

IELTS Secrets

Your Key to IELTS Success

From the desk of Tom Paulson, Director of Test-Taking Strategy at IELTS Secrets, May 5, 2002-

Dear future IELTS Success Story:

Congratulations on your purchase of the most advanced test-taking manual for the IELTS. Notice I did not say study guide- there are plenty of decent study guides on the market, but that was not our objective in writing this manual. Our goal is to seek and exploit specific weaknesses in the IELTS assessment, and then share those secrets with our customers.

Let's be perfectly honest here- you've worked hard enough in the past, and if you want to spend hours in a study guide to boost your score, that's a great thing to do. In fact, we recommend at least a brief review of some of the better study guides on the market. But that's simply not enough to do well in the high-pressure high-stakes environment of the test day. How well you do on this test will have a significant impact on your future- and we have the research and practical advice to help you execute on test day.

The product you're reading now is much more than a study guide- it is a tactical weapon designed to exploit weaknesses in the test itself, and help you avoid the most common errors students make when taking the IELTS.

How to use this manual

We don't want to waste your time. This manual is fast-paced and fluff-free. We suggest going through it a number of times, trying out its methods on a number of official practice tests.

First, read through the manual completely to get a feel for the content and organization. Read the general success strategies first, and then proceed to

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the individual test sections. Each tip has been carefully selected for its effectiveness.

Second, read through the manual again, and take notes in the margins and highlight those sections where you may have a particular weakness (we strongly suggest printing the manual out on a high-quality printer).

Third, go through at least one official practice test with the manual at your side and apply the strategies. We believe three practice tests to be the maximum benefit, the first time with all strategies except time (take as much time as you need), the second time with all strategies and time constraints, and a third time without the benefit of the open manual to refer to during the test. See the appendix for the exclusive list of practice test sources we believe to be valuable. Quick tip- there is no greater waste of time than studying practice tests written by anyone other than IELTS.

Finally, bring the manual with you on test day and study it before the exam begins.

Your success is our success

We would be delighted to hear your IELTS Success Story. Drop us a line at ieltssecrets@ieltssecrets.com and tell us your story. Thanks for your business and we wish you continued success-

Sincerely,

The IELTS Secrets Team

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Secret Key #1 – Time is your greatest enemy.

To succeed on the IELTS, you must use your time wisely. Many students do not finish at least one module. The table below shows the time challenge you are faced with:

Module	Total amount of time allotted	Number of questions	Time to answer each question
Listening	30 min	40	.75 min
Reading	60 min	40	.67 min
Writing	60 min	2	30 min
Speaking	11-14 min	N/A	N/A

As you can see, the time constraints are brutal. To succeed, you must ration your time properly. The reason that time is so critical is that every question counts the same toward your final score. If you run out of time on any passage, the questions that you do not answer will hurt your score far more than earlier questions that you spent extra time on and feel certain are correct.

On the Reading Module, the test is separated into passages. The reason that time is so critical is that 1) every question counts the same toward your final score, and 2) the passages are not in order of difficulty. If you have to rush during the last passage, then you will miss out on answering easier questions correctly. **It is natural to want to pause and figure out the hardest questions, but you must resist the temptation and move quickly.**

Success Strategy #1

Pace Yourself

Wear a watch to the IELTS Test. At the beginning of the test, check the time (or start a chronometer on your watch to count the minutes), and check the time after each passage or every few questions to make sure you are “on schedule.”

Remember that on the Listening and Reading Modules you have a little over half a minute for each question. If you can work quickly, you can pace yourself at half a minute per question, which makes it easy to keep track of your time.

If you find that you are falling behind time during the test, you must speed up. Even though a rushed answer is more likely to be incorrect, it is better to miss a couple of questions by being rushed, than to completely miss later questions by not having enough time. It is better to end with more time than you need than to run out of time.

If you are forced to speed up, do it efficiently. Usually one or more answer choices can be eliminated without too much difficulty. Above all, don't panic. Don't speed up and just begin guessing at random choices. By pacing yourself, and continually monitoring your progress against the clock or your watch, you will always know exactly how far ahead or behind you are with your available time. If you find that you are a few minutes behind on a module, don't skip questions without spending any time on it, just to catch back up. Spend perhaps a little less than half a minute per question and after a few questions, you will have caught back up more gradually. Once you catch back up, you can continue working each problem at your normal pace. If you have time at the end, go back then and finish the questions that you left behind.

Furthermore, don't dwell on the problems that you were rushed on. If a problem was taking up too much time and you made a hurried guess, it must have been

difficult. The difficult questions are the ones you are most likely to miss anyway, so it isn't a big loss. If you have time left over, as you review the skipped questions, start at the earliest skipped question, spend at most another half a minute, and then move on to the next skipped question.

Lastly, sometimes it is beneficial to slow down if you are constantly getting ahead of time. You are always more likely to catch a careless mistake by working more slowly than quickly, and among very high-scoring test takers (those who are likely to have lots of time left over), careless errors affect the score more than mastery of material.

Scanning

For Reading passages, **don't waste time reading, enjoying, and completely understanding the passage.** Simply scan the passage to get a rough idea of what it is about. You will return to the passage for each question, so there is no need to memorize it. Only spend as much time scanning as is necessary to get a vague impression of its overall subject content.

Secret Key #2 – Guessing is not guesswork.

You probably know that guessing is a good idea on the IELTS- unlike other standardized tests, **there is no penalty for getting a wrong answer.** Even if you have no idea about a question, you still have a 20-25% chance of getting it right.

Most students do not understand the impact that proper guessing can have on their score. Unless you score extremely high, guessing will significantly contribute to your final score.

