also commissioned by the International Editing Committee of IELTS (Taylor, personal communication) to account for the inter-rater and intra-rater reliability of the IELTS speaking test; however, the precise details of the findings are not available (Boody, 2001).

Assessment Criteria

There were also overwhelming needs for assessment changes since the former band scale, developed in 1989, could not cover up all the aspects of proficiency at every band level, although the bands embodies significant criteria (e.g. ability to communicate effectively, ability to use appropriate vocabulary and structures, ability to ask questions, ability to take initiative in a conversation, general fluency, structural accuracy and intelligibility). For instance, pronunciation was in the descriptor for band four, but there was no tinge of it again until band eight.

To come up with a more analytical and feasible assessment scale, four general performance criteria were pinpointed: **Fluency and coherence** (if the candidate's speech flows, and if he / she is easily understood); **Grammatical range and accuracy** (if the candidate uses English grammar properly when he / she speaks); **Lexical resource** (if the candidate uses a wide range of vocabulary in his / her speech); and **Pronunciation** (if the candidate uses English sounds, stress, and intonation patterns, etc. correctly). Descriptors for each of these criteria are provided across nine bands; candidates are given a sub score on each criterion, based on their actual performance, and the four sub scores are averaged to provide a final score for speaking. However, the following features of the former test of speaking remained unchanged:

- The test takes the form of a one-to-one interview (i.e. one candidate and one interviewer with audio recording of the interview, so it can be checked thoroughly that the correct interview procedure is followed and that an accurate band score is given).
- The overall test length remains the same (the whole interview takes between 11-14 minutes).
- The test has a multi-phase approach to a range of speech functions.

As a corollary, in July 2001, the revised Speaking Test was formally introduced with the prime following features:

- Development of a fairly more clear-cut specification of tasks, in terms of input and expected candidate output, and the substantial revision of the tasks themselves for some phases of the test

- Development of an interlocutor framework to increase the standardisation of the test management (This provides great support for lower level candidates while still allowing those at higher levels to maneuver, demonstrating their ability.)
- Revision of the rating scale descriptors

“We are confident that the revised test is fairer and more vigorous and can be shown to satisfy three important aspects of successful speaking tests: **theoretical relevance, discriminating power, and assessability**”

Nich Charge,
The subject manager for
IELTS at UCLES

The New Speaking Format

The overall revised format of the speaking test comprises three main parts. Each part has been designed to fulfill separate functions in terms of interaction patterns, task input and candidate output, allowing the candidates to demonstrate their speaking proficiency. The aforementioned parts are summarised in the following table:

	Nature of Interaction	Objectives of the Part	Timing
Part 1 Introduction and interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examiner introduces him / herself and confirms the candidate's identity. Examiner asks the candidate a number of general questions selected from familiar topics, e.g. about him / herself, his / her home / family, his / her job / studies, his / her interests, etc. 	Greetings and settling down the chat to ensure the candidate understands and can use social functions and formulae properly.	4-5 minutes
Part 2 Individual long turn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examiner asks candidate to give a brief talk for 1-2 minutes on a particular topic, based on a verbal prompt or written input in the form of a general instruction on a card. The candidate has one minute to prepare before speaking and is given a paper and pencil to make notes. To round off the long turn, the examiner then asks one or two follow-up questions. 	To ensure the candidate possesses the ability to provide information, narrate, explain, describe, or compare.	3-4 minutes
Part 3 Two-way discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examiner invites the candidate to participate in a discussion of more abstract questions. The set forth issues and concepts are, to a large extent, linked to the topic introduced in part 2. 	To ensure the candidate is able to successfully take part in a reciprocal conversation, participate, elicit and seek information from the interviewer and can communicate effectively in English.	4-5 minutes

Note: The mentioned parts may well run into each other in a way that candidates may not know which one has ended and another begun.

PART ONE

In part 1 of the speaking test, first of all, the interviewer introduces him or herself and asks the candidate his / her name. The interviewer may also ask the candidate how to pronounce his / her name, or, for a case in point, how he / she would like to be called.

If you are a candidate, **bear in mind** that interviewers are teachers who have been highly trained. They initiate the conversation tactfully to make the candidate feel comfortable and relaxed. It is recommended, therefore, to sit comfortably, be as relaxed as possible, and show the examiner that you are confident, perhaps by smiling and looking at him / her in the eye.

