

Cambridge English

# Top Tips

for IELTS General Training



Official Cambridge preparation material for IELTS General Training  
*Produced in collaboration with the British Council*

# Contents

**Introduction**

**Guide to IELTS task types**

**How to revise for IELTS**



**The IELTS Listening test**



**The IELTS Reading test**



**The IELTS Writing test**



**The IELTS Speaking test**

**What to do on the day**

**Answer sheets**

**Understanding your IELTS scores**

**Installing the CD-ROM**

## Introduction

*Top Tips for IELTS* is an essential part of your revision for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) test.

Each of the four main sections (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) follows the same structure and is based on a series of pieces of advice (the 'tips') which IELTS materials writers have collected from many years' experience of involvement in the production of IELTS tests. Each section starts with a tip at the top of the page. The tip is followed by an example taken from IELTS material and a clear explanation to help you understand exactly what it means. Each section ends with some more 'General tips' for that component.

There is also a handy section at the beginning of the book on how to revise for IELTS and a very important section at the back on what you should do on the day of the test.

There is a companion publication to this book, *Top Tips for IELTS Academic*. Please note that the Listening and Speaking sections are common to both books.

IELTS is jointly managed by British Council, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL) and IDP: IELTS Australia.

### How to use *Top Tips for IELTS*

Take the *Top Tips for IELTS* book with you and read it when you have a few minutes during the day. Then use the CD-ROM to practise at home: it contains an IELTS practice test for you to try, together with the answers for Listening and Reading and some sample answers for the Writing. The CD-ROM also includes all the recordings for the Listening and a video of a candidate doing an example IELTS Speaking test, to show you exactly what you will have to do when you take the test. Practise with some classmates using the Speaking test material on the CD-ROM and compare your performance with the student on the video.

*Top Tips for IELTS* is flexible. You can look at a different tip from a different section every day, or you can start at the beginning with the tips for the Listening test and work through until you get to the end of the tips for the Speaking test. Whichever method you prefer, read the example and the explanation carefully to make sure that you understand each tip. When you have understood all the tips for each section, try the test on the CD-ROM.

## Guide to symbols



This symbol introduces the 'tip' which is at the top of the page. Each tip is some useful advice to help you find the right answer for Listening and Reading. For Writing, the tips show you how to write a better answer to the question, and for Speaking, they explain how you can give good answers which show your true level of English to the examiner.



This is an extra piece of advice which is important for this particular part of the test.



This symbol tells you to go to the CD-ROM, where you will find an IELTS practice test to try.

We hope that *Top Tips for IELTS* will help you with your preparation for taking the IELTS test.

**Cambridge ESOL**

## Guide to question types used in IELTS Reading and Listening

**Multiple choice** (*Listening and Reading*) You have to read a text or listen to a recording and answer some questions. In Listening multiple-choice tasks, you usually have to choose one of three possible answers (A, B or C) for each question; in Reading you usually choose one of four (A, B, C or D). In some multiple-choice tasks, you have to choose several options from a longer list.

**Identifying information** (*Reading*) You have to read a text and a series of statements and decide if the statement agrees with the information in the text ('true'), if the statement contradicts the information in the text ('false') or whether there is no information in the text to support the statement ('not given').

**Identifying writer's views/claims** (*Reading*) You read a text and a series of statements and say whether each statement agrees with the views/claims of the writer. For each statement, you answer 'yes' if the statement does, 'no' if the statement doesn't, or 'not given' if there is no view/claim in the text to support the statement.

**Matching information** (*Reading*) You have to locate specific information in a paragraph or section of a text.

**Matching headings** (*Reading*) You have to choose the correct headings for the paragraphs or sections of the text.

**Matching features** (*Reading*) You have to match numbered items to a set of features (e.g. people or dates) from the text.

**Matching sentence endings** (*Reading*) You are given the first half of a sentence based on a text and you choose the best way to complete it from a list of possible options.

**Sentence, Summary, Note, Table, Flow-chart completion**

*(Listening and Reading)* You listen to a recording, or read a text, and fill in the missing information. Sometimes you complete the task by choosing words from a box rather than words in a Listening/Reading text. There is a limit to the number of words you can use, so pay careful attention to this when you are deciding what your answer should be.

**Form completion** *(Listening)* You listen to a recording and fill in the missing information in a form. You must pay careful attention to the maximum number of words you can write for each answer.