Monkeys Take the IELTS

What most students don't realize is that to insure that 20-25% chance, you have to guess randomly. If you put 20 monkeys in a room to take the IELTS, assuming they answered once per question and behaved themselves, on average they would get 20-25% of the questions correct on a five choice multiple choice problem. Put 20 students in the room, and the average will be much lower among guessed questions. Why?

1. IELTS intentionally writes deceptive answer choices that "look" right. A student has no idea about a question, so picks the "best looking" answer, which is often wrong. The monkey has no idea what looks good and what doesn't, so will consistently be lucky about 20-25% of the time.
2. Students will eliminate answer choices from the guessing pool based on a hunch or intuition. Simple but correct answers often get excluded, leaving a 0% chance of being correct. The monkey has no clue, and often gets lucky with the best choice.

This is why the process of elimination endorsed by most test courses is flawed and detrimental to your performance- students don't guess, they make an ignorant stab in the dark that is usually worse than random.

Success Strategy #2

Let me introduce one of the most valuable ideas of this course- the \$5 challenge:

You only mark your "best guess" if you are willing to bet \$5 on it.

You only eliminate choices from guessing if you are willing to bet \$5 on it.

Why \$5? Five dollars is an amount of money that is small yet not insignificant, and can really add up fast (20 questions could cost you \$100). Likewise, each answer choice on one question of the IELTS will have a small impact on your overall score, but it can really add up to a lot of points in the end.

The process of elimination IS valuable. The following shows your chance of guessing it right:

If you eliminate this many choices on a 3 choice multiple choice problem:	0	1	2
Chance of getting it correct	33%	50%	100%

However, if you accidentally eliminate the right answer or go on a hunch for an incorrect answer, your chances drop dramatically: to 0%. By guessing among all the answer choices, you are GUARANTEED to have a shot at the right answer.

That's why the \$5 test is so valuable- if you give up the advantage and safety of a pure guess, it had better be worth the risk.

What we still haven't covered is how to be sure that whatever guess you make is truly random. Here's the easiest way:

Always pick the first answer choice among those remaining.

Such a technique means that you have decided, **before you see a single test question**, exactly how you are going to guess- and since the order of choices

tells you nothing about which one is correct, this guessing technique is perfectly random.

Let's try an example-

A student encounters the following problem on the Listening Module in a conversation about the chemical term "amine," a derivative of ammonia:

In the reaction, the amine will be?

- A. neutralized
- B. protonated
- C. deprotonated

The student has a small idea about this question- he is pretty sure that the amine will be deprotonated, but he wouldn't bet \$5 on it. He knows that the amine is either protonated or deprotonated, so he is willing to bet \$5 on choice A not being correct. Now he is down to B and C. At this point, he guesses B, since B is the first choice remaining.

The student is correct by choosing B, since the amine will be protonated. He only eliminated those choices he was willing to bet money on, AND he did not let his stale memories (often things not known definitely will get mixed up in the exact opposite arrangement in one's head) about protonation and deprotonation influence his guess. He blindly chose the first remaining choice, and was rewarded with the fruits of a random guess.

This section is not meant to scare you away from making educated guesses or eliminating choices- you just need to define when a choice is worth eliminating. The \$5 test, along with a pre-defined random guessing strategy, is the best way to make sure you reap all of the benefits of guessing.

Specific Guessing Techniques

Slang

Scientific sounding answers are better than slang ones. In the answer choices below, choice B is much less scientific and is incorrect, while choice A is a scientific analytical choice and is correct.

Example:

- A.) To compare the outcomes of the two different kinds of treatment.
- B.) Because some subjects insisted on getting one or the other of the treatments.

Extreme Statements

Avoid wild answers that throw out highly controversial ideas that are proclaimed as established fact. Choice A is a radical idea and is incorrect. Choice B is a calm rational statement. Notice that Choice B does not make a definitive, uncompromising stance, using a hedge word "if" to provide wiggle room.

Example:

- A.) Bypass surgery should be discontinued completely.
- B.) Medication should be used instead of surgery for patients who have not had a heart attack if they suffer from mild chest pain and mild coronary artery blockage.

Similar Answer Choices

When you have two answer choices that are direct opposites, one of them is usually the correct answer.

Example:

- A.) described the author's reasoning about the influence of his *childhood* on his adult life.
- B.) described the author's reasoning about the influence of his *parents* on his adult life.

These two answer choices are very similar and fall into the same family of answer choices. A family of answer choices is when two or three answer choices are very similar. Often two will be opposites and one may show an equality.

Example:

- A.) Plan I or Plan II can be conducted at equal cost
- B.) Plan I would be less expensive than Plan II
- C.) Plan II would be less expensive than Plan I
- D.) Neither Plan I nor Plan II would be effective

Note how the first three choices are all related. They all ask about a cost comparison. Beware of immediately recognizing choices B and C as opposites and choosing one of those two. Choice A is in the same family of questions and should be considered as well. However, choice D is not in the same family of questions. It has nothing to do with cost and can be discounted in most cases.

Hedging

When asked for a conclusion that may be drawn, look for critical “hedge” phrases, such as likely, may, can, will often, sometimes, etc, often, almost, mostly, usually, generally, rarely, sometimes. Question writers insert these hedge phrases to cover every possibility. Often an answer will be wrong simply because it leaves no room for exception. Avoid answer choices that have definitive words like “exactly,” and “always”.

Summary of Guessing Techniques

1. Eliminate as many choices as you can by using the \$5 test. Use the common guessing strategies to help in the elimination process, but only eliminate choices that pass the \$5 test.
2. Among the remaining choices, only pick your “best guess” if it passes the \$5 test.
3. Otherwise, guess randomly by picking the first remaining choice.

Secret Key #3 – Practice Smarter, Not Harder

Many students delay the test preparation process because they dread the awful amounts of practice time they think necessary to succeed on the test. We have refined an effective method that will take you only a fraction of the time.