Next, the interviewer asks the candidate some questions based on familiar everyday topics and personal experiences, using a framework (i.e, a set of pre-determined questions). However, the mentioned frame is a bit tight for part 1, allowing the interviewer to only ask you the questions in the frame (chosen out of a number of available frames). This tight frame has been designed to standardize examiner input. The results of various studies done on the examiner frame indicate that the frame provides tremendous support for lower level candidates, while still allowing those at higher levels to easily demonstrate their proficiency.

So be prepared and have sufficient practice to answer general questions about your background, nationality, your occupation and work experience, your likes and dislikes, your family and marital status, your home town, your hobbies, your future plans, etc.

In general, part 1 of the speaking test assesses the candidate's ability to:

- Exchange greetings
- Give personal information
- Answer basic questions about ordinary topics
- Talk about familiar issues and habits
- Give factual information

- Describe situations
- Express opinions
- Express preferences
- Express attitudes
- Give reasons for opinions, preferences and attitudes

Remember that in an interview situation, it is really important to give full answer rather than single words to the questions being asked. It is crystal clear that providing a full, appropriate, informative, and possibly interesting answer in each case and taking the initiative where reasonable give a much better impression. The interviewer elicits answers to assess your spoken English and may not be convinced unless you reply by offering full response.

Have a look at the following question and decide which of the two answers seems more convincing? Why (not)?

Question

- Where do you live?

Answer

A: In Tehran.

B: Well, I was born in Shiraz, but I've lived in Tehran since I was 7.

The candidate has made full use of the question by giving the required information. In other words, she / he has been precise and concise. However, try not to reply with large words and complex explanations. Be simple, convincing, fluent, accurate, and to the point and not complex, irrelevant and inaccurate.

As already mentioned, some basic topics for part 1 of the interview are:

- Job
- Family
- Home Town
- Studies
- Hobbies
- Likes & dislikes

Have a look at the phrases and sentences below and practise using them with a partner. Then with the help of your partner answer the follow-up questions to test yourself. **Remember** that these questions are only sample questions designed to promote your spoken English ability in those areas and facilitate the task and may not necessarily be the questions being asked in the actual test.

Job

What you do	
1. I'm a / an (+job).	e.g. a nurse / an accountant / a builder
2. I work in (+place or general area)	e.g. a hospital / an office marketing / social services
3. I work for (+ name / place of the company)	e.g. Union Bank / IBM / Fiat / an international bank
What your job involves	
4. I'm in charge of	e.g. a big company
5. I'm responsible for	e.g. some workers in that department
6. I have to deal with	e.g. any complaints / overseas clients, mainly
7. I run	e.g. the company / a restaurant
8. I manage	e.g. a shop in downtown
Daily duties / routines	
9. I have to go / attend (fml)	e.g. (to) a lot of meetings / conferences
10. I visit / see / meet	e.g. patients / clients
11. I advise	e.g. people / clients and give them help...
12. It involves	e.g. writing letters / filling in forms / doing a lot of paperwork / using computers a lot of the time
Getting a job	
13. It's not easy to get / find work	e.g. in big cities / round these parts
14. I'd love to do	e.g. marketing / this kind of work

15. It's difficult to <u>make a living</u> as a / an	e.g. freelance writer
16. I've been <u>offered a job</u>	e.g. in that company / in London
17. I've <u>applied for a job</u>	e.g. in a local company / in the accounts department
Working hours	
18. I have a <u>nine-to-five job</u> / I work nine-to-five.	(regular working hours in Britain)
19. I <u>do / work shift work.</u>	(nights one week, days next)
20. I <u>am on flexi-time.</u>	(flexible working hours)
21. I have <u>to do / work overtime.</u>	(work extra hours)
22. I only <u>work part-time / take a part-time job.</u>	(part of a day or a few days a week)
23. I <u>am a workaholic.</u> I work <u>full-time.</u>	(work too much)
24. I <u>took early retirement.</u>	(retire at 55 in Britain)
25. I <u>am on / take sick leave.</u>	(a period spent away from work, etc. because of illness)
26. I <u>am on / take maternity leave.</u>	(expecting a baby)
27. I <u>gave up work</u>	e.g. in order to study
28. I <u>was laid off</u> (infml)	e.g. when the factory went bust
29. I <u>was made redundant.</u>	(no longer needed and therefore out of work)
30. I <u>was dismissed</u> (fml)	e.g. for refusing to obey orders
31. I <u>was fired</u> (infml)	e.g. for always being late
32. I <u>am on / off duty.</u>	(to be working / not working)
Other useful phrases	
33. We usually <u>take a break</u>	e.g. for lunch / for ten minutes
34. We normally <u>knock off work</u> (infml)	e.g. about 5:30 p.m. and go off to a restaurant nearby
35. I <u>get some rest.</u>	(a period of time when you relax after working)