**Diagram label completion** *(Reading)* You complete labels on a diagram which relate to a description contained in the text. You must pay careful attention to the maximum number of words you can write for each answer.

**Short-answer questions** *(Listening and Reading)* You listen to a recording, or read a text, and write short answers to questions. You must pay careful attention to the maximum number of words you can write for each answer.

**Matching** *(Listening)* You listen to a recording and match each numbered item to one of a list of options (A, B, C etc.) according to the information you hear.

**Plan, Map, Diagram labelling** *(Listening)* You listen to a recording and label the plan, map or diagram according to the information you hear.

## How to revise for IELTS

It is important to use the time you have to revise for IELTS effectively. Here are some general ideas to help you do this.

### Make a plan

It is a good idea to make a plan for your last month's study before the test. Think about:

- what you need to do
- how much time you have
- how you can fit what you need to do into that time.

Try to be realistic when you make your plan. If you plan to do too much, then you may soon be disappointed when you fall behind.

### Think about what you need to know

Most things that you do in English will help you to improve your language skills – reading an article or watching certain TV programmes may be as useful as doing a grammar exercise.

It is very important, however, that you know exactly what you will have to do in the test. Doing some practice tests will help you develop good exam techniques and this will help you a great deal in the exam room. But don't spend all your revision time doing practice papers.

Think about what you need to improve. If you are attending an IELTS preparation course, ask your English teacher what you need to work on – listening, reading, writing, or speaking, or how English is used.

Look back at your homework. What mistakes did you make? Do you understand where you went wrong? How can you improve?

## Have what you need to hand

In order to prepare for IELTS you probably need:

- a good learners' dictionary (one with examples of how words are actually used in English)
- some practice tests
- an IELTS preparation coursebook
- a good grammar book
- a vocabulary notebook
- notes or other materials from your English course (if you are doing one)
- a bilingual dictionary.

If you have access to the internet you can get some of these online – the dictionaries and samples of IELTS test materials, for instance. (See [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org) and [www.CambridgeESOL.org](http://www.CambridgeESOL.org))

Also have a good supply of stationery such as pens, pencils, highlighters and paper. Some students find it convenient to write things like vocabulary on cards, which they then carry with them and look at when they have a spare moment on the bus or in a café.

## Think about when and where you study

Most people find it best to study at regular times at a desk with a good light and everything they need beside them.

Some people find they work best in the early mornings, while others prefer the evenings. If possible, do most of your revision at the time of day which is best for you.

You may also find that there are other good times and places for you to study. Perhaps you could listen to some English on an mp3 player while you are doing other things. Or you could read something on your way to work or college.



## Organise your revision time well

Allow time for breaks when you are revising – many students like to study for an hour and a half, for example, and then have a break for half an hour.

Vary what you do – sometimes focus on listening, sometimes on vocabulary, sometimes on writing. This will make sure that you don't neglect any aspect of the language and will also make your study more interesting.

It is sensible to do something completely different before you go to bed – go for a walk, read a relaxing book or watch a favourite film.

## Enjoy your study

Find some enjoyable activities that help your English – listening to songs in English or watching a TV programme or DVD will generally help your listening and pronunciation and may also extend your vocabulary.

What do you like doing in your free time? Could you combine that with English practice? For example, if you like a particular sport or singer, or if you are interested in news or computer games, you will be able to find something in English about your interest on the internet.

Study with a friend – you can practise talking to each other in English and can perhaps help each other with any questions you have.

## Keep fit

Don't forget that feeling fit and healthy will help you get good marks too:

- make sure you get enough sleep
- remember to eat well
- take some exercise.

**Now here are some ideas to help you organise your revision for the individual parts of IELTS.**

## The IELTS Listening test

Even if you are a long way from an English-speaking country, there are a lot of things you can do these days to give you practice in the kinds of listening you will have to deal with in the IELTS Listening test. Here are some ideas:

- Go to the websites of universities in English-speaking countries – these often have links where you can listen to students or staff talking about the experience of studying in their institution.
- You can find TV and radio programmes on topics relevant to IELTS on the websites of national public broadcasting organisations like the BBC ([www.bbc.co.uk.iplayer](http://www.bbc.co.uk.iplayer)), PBS ([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org)) and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation ([www.abc.net](http://www.abc.net)). You can access some of these wherever you are in the world, but some programmes are only available to people living in the country where the broadcaster is based.
- Find the tourist information website for a country that you would like to visit – such websites often now have video clips which provide useful listening materials.
- Many libraries and museums now also have websites with video materials which can provide useful listening practice.
- Search YouTube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) for interesting recordings – use keywords like ‘lecture’ or ‘tutorial’, or ‘study skills’ and you should find plenty of clips to help you practise.