There are a number of “obstacles” in your way on the IELTS. Among these are answering questions, finishing in time, and mastering test-taking strategies. All must be executed on the day of the test at peak performance, or your score will suffer. The IELTS is a mental marathon that has a large impact on your future.

Just like a marathon runner, it is important to work your way up to the full challenge. So first you just worry about questions, and then time, and finally strategy:

Success Strategy #3

1. **Find a good source for IELTS practice tests. These must be OFFICIAL IELTS tests, or they will be of little use.** The best source for these is official practice tests from IELTS. A link to a source of official practice tests is included in the appendix.
2. If you are willing to make a larger time investment (or if you want to really “learn” the material, a time consuming but ultimately valuable endeavor), consider buying one of the better study guides on the market. Again, do NOT use their practice tests, just the study guide.
3. Take a practice test with no time constraints, with all study helps “open book.” Take your time with questions and focus on applying the strategies.
4. Take another test, this time with time constraints, with all study helps “open book.”
5. Take a final practice test with no open material and time limits.

If you have time to take more practice tests, just repeat step 5. By gradually exposing yourself to the full rigors of the test environment, you will condition your mind to the stress of test day and maximize your success.

Secret Key #4 – Prepare, Don't Procrastinate

Let me state an obvious fact: if you take the IELTS three times, you will get three different scores. This is due to the way you feel on test day, the level of preparedness you have, and, despite IELTS's claims to the contrary, some tests WILL be easier for you than others.

Since so much depends on your score, you should maximize your chances of success. In order to maximize the likelihood of success, you've got to prepare in advance. This means **taking official practice tests** and **spending time learning the information and test taking strategies you will need to succeed.**

You can always retake the test more than once, but remember that you will have to wait a minimum of three months before retaking the test. Don't get into a situation where you need a higher score and can't afford to wait, so don't take the IELTS as a "practice" test. Feel free to take sample tests on your own, but when you go to take the IELTS, be prepared, be focused, and do your best the first time!

The Listening Module

The Listening module of the IELTS consists of a total of 40 questions.

There are four sections:

1. Social Needs – Conversation between two speakers
2. Social Needs – Speech by one speaker
3. Educational or Training – Conversation between up to four speakers
4. Educational or Training – Speech by one speaker

Main Ideas

Important words and main ideas in conversation are ones that will come up again and again. Listen carefully for any word or words that come up repeatedly. What words come up in nearly every statement made? These words with high frequency are likely to be in the main idea of the conversation. For example, in a conversation about class size in the business department of a college, the term “class size” is likely to appear in nearly every statement made by either speaker in the discussion.

Voice Changes

IELTS expects you to be able to recognize and interpret nuances of speech. Be on the alert for any changes in voice, which might register surprise, excitement, or another emotion. If a speaker is talking in a normal monotone voice and suddenly raises their voice to a high pitch, that is a huge clue that something critical is being stated. Listen for a speaker to change their voice and understand the meaning of what they are saying.

Example:

Man: Let’s go to Wal-mart.

Woman: *There’s a Wal-mart in this small town?*

If the woman’s statement was higher pitched, indicating surprise and shock, then she probably did not expect there to be a Wal-mart in that town.

Specifics

Listen carefully for specific pieces of information. **Adjectives are commonly asked about in IELTS questions. Try to remember any main adjectives that are mentioned.** Pick out adjectives such as numbers, colors, or sizes.

Example:

Man: Let's go to the store and get some apples to make the pie.

Woman: How many do we need?

Man: We'll need **five** apples to make the pie.

A typical question might be about how many apples were needed.

Interpret

As you are listening to the conversation, put yourself in the person's shoes.

Think about why someone would make a statement. You'll need to do more than just regurgitate the spoken words but also interpret them.

Example:

Woman: I think I'm sick with the flu.

Man: Why don't you go see the campus doctor?

Sample Question: Why did the man mention the campus doctor?

Answer: The campus doctor would be able to determine if the woman had the flu.

Find the Hidden Meaning

Look for the meaning behind a statement. When a speaker answers a question with a statement that doesn't immediately seem to answer the question, the response probably contained a hidden meaning that you will need to recognize and explain.

Man: Are you going to be ready for your presentation?

Woman: I've only got half of it finished and it's taken me five hours just to do this much. There's only an hour left before the presentation is due.

At first, the woman did not seem to answer the question the man presented. She responded with a statement that only seemed loosely related. Once you look deeper, then you can find the true meaning of what she said. If it took the woman five hours to do the first half of the presentation, then it would logically take her another five hours to do the second half. Since she only has one hour until her presentation is due, she would probably NOT be able to be ready for the presentation. So, while an answer was not immediately visible to the man's question, when you applied some logic to her response, you could find the hidden meaning beneath.

Memory Enhancers

You have scratch paper provided to you while taking the test. This can be a huge help. **While you listen, you are free to make notes.** If different people are talking, **use short hand to describe the main characteristics of each speaker.** As you hear **main adjectives that you think might be hard to remember, jot them down quickly in order that you can refer to them later during the question stage.** Use your notes to help you remember those hard to remember facts. Don't end your test without making use of your scratch paper ally.

Example:

Speaker 1: I'm Bob Thomas, and I'm majoring in business development.

Speaker 2: I'm Matt Smith, and I'm majoring in chemical engineering.

Speaker 3: I'm John Douglass, and I'm majoring in speech therapy.

Your short hand might read:

Bob – Bus.

Matt – Chem. E

John – Sp. Th.

On subsequent questions about the characters, you'll be able to remember these basic facts and answer more accurately. However, don't spend so much time

making notes that you miss something on the tape. You won't be able to rewind it and catch what you miss. The idea is that the notes should only supplement your memory, not replace it.