36. I was rather <u>inexperienced</u>	e.g. for that kind of work
37. I <u>have a lot of experience</u>	e.g. in this area / of this kind of problem
38. I am sufficiently <u>qualified</u>	e.g. for this position
39. This is <u>a job requiring</u>	e.g. a great deal of skill
40. I try to be <u>hardworking.</u>	(work hard)
41. I'm quite <u>competent</u>	e.g. at my job
42. I try to <u>work efficiently.</u>	(work quickly without making mistakes and wasting time)
43. <u>Efficiency</u> is very important	e.g. in my job
44. A lot of people do <u>voluntary work.</u>	(you want to do it and you're not paid)
45. I <u>was promoted.</u>	(get a higher position)
46. It is a <u>demanding job.</u>	(needing a lot of effort, care, skill)
47. I <u>fill in for / stand in for / cover for</u>	e.g. her while she is off sick
48. I'm <u>acting</u>	e.g. as manager for the next couple of months
49. I will <u>take the place of</u>	e.g. our manager when he leaves
50. This morning shift <u>takes over from</u>	e.g. the night shift at 9 a.m.
51. It is great <u>teamwork</u>	e.g. that helps get the job done on time
52. We <u>teamed up</u>	e.g. with another group to finish our project
53. We <u>cooperate</u>	e.g. with a German firm on this project
54. I <u>was employed</u>	e.g. as a secretary for a couple of months
55. I <u>do casual work.</u>	(not regular, usually paid hourly)
56. I've got <u>a temporary job</u>	e.g. working in a newspaper office
57. This factory has 200 <u>employees.</u>	(a person who is employed)
58. The <u>staff</u>	e.g. are so polite and friendly
59. They <u>promoted</u>	e.g. me to office manager
60. I'm <u>on leave</u>	e.g. at the moment because...
61. The post has been <u>vacant</u>	e.g. for some time
62. I <u>turned it down.</u>	(to refuse one's offer)

Payment	
63. I <u>am paid</u> directly	e.g. every month and this <u>pay</u> goes into my bank account monthly
64. My <u>salary</u>	e.g. is £20.000 a year
65. I <u>earn</u>	e.g. £200 a week as a hairdresser
66. With many jobs you <u>get holiday pay and sick pay.</u>	(when you're off duty or ill)
67. I'm going to a <u>pay rise.</u>	(my pay goes up)
68. My average <u>income</u>	e.g. has risen 2% this year
69. I'm <u>poorly paid / badly paid / don't earn much.</u>	(I'm paid very little money)
70. I <u>have a high income / earn a lot / am well-paid.</u>	(I'm paid a lot of money)
71. My <u>take-home pay / net income is £150.</u>	(money left after deductions)
72. My <u>gross income</u> is more than that.	(before deductions)

Questions

1. What do you do?
2. What's your job?
3. What do you do for a living?
4. What are your main responsibilities?
5. What do you do every day?
6. What are your duties?
7. What is your daily routine?
8. What does your job involve?
9. How many people does your firm employ at present?
10. Can you have some time off whenever you want?
11. If your job is so badly paid, why don't you quit?
12. Why don't you apply for another job?
13. Have you filled in the application form?
14. If they offer you a well-paid job, will you take it?
15. How much holiday do you get / How many weeks holiday do you get?

The IELTS Speaking Test, which is, indeed, a one-to-one, eleven-to-fourteen minute, oral interview between a candidate and an examiner is now in use around the world as a fairly reliable indication of the speaking proficiency of candidates. This is part of an academic and vocational English test, designed by UCLES (University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate), and jointly managed by the British Council and IDP Australia, launched world-wide in 1989. The test justifiably claims that it gives candidates opportunities to demonstrate their oral skills in a variety of situations similar to those deemed to be met in an English-speaking environment. All IELTS candidates, whether they are taking the Academic or General Training Modules, have to participate in the speaking test.

By presenting the overall format, assessment criteria, and the required skills and strategies to tackle the possible obstacles, this book provides tremendous help for the candidates who desire to take THE SPEAKING TEST OF IELTS.