## The IELTS General Training Reading test

The more you read before the test, the better you will do. Reading is also a very good way of improving your vocabulary and grammar and it will also help your own writing.

The General Training Reading test includes a wide range of texts including such practically useful texts as notices, advertisements, timetables, information about travel and accommodation, company handbooks and contracts as well as articles from newspapers, magazines or journals and extracts from fiction and non-fiction books.

- Make sure you read from a wide range of sources including something from each of the text types listed above – you can easily find examples of all of these on the internet as well as in printed form.

- It's important to read for pleasure, so regularly read something that you enjoy – novels, sports reports or magazine quizzes may not feature in IELTS but reading them will also help you develop your knowledge of the language in an effective way.
- Keep a reading diary – write a couple of sentences in English about what you have read. This should also help you to learn some of the words and expressions you have read and will also help you with the IELTS Writing test.
- Discuss what you have read with a friend – perhaps start a reading club to do this on a regular basis.
- Don't look up every word that you are not sure about when you read. Just look up anything that seems to be important for a general understanding of the text. When you have finished reading you can then, if you want, go back and check the meanings of less important vocabulary.

Other examples of things you might like to read include:

- graded readers and magazines
- translations of books you have already read in your own language
- travel information about your own country or places you have been to
- newspaper articles
- music, film or book reviews.

## The IELTS General Training Writing test

The General Training Writing test asks you to write a letter and an essay giving your opinion on a topic.

- Practise writing answers to exam type tasks on a regular basis – if possible, ask a teacher or other good English speaker to correct your work. Pay attention to the comments they make and try to improve in the next piece of writing you do for them.
- Always think about the structure of what you are going to write – make a plan first.
- Always think about who the task says you are writing for – how does this affect what you need to write and how you should express it?
- In your writing make a point of using new words and expressions that you have recently learned – if necessary use a good learner's dictionary for good examples of how words are used in practice.

- Practise checking your writing carefully so that it is as accurate as possible – look particularly for the kinds of mistakes that you know you often make (mistakes with verb agreement, prepositions or articles, for example).
- Make sure that you know the conventions in English for writing different kinds of letters.

## The IELTS Speaking test

Make the effort to practise speaking in English whenever you can.


- Make sure that you know how to talk about your own work and study experiences and plans – become familiar with the relevant language by reading articles on the internet about, for example, your chosen profession and about university courses.
- Make sure that you know how to express your opinion on a range of general topics, giving examples and reasons to explain why you think as you do – become familiar with the relevant language by listening to radio or watching TV programmes in which people give their opinions.
- If there are students in your area whose first language is English, try to make contact with them – perhaps you could exchange conversation sessions with them – half an hour in English and half an hour in your first language.
- Try to make contact with English-speaking visitors to your area – perhaps you could get some part-time work as a tour guide.
- Practise with friends by agreeing to only talk English for half an hour on a regular basis – choose a specific topic to discuss for that time.
- Join an English language club if there is one in your area.
- Make sure that you can do these things with ease in English – introduce yourself, agree or disagree, ask someone to repeat or explain, give arguments for and against, make hypotheses, talk about your own experiences, justify a point of view – as you will almost certainly need to do most of these in the exam.


We hope these ideas will help you to make the most of your revision time. Above all, we hope that you enjoy your studies and wish you all the best for your exam.





# The IELTS Listening test

## What's in the Listening test


**Section 1**  a conversation in an everyday social context between two people

**Section 2**  a monologue on a topic relating to general social needs

**Section 3**  a conversation in an academic context between two or more people

**Section 4**  a lecture or talk on a topic of general academic interest

 1 mark for each correct answer

 Approximately **40 minutes**  
*(including 10 minutes to copy your answers onto the answer sheet)*

Each section has 10 questions.

The following question types are used in the Listening test:

- multiple choice
- matching
- plan, map, diagram labelling
- note completion
- form completion
- table completion
- sentence completion
- short answer questions
- summary completion
- flow-chart completion

Any of these question types may appear in any section. Not all question types will appear in an individual Listening test.

## Listening: multiple choice



**TIP:** Don't choose an option just because you hear a word from it. Think about the whole meaning of what is said.

### Example

Here is a question from a task about a field trip.