The Reading Module

The Reading module of the IELTS consists of a total of 40 questions.

There are three passages, with a total of 2,000 to 2,750 words.

Skimming

Your first task when you begin reading is to answer the question “What is the topic of the selection?” This can best be answered by quickly skimming the passage for the general idea, stopping to read only the first sentence of each paragraph. A paragraph’s first sentence is usually the main topic sentence, and it gives you a summary of the content of the paragraph.

Once you’ve skimmed the passage, stopping to read only the first sentences, you will have a general idea about what it is about, as well as what is the expected topic in each paragraph.

Each question will contain clues as to where to find the answer in the passage. Do not just randomly search through the passage for the correct answer to each question. Search scientifically. Find key word(s) or ideas in the question that are going to either contain or be near the correct answer. These are typically nouns, verbs, numbers, or phrases in the question that will probably be duplicated in the passage. Once you have identified those key word(s) or idea, skim the passage quickly to find where those key word(s) or idea appears. The correct answer choice will be nearby.

Example: What caused Martin to suddenly return to Paris?

The key word is Paris. Skim the passage quickly to find where this word appears. The answer will be close by that word.

However, sometimes key words in the question are not repeated in the passage. In those cases, search for the general idea of the question.

Example: Which of the following was the psychological impact of the author's childhood upon the remainder of his life?

Key words are "childhood" or "psychology". While searching for those words, be alert for other words or phrases that have similar meaning, such as "emotional effect" or "mentally" which could be used in the passage, rather than the exact word "psychology".

Numbers or years can be particularly good key words to skim for, as they stand out from the rest of the text.

Example: Which of the following best describes the influence of Monet's work in the 20th century?

20th contains numbers and will easily stand out from the rest of the text. Use 20th as the key word to skim for in the passage.

Once you've quickly found the correct section of the passage to find the answer, focus upon the answer choices. Sometimes a choice will repeat word for word a portion of the passage near the answer. However, beware of such duplication – it may be a trap! More than likely, the correct choice will paraphrase or summarize the related portion of the passage, rather than being exactly the same wording.

For the answers that you think are correct, read them carefully and make sure that they answer the question. An answer can be factually correct, but it **MUST** answer the question asked. Additionally, two answers can both be seemingly

correct, so be sure to read all of the answer choices, and make sure that you get the one that BEST answers the question.

Some questions will not have a key word.

Example: Which of the following would the author of this passage likely agree with?

In these cases, look for key words in the answer choices. Then skim the passage to find where the answer choice occurs. By skimming to find where to look, you can minimize the time required.

Sometimes it may be difficult to identify a good key word in the question to skim for in the passage. In those cases, look for a key word in one of the answer choices to skim for. Often the answer choices can all be found in the same paragraph, which can quickly narrow your search.

Paragraph Focus

Focus upon the first sentence of each paragraph, which is the most important. The main topic of the paragraph is usually there.

Once you've read the first sentence in the paragraph, you have a general idea about what each paragraph will be about. As you read the questions, try to determine which paragraph will have the answer. Paragraphs have a concise topic. The answer should either obviously be there or obviously not. It will save time if you can jump straight to the paragraph, so try to remember what you learned from the first sentences.

Example: The first paragraph is about poets; the second is about poetry. If a question asks about poetry, where will the answer be? The second paragraph.

The main idea of a passage is typically spread across all or most of its paragraphs. Whereas the main idea of a paragraph may be completely different than the main idea of the very next paragraph, a main idea for a passage affects all of the paragraphs in one form or another.

Example: What is the main idea of the passage?

For each answer choice, try to see how many paragraphs are related. It can help to count how many sentences are affected by each choice, but it is best to see how many paragraphs are affected by the choice. Typically the answer choices will include incorrect choices that are main ideas of individual paragraphs, but not the entire passage. That is why it is crucial to choose ideas that are supported by the most paragraphs possible.

Eliminate Choices

Some choices can quickly be eliminated. “Andy Warhol lived there.” Is Andy Warhol even mentioned in the article? If not, quickly eliminate it.

When trying to answer a question such as “the passage indicates all of the following EXCEPT” quickly skim the paragraph searching for references to each choice. If the reference exists, scratch it off as a choice. Similar choices may be crossed off simultaneously if they are close enough.

In choices that ask you to choose “which answer choice does NOT describe?” or “all of the following answer choices are identifiable characteristics, EXCEPT which?” look for answers that are similarly worded. Since only one answer can be correct, if there are two answers that appear to mean the same thing, they must BOTH be incorrect, and can be eliminated.

Example:

- A.) changing values and attitudes
- B.) a large population of mobile or uprooted people

These answer choices are similar; they both describe a fluid culture. Because of their similarity, they can be linked together. Since the answer can have only one choice, they can also be eliminated together.

Contextual Clues

Look for contextual clues. An answer can be right but not correct. The contextual clues will help you find the answer that is most right and is correct. Understand the context in which a phrase is stated.

When asked for the implied meaning of a statement made in the passage, immediately go find the statement and read the context it was made in. Also, look for an answer choice that has a similar phrase to the statement in question. Example: In the passage, what is implied by the phrase “Churches have become more or less part of the furniture”?

Find an answer choice that is similar or describes the phrase “part of the furniture” as that is the key phrase in the question. “Part of the furniture” is a saying that means something is fixed, immovable, or set in their ways. Those are all similar ways of saying “part of the furniture.” As such, the correct answer choice will probably include a similar rewording of the expression.

Example: Why was John described as “morally desperate”.

The answer will probably have some sort of definition of morals in it. “Morals” refers to a code of right and wrong behavior, so the correct answer choice will likely have words that mean something like that.

Fact/Opinion

When asked about which statement is a fact or opinion, remember that answer choices that are facts will typically have no ambiguous words. For example, how long is a long time? What defines an ordinary person? These ambiguous words

of “long” and “ordinary” should not be in a factual statement. However, if all of the choices have ambiguous words, go to the context of the passage. Often a factual statement may be set out as a research finding.

Example: “The scientist found that the eye reacts quickly to change in light.”

Opinions may be set out in the context of words like thought, believed, understood, or wished.

Example: “He thought the Yankees should win the World Series.”

Opposites

Answer choices that are direct opposites are usually correct. The paragraph will often contain established relationships (when this goes up, that goes down). The question may ask you to draw conclusions for this and will give two similar answer choices that are opposites.

Example:

- A.) if other factors are held constant, then increasing the interest rate will lead to a decrease in housing starts
- B.) if other factors are held constant, then increasing the interest rate will lead to an increase in housing starts

Often these opposites will not be so clearly recognized. Don’t be thrown off by different wording, look for the meaning beneath. Notice how these two answer choices are really opposites, with just a slight change in the wording shown above. Once you realize these are opposites, you should examine them closely. One of these two is likely to be the correct answer.

Example:

- A.) if other factors are held constant, then increasing the interest rate will lead to a decrease in housing starts
- B.) when there is an increase in housing starts, and other things remaining equal, it is often the result of an increase in interest rates

Make Predictions

As you read and understand the passage and then the question, try to guess what the answer will be. Remember that most of the answer choices are wrong, and once you begin reading them, your mind will immediately become cluttered with answer choices designed to throw you off. Your mind is typically the most focused immediately after you have read the passage and question and digested its contents. If you can, try to predict what the correct answer will be. You may be surprised at what you can predict.

Quickly scan the choices and see if your prediction is in the listed answer choices. If it is, then you can be quite confident that you have the right answer. It still won't hurt to check the other answer choices, but most of the time, you've got it!

Answer the Question

It may seem obvious to only pick answer choices that answer the question, but IELTS can create some excellent answer choices that are wrong. Don't pick an answer just because it sounds right, or you believe it to be true. It **MUST** answer the question. Once you've made your selection, always go back and check it against the question and make sure that you didn't misread the question, and the answer choice does answer the question posed.

Benchmark

After you read the first answer choice, decide if you think it sounds correct or not. If it doesn't, move on to the next answer choice. If it does, make a mental note about that choice. This doesn't mean that you've definitely selected it as your answer choice, it just means that it's the best you've seen thus far. Go ahead and read the next choice. If the next choice is worse than the one you've already selected, keep going to the next answer choice. If the next choice is better than the choice you've already selected, then make a mental note about that answer choice.

As you read through the list, you are mentally noting the choice you think is right. That is your new standard. Every other answer choice must be benchmarked against that standard. That choice is correct until proven otherwise by another answer choice beating it out. Once you've decided that no other answer choice seems as good, do one final check to ensure that it answers the question posed.

New Information

Correct answers will usually contain the information listed in the paragraph and question. Rarely will completely new information be inserted into a correct answer choice. Occasionally the new information may be related in a manner than IELTS is asking for you to interpret, but seldom.

Example:

The argument above is dependent upon which of the following assumptions?
A.) Scientists have used Charles's Law to interpret the relationship.

If Charles's Law is not mentioned at all in the referenced paragraph and argument, then it is unlikely that this choice is correct. All of the information needed to answer the question is provided for you, and so you should not have to make guesses that are unsupported or choose answer choices that have unknown information that cannot be reasoned.

Key Words

Look for answer choices that have the same key words in them as the question.

Example:

Which of the following, if true, would best explain the reluctance of politicians since 1980 to support this funding?

Look for the key words "since 1980" to be referenced in the correct answer choice. Most valid answer choices would probably include a phrase such as "since 1980, politicians have..."

Valid Information

Don't discount any of the information provided in the passage, particularly shorter ones. Every piece of information may be necessary to determine the correct answer. None of the information in the passage is there to throw you off (while the answer choices will certainly have information to throw you off). If two seemingly unrelated topics are discussed, don't ignore either. You can be confident there is a relationship, or it wouldn't be included in the passage, and you are probably going to have to determine what is that relationship for the answer.

Time Management

In technical passages, do not get lost on the technical terms. Skip them and move on. You want a general understanding of what is going on, not a mastery of the passage.

When you encounter material in the selection that seems difficult to understand, it often may not be necessary and can be skipped. Only spend time trying to understand it if it is going to be relevant for a question. Understand difficult phrases only as a last resort.

Identify each question by type. Usually the wording of a question will tell you whether you can find the answer by referring directly to the passage or by using your reasoning powers. You alone know which question types you customarily handle with ease and which give you trouble and will require more time.

Final Warnings

Hedge Phrases Revisited

Once again, watch out for critical "hedge" phrases, such as likely, may, can, will often, sometimes, etc, often, almost, mostly, usually, generally, rarely, sometimes. Question writers insert these hedge phrases, to cover every

possibility. Often an answer will be wrong simply because it leaves no room for exception.

Example: Animals live longer in cold places than animals in warm places.

This answer choice is wrong, because there are exceptions in which certain warm climate animals live longer. This answer choice leaves no possibility of exception. It states that every animal species in cold places live longer than animal species in warm places. Correct answer choices will typically have a key hedge word to leave room for exceptions.

Example: In severe cold, a polar bear cub is likely to survive longer than an adult polar bear.

This answer choice is correct, because not only does the passage imply that younger animals survive better in the cold, it also allows for exceptions to exist. The use of the word “likely” leaves room for cases in which a polar bear cub might not survive longer than the adult polar bear.