**Q** What did the students see on their walk in the mountains?

- A** a group of unusual animals
- B** some rare plants ✓
- C** an interesting geological feature



TAPESCRIPT

- TUTOR:** How did you enjoy the field trip to Scotland?
- STUDENT:** Well, we had some fantastic walks. One day we walked along an amazing deserted beach. We must have walked for about fifteen miles and we saw a seal which was basking in the sunshine. It was there all by itself.
- TUTOR:** How lucky! They're such beautiful animals and it's quite unusual to see them there.
- STUDENT:** That's right. Another day we climbed the mountain behind the hut where we were staying. We were hoping to find some rare ferns that are supposed to grow there and nowhere else in Scotland. We'd just about given up hope when we found some at the bottom of a rocky slope. They have a number of very interesting features, for example ...

**Explanation:** The correct answer is **B**, but the mention of an unusual animal (a seal, although only one) might lead you to believe that **A** is correct. Similarly, the phrase 'interesting features' might tempt you to the answer **C**. In other words, you need to understand the recording as a whole rather than jump to a conclusion simply because you hear words from one of the options.



## Listening: multiple choice



**TIP:** Sometimes in a multiple-choice question you have to complete a half sentence with one of the options. If you change the first half sentence into a question it often makes it easier to choose the right answer.

### Example

Here is a question from a task about a lecture on a scientific experiment.



The study was carried out in order to

- A** determine the health benefits of eating tomatoes.
- B** investigate whether tomato tablets could protect against heart disease. ✓
- C** establish the side-effects of a range of nutritional supplements.



TAPESCRIPT

As we are all well aware, some nutritional supplements have some undesirable side-effects. The Robinson research that we're going to look at today seems to have determined quite conclusively that the tomato tablets under consideration have no significant side-effects at all. However, his main focus was on their health benefits. It's long been known that a diet rich in tomatoes seems to be very good for our hearts. However, until recently it has been impossible to preserve the health-giving, antioxidant properties of tomatoes in tablet form. Robinson wanted to find out whether these supplements would really have the same health benefits as a tomato-rich diet.

**Explanation:** In this case the question would be 'Why was the study carried out?' and the correct answer is **B**. **A** is incorrect because the speaker says that the health benefits of eating tomatoes have long been known – there was therefore no need for a further study into this. **C** is incorrect because it relates only to the side-effects of tomato tablets (and not a range of nutritional supplements) and also because the issue of side-effects was not the main focus of the study.

## Listening: multiple choice



**TIP:** You will hear some reference to all the options in the list, but some of them will not be an appropriate answer to the question.

### Example

Here is a question from a task relating to a student's lab report.



Which two sections of her work does the student need to improve?

- A** conclusion ✓
- B** figures ✓
- C** procedure
- D** results
- E** aims



TAPESCRIPT

**STUDENT:** How was my lab report this time? Do you think it was better than my last one?

**TUTOR:** Yes, it was much improved, particularly the clear way in which you described the procedure. I also felt you laid out the aims very clearly, which gave a good impression from the start. You could think a bit more in future about the conclusions section, though. That felt a bit hurried to me even though you'd actually made a first-class job of writing up the results.

**STUDENT:** What about the way I presented the figures? Was that OK?

**TUTOR:** Yes, I liked it. But don't forget that you need to label them all and then you can refer to them more easily when you're describing them in your text.





**Explanation:** The tutor suggests that the student can improve the conclusion **A** and the figures **B**.

The tutor makes positive comments about procedure **C**, results **D** and aims **E**.



*Listen to everything the speaker says before you choose the answer, in order to be sure that you are selecting the correct options.*

# Top Tips for IELTS General Training with interactive CD-ROM

**What are the most important things you need to know to help you prepare for the IELTS test?**

*Top Tips for IELTS General Training* gives you some essential advice ('tips') for each part of each of the four IELTS components (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking). It is written by Cambridge ESOL, the organisation responsible for the production of the test, and includes:

#### In the book

- clear examples and explanations to show you exactly what each tip means
- general tips for each skill to help you as you revise
- sections on how to revise and what to do on the day of the test

#### On the CD-ROM

- an interactive IELTS practice test for you to try so that you know what to expect when you take the test
- answers, sample answers (for the Writing), scores and feedback at the end of the test, so that you can check your performance
- a video of an example Speaking test to give you a clear idea of what you have to do when you take the test

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