Word Usage Questions

When asked how a word is used in the passage, don't use your existing knowledge of the word. The question is being asked precisely because there is some strange or unusual usage of the word in the passage. Go to the passage and use contextual clues to determine the answer. Don't simply use the popular definition you already know.

Switchback Words

Stay alert for “switchbacks”. These are the words and phrases frequently used to alert you to shifts in thought. The most common switchback word is “but”.

Others include although, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, even though, while, in spite of, despite, regardless of.

Avoid “Fact Traps”

Once you know which paragraph the answer will be in, focus on that paragraph. However, don't get distracted by a choice that is factually true about the paragraph. Your search is for the answer that answers the question, which may be about a tiny aspect in the paragraph. Stay focused and don't fall for an answer that describes the larger picture of the paragraph. Always go back to the question and make sure you're choosing an answer that actually answers the question and is not just a true statement.

The Writing Module

The Writing module of the IELTS consists of a 60 minute module with two tasks.

Task 1: A diagram or table will be presented to you and you must write out approximately a 150 word discussion on it within approximately 20 minutes. You must evaluate the diagram or table, organize your ideas, and develop them into a cohesive and coherent explanation.

Task 2: A topic will be presented to you and you must write out approximately a 250 word discussion on it within approximately 40 minutes. There is not a “correct” answer to the topic. You must evaluate the topic, organize your ideas, and develop them into a cohesive and coherent response.

You will be scored on how well you are able to utilize standard written English, organize and explain your thoughts, and support those thoughts with reasons and examples.

Brainstorm

Spend the first three to five minutes brainstorming out ideas. Write down any ideas you might have on the topic or table. The purpose is to extract from the recesses of your memory any relevant information. In this stage, anything goes down. Write down any idea, regardless of how good it may initially seem. You can use either the scratch paper provided or the word processor to quickly jot down your thoughts and ideas. The word processor is highly recommended though, particularly if you are a fast typist.

Strength through Diversity

The best papers will contain diversity of examples and reasoning. As you brainstorm consider different perspectives. Not only are there two sides to every issue, but there are also countless perspectives that can be considered. On any

issue, different groups are impacted, with many reaching the same conclusion or position, but through vastly different paths. Try to “see” the issue through as many different eyes as you can. Look at it from every angle and from every vantage point. The more diverse the reasoning used, the more balanced the paper will become and the better the score.

Example:

The issue of free trade is not just two sided. It impacts politicians, domestic (US) manufacturers, foreign manufacturers, the US economy, the world economy, strategic alliances, retailers, wholesalers, consumers, unions, workers, and the exchange of more than just goods, but also of ideas, beliefs, and cultures. The more of these angles that you can approach the issue from, the more solid your reasoning and the stronger your position.

Furthermore, don’t just use information as to how the issue impacts other people. Draw liberally from your own experience and your own observations. Explain a personal experience that you have had and your own emotions from that moment. Anything that you’ve seen in your community or observed in society can be expanded upon to further round out your position on the issue.

Pick a Main Idea

Once you have finished with your creative flow, stop and review it. Which idea were you able to come up with the most supporting information? It’s extremely important that you pick an angle that will allow you to have a thorough and comprehensive coverage of the topic or table. This is not about your personal convictions, but about writing a concise rational discussion of an idea.

Weed the Garden

Every garden of ideas gets weeds in it. The ideas that you brainstormed over are going to be random pieces of information of mixed value. Go through it methodically and pick out the ones that are the best. The best ideas are strong points that it will be easy to write a few sentences or a paragraph about.

Create a Logical Flow

Now that you know which ideas you are going to use and focus upon, organize them. Put your writing points in a logical order. You have your main ideas that you will focus on, and must align them in a sequence that will flow in a smooth, sensible path from point to point, so that the reader will go smoothly from one idea to the next in a logical path. Readers must have a sense of continuity as they read your paper. You don't want to have a paper that rambles back and forth.

Start Your Engines

You have a logical flow of main ideas with which to start writing. Begin expanding on the issues in the sequence that you have set for yourself. Pace yourself. Don't spend too much time on any one of the ideas that you are expanding upon. You want to have time for all of them. Make sure you watch your time. If you have twenty minutes left to write out your ideas and you have ten ideas, then you can only use two minutes per idea. It can be a daunting task to cram a lot of information down in words in a short amount of time, but if you pace yourself, you can get through it all. If you find that you are falling behind, speed up. Move through each idea more quickly, spending less time to expand upon the idea in order to catch back up.

Once you finish expanding on each idea, go back to your brainstorming session up above, where you wrote out your ideas. Go ahead and erase the ideas as you write about them. This will let you see what you need to write about next, and also allow you to pace yourself and see what you have left to cover.

First Paragraph

Your first paragraph should have several easily identifiable features. First, it should have a quick description or paraphrasing of the topic or table. Use your own words to briefly explain what the topic or table is about.

Second, you should explain your opinion of the topic or table and give an explanation of why you feel that way. What is your decision or conclusion on the topic or table?

Third, you should list your “writing points”. What are the main ideas that you came up with earlier? This is your opportunity to outline the rest of your paper. Have a sentence explaining each idea that you will go into further depth in additional paragraphs. If someone was to only read this paragraph, they should be able to get an “executive summary” of the entire paper.

Body Paragraph

Each of your successive paragraphs should expand upon one of the points listed in the main paragraph. Use your personal experience and knowledge to support each of your points. Examples should back up everything.

Conclusion Paragraph

Once you have finished expanding upon each of your main points, wrap it up. Summarize what you have said and covered in a conclusion paragraph. Explain once more your opinion of the topic or table and quickly review why you feel that way. At this stage, you have already backed up your statements, so there is no need to do that again. All you are doing is refreshing in the mind of the reader the main points that you have made.

Don't Panic

Panicking will not put down any more words on paper for you. Therefore, it isn't helpful. When you first see the topic or table, if your mind goes as blank as the page on which you have to write your paper, take a deep breath. Force yourself to mechanically go through the steps listed above.

Secondly, don't get clock fever. It's easy to be overwhelmed when you're looking at a page that doesn't seem to have much text, there is a lot of blank space further down, your mind is full of random thoughts and feeling confused, and the clock is ticking down faster than you would like. You brainstormed first so that

you don't have to keep coming up with ideas. If you're running out of time and you have a lot of ideas that you haven't expanded upon, don't be afraid to make some cuts. Start picking the best ideas that you have left and expand on those few. Don't feel like you have to write down and expand all of your ideas.

Check Your Work

It is more important to have a shorter paper that is well written and well organized, than a longer paper that is poorly written and poorly organized. Remember though that you will be penalized for answers shorter than the required minimum limit. Don't keep writing about a subject just to add words and sentences, and certainly don't start repeating yourself. Expand on the ideas that you identified in the brainstorming session and make sure that you save yourself a few minutes at the end to go back and check your work.

Leave time at the end, at least three minutes, to go back and check over your work. Reread and make sure that everything you've written makes sense and flows. Clean up any spelling or grammar mistakes that you might have made. If you see anything that needs to be moved around, such as a paragraph that would fit in better somewhere else, cut and paste it to that new location. Also, go ahead and erase any brainstorming ideas that you weren't able to expand upon and clean up any other extraneous information that you might have written that doesn't fit into your paper.

As you proofread, make sure there aren't any fragments or run-ons. Check for sentences that are too short or too long. If the sentence is too short, look to see if you have an identifiable subject and verb. If it is too long, break it up into two separate sentences. Watch out for any "big" words you may have used. It's good to use difficult vocabulary words, but only if you are positive that you are using them correctly. Your paper has to be correct, it doesn't have to be fancy. You're not trying to impress anyone with your vocabulary, just your ability to develop and express ideas.

Shortcut Keys

If you're taking the IELTS on the computer, spend some time on your keyboard getting familiar with the shortcut keys to cut, copy, and paste. It will help you to quickly move text around on your paper. First highlight the text you wish to move or copy and then type:

Ctrl+C = copy

Ctrl+X = cut

Ctrl+V = paste

You must hold down the ctrl key and then tap the "c", "x", or "v" key to perform the desired function.

Final Note

Depending on your test taking preferences and personality, the essay writing will probably be your hardest or your easiest section. You are required to go through the entire process of writing a paper very quickly, which can be quite a challenge.

Focus upon each of the steps listed above. Go through the process of creative flow first, generating ideas and thoughts about the topic or table. Then organize those ideas into a smooth logical flow. Pick out the ones that are best from the list you have created. Decide which main idea or angle of the topic or table you will discuss.

Create a recognizable structure in your paper, with an introductory paragraph explaining what you have decided upon, and what your main points will be. Use the body paragraphs to expand on those main points and have a conclusion that wraps up the topic or table.

Save a few moments to go back and review what you have written. Clean up any minor mistakes that you might have had and give it those last few critical

touches that can make a huge difference. Finally, be proud and confident of what you have written!

The Speaking Module

The Speaking Module of the IELTS consists of a 60 minute module with three parts.

Part 1

You will need to answer general questions about yourself, your homes/families, your jobs/studies, your interests, and a range of familiar topic areas in four to five minutes.

Part 2

You will be given a verbal prompt on a card and asked to speak about a particular topic (listed on the card). You will have one minute to prepare before speaking at length, and will need to speak between one and two minutes. Then the examiner will ask you one or two follow up questions.

Part 3

You and the examiner will engage in a discussion of more abstract concepts and issues which will be linked to the topic you discussed in Part 2. The discussion will last between four and five minutes.

You will be scored on how well you are able to communicate effectively in English.

Of all the test modules on IELTS, this is the easiest to prepare for. This is the test module that you can practice anywhere, in your car, in your room, on the phone, by yourself or with someone else. After you successfully pass IELTS, you will be speaking English a lot, so you might as well prepare by speaking it at every opportunity beforehand.

Exhausting the Possibilities

Part 1 will ask basic questions. There are only so many possible basic questions that can be asked about someone. You can easily be prepared for every possibility. Go through and write down all the possibilities and a good answer for each. When you're asked about your family, don't have to struggle to come up with descriptions for your family members. Practice ahead of time and know what you're going to say. Right now as you're reading this, stop and take a minute to answer each of these following questions. If you were asked these in an interview, what would you say?

1. Please describe yourself.
2. Please describe your family.
3. Please describe your home.
4. Please describe some of your interests.
5. Please describe your job.
6. Please describe your studies

This is important practice. Make sure that you can spend a minute or so answering each of these questions without having to take time to think of a good response. These are basic questions and you should have your basic answers ready.

Tell a Story

Movie making is a multi-billion dollar industry. Why? It's because everyone likes to hear a good story, and the best movies contain great stories. The Speaking Module interview can be a big aggravation for both sides. Usually, it is tense, uncomfortable, and boring for both the interviewer and the test taker.

Think about your favorite relatives. In many cases, they are your favorite because they are such raconteurs, or good storytellers. These are your aunts and uncles that can turn a simple trip to the grocery store into high adventure and will keep you captivated and entertained. Even if you're not a natural storyteller,

with a little thought and practice, even you can turn your dull past experiences into exciting exploits.

Stories are your strongest weapon for captivating the interviewer and demonstrating your mastery of speaking English. The questions in Part 2 of the Speaking Module literally beg for stories to be told. These need to be compelling stories, real time drama, and you're the hero. You want the interviewer begging for more, asking follow-up questions, eager to hear how it ends. Once you begin a quick exciting story, you set the tone of the interview, and you will determine what will be the follow-up questions.

The easiest way to prepare for these Part 2 questions is to scour your memory for any exciting instance in your past. Perhaps where you played a leadership role or accomplished a goal. These can be from any part of your past, during your education, at home with your family, projects at work, or anything that you might have had a part in. Identify the main characteristics of the story, you want to have things straight. Make sure you know the basics of what happened, who was involved, why it occurred, and how the events unfolded sequentially. You certainly don't want to stumble over the facts and repeat yourself during the interview.

One Size Fits All

These basic stories are building blocks. Just as a piece of lumber can be cut into many different shapes and have many completely unique uses, each of your stories does not only answer one unique question. Your stories are one size fits all. With practice you will find that you can use the same story to answer two seemingly unrelated questions.

For example, a question about teamwork and working under pressure can both be answered by a story about your experience playing intramural basketball. The story could describe how you had to work as a team in order to get into the

playoffs, spending time practicing together, coordinating plays, whatever was necessary for the team to advance. Alternatively, the story could focus upon the clutch shots that you made that season in order to win the game in the last few seconds of play under enormous pressure. The basic story is the same: your experiences playing basketball.

The questions were different, but you customized the story to fit the question. With practice you should be able to answer almost any question with just a few stock stories that can be customized.

Find the Bridges

Some questions will lend themselves more readily to a story than others. You must have a set of basic stories ready that can be modified to fit the occasion. You must “find the bridges” in the questions offered to make sure your stories get told.

In WWII, the US Army used Bailey bridges. Bailey bridges were bridges made of prefabricated steel sections that were carried around and could be thrown together at a moment’s notice, allowing the army to move quickly across any obstacle and get to where they wanted to go.

You need to find bridges, i.e. opportunities to tell your stories. Look for any chance to turn a standard question about anything, into a bridge to begin telling your story. For example, “What is your job title?”

On the surface that might not seem like the ideal bridge, but with a little insight your response might become:

“My job title is Product Line Manager. I was responsible for everything from the development of new products, to the obsolescence of old products. Marketing, sales, engineering, and production of the entire product line fell under my

responsibility. One of the products was even my own idea based on feedback I received from my interactions with our customers. In the first year, it alone had achieved a sales level of over...”

The key to remember is that just because a question is asked as a closed ended question (yes/no, or one word answers), doesn't mean that you have to answer it as a closed ended question. Answer the question asked, but then find a way to develop your answer and a bridge to a good story of yours. With an open mind, the most closed ended of questions can become a launch pad into a story.

Pregnant Pause

A good story can usually wind its way down a long path. There is always a danger that you will begin to bore the interviewer, who may wonder if an end is in sight. Some interviewers may get worried that they won't be able to get through the fifteen questions on their list during the allotted time. Therefore, find natural breaks in your story and pause for a second. If the interviewer maintains eye contact or asks continuation questions, then keep going. But this will give them a chance to stop the story and ask a different question if they are getting bored and want to move on.

Taking the Final Step

By trying to answer each of your Part 2 questions with a basic story, you will be able to transition nicely into the final step, Part 3. Part 3 questions are based upon your answers to Part 2 questions and will be asked at the interviewer's discretion. By using the story techniques listed above, you will have already determined the path that the interviewer will take with his follow-up Part 3 questions. The interviewer will naturally ask questions that tie into your story and you will already be prepared for those questions and will ace Part 3 as easily as the others.

Practice Makes Perfect

Don't try to answer every question by shooting from the hip. You'll spend most of your time trying to think of what happened and repeating yourself. Think of the classic stories that you could tell and then practice going over them with your friends, explaining how you successfully achieved the goal, or took charge and gave leadership to your group project. You don't want to have the story memorized, because it will become stale in the telling, but you want it to be smooth. This story must be live and in living color, where the interviewer can see himself taking part on the sidelines and watching the situation take place. Have your friends and family members quiz you by asking you random questions and see how well you can adapt to the question and give a lucid response.

Special Report: How Your IELTS Score is Viewed, and What This Means for You

For your IELTS score, you will be grouped in one of nine bands.

Band	Description	Meaning
9	Expert User	Fluent with complete understanding
8	Very Good User	Full operational command, occasional inaccuracies
7	Good User	Operational command, occasional inaccuracies
6	Competent User	Effective command, inaccuracies
5	Modest User	Partial command, many mistakes
4	Limited User	Limited command, frequent problems
3	Extremely Limited User	Only general understanding
2	Intermittent User	Only basic understanding with difficulty
1	Non User	No language ability
0	Did Not Take Test	N/A

If you are on the upper edge of one of these bands, it is definitely profitable to work your way into the next one by studying and practicing.

Special Report: What Jobs Require Which IELTS Scores

Below is a list of different jobs and what each IELTS score band means to that occupation. If you have a lower IELTS score, you might want to consider either studying more and trying to increase your score, or a less linguistically demanding position.

	Linguistically demanding academic courses	Linguistically less demanding academic courses	Linguistically demanding training courses	Linguistically less demanding training courses
Band	(Medicine, Law, Linguistics, Journalism, Library Studies)	(Agriculture, Pure Mathematics, Technology, Computer-based work, Telecommunications)	(Air Traffic Control, Engineering, Pure Applied Sciences, Industrial Safety)	(Animal Husbandry, Catering, Fire Services)
9.0-7.5	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
7.0	Probably Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.5	English Study Needed	Probably Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.0	English Study Needed	English Study Needed	Probably Acceptable	Acceptable
5.5	English Study Needed	English Study Needed	English Study Needed	Probably Acceptable