

# What is IELTS?

IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is the world's most popular English language test for higher education and global migration.

## How IELTS exams are marked

IELTS uses a band scoring system. There are nine bands.

Each of the four skills (Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking) is scored on a scale of 1.0 to 9.0, and students can score half points, (e.g. 6.5). Students will then be given an overall score. For context, the average entry into a British university will require an overall score of 5.5 to 7.5.

Each band corresponds to a description. Here is a closer look at these descriptions in more detail.

<b>Band 9: Expert user</b>	<b>Complete control: Correct usage and complete understanding.</b>
<b>Band 8: Very good user</b>	<b>Complete control with small errors: Errors may occur in new or stressful situations. Can form advanced and sophisticated arguments.</b>
<b>Band 7: Good user</b>	<b>Advanced control with errors in some situations: Can use sophisticated words, advanced grammar, and can understand challenging arguments.</b>
<b>Band 6: Competent user</b>	<b>Capable control with some errors and confusion: Can use advanced language but usually only in common and everyday topics.</b>
<b>Band 5: Modest user</b>	<b>Limited control of the language: Commits many errors and can have difficulty with general conversation.</b>
<b>Band 4: Limited user</b>	<b>Limited and low-level control of simple words: Can have trouble with simple conversations.</b>
<b>Band 3: Extremely limited user</b>	<b>Cannot follow simple conversations.</b>
<b>Band 2: Intermittent user</b>	<b>Uses simple words to express simple needs.</b>
<b>Band 1: Non user</b>	<b>Knows a few English words: No real understanding of English.</b>

# Frequently asked questions

## Questions about the exam

1. How many marks do I need to pass?
2. Where and when can I take the test?
3. How long do I have to wait to get my results?
4. How long is my IELTS Certificate valid for?
5. What happens if I don't get the score I need?
6. How long is the IELTS Test?
7. What topics are in the exam?
8. Is there a Grammar section in the IELTS Exam?
9. Do I need to study Grammar and Vocabulary?

Questions about the exam	
1	IELTS is not a pass/fail exam. It is a proficiency exam which shows student levels according to a Band Score from 0-9. However, if a student writes nothing, answers no questions, and does not speak in the Speaking paper, they could receive Band 0 – which would be considered a “fail”.
2	Students can take the test in over 130 countries all over the world. The school you work for should have information and contacts with the local IELTS test centre. Or you can check the <a href="#">IELTS (opens in a new tab)</a> website for dates and locations of IELTS tests.
3	Students will receive their IELTS test results 13 working days after sitting the exam.
4	IELTS Certificates are valid for 2 years.

5	If a student doesn't get the score they need, they can re-sit the test. There are no restrictions on how long you have to wait before taking another IELTS exam.
6	In total, the IELTS test is about 3 hours. (Reading and Writing 2 hours, Listening 40 minutes and Speaking up to 14 minutes). However, students will be at the test centre for longer than 3 hours, as they need to register when they arrive and may have a gap between the Reading, Writing and Listening and the Speaking papers. They may even do the Speaking exam on a different day.
7	The topics students will encounter in the IELTS exam are varied. However, for the Academic paper you can advise students that they should be familiar with academic topics, for example, geography, history, sciences, technology. Be sure that you make it clear that you cannot give them an exhaustive list of every possible topic in the exam. For the General Training paper, students should be familiar with every day topics that they may encounter while living and working in an English-speaking country, for example, jobs, notices, adverts. Using a course book in your lessons will help familiarise you and your students with the topics that may come up in the IELTS exam.
8	There is no specific Grammar or Vocabulary paper in the IELTS exam. Students' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is tested integrally throughout all the papers.
9	Yes. Although there are no specific sections on grammar and vocabulary, your students need to be able to recognise and use a wide variety of grammatical structures and range of vocabulary.

### Questions about IELTS preparation courses

1. How long is my IELTS preparation course?
2. What can I do outside class to help me prepare for the IELTS test?

### 3. What level of English do I need to start an IELTS preparation course?

1	The length of an IELTS course depends on your school. Your school may have a specific IELTS preparation course in place and the length varies. It also depends on the level of the students in the class. However, typically the minimum length of an IELTS preparation course is between 4-6 weeks.
2	You should encourage your students to read and listen as much as possible outside of class. Some students may believe that only reading IELTS past papers will help them improve and pass the exam. However, you should encourage your students to read as widely as possible, not only IELTS past papers.
3	As IELTS is a multi-level exam, you may find that your students have differing abilities. Some schools require students to reach a certain level before taking an IELTS course (Intermediate or Upper Intermediate). However, you may find students who are at Pre-Intermediate level want to take the exam. Elementary students would probably struggle to complete an IELTS course, so most schools encourage students to improve their General English before starting an IELTS preparation course.

## What makes IELTS an international exam?

### Content

If an exam contains examples of English from around the world, it can be considered international. An exam which only uses British English, for example, might only be considered relevant to candidates who are planning to live, work, or study in the UK. An exam which contains examples of different varieties of English, for example American, Canadian or Australian, can be said to prepare students for a wider international experience.

### **Use**

An exam which is accepted by institutions and organisations around the world can be considered an international exam. In contrast to a national exam, for example, that is required to graduate from secondary school or qualifications that are not transferable between different countries.

### **Location**

If an exam is conducted in an international context, it can be considered an international exam in different countries around the world. An exam that is conducted and accepted in only one country, and is not transferable to other countries, cannot be considered an international exam.

### **Test Standards**

An exam that is written and conducted internally, for example within a school or university, may not be considered an international exam. An exam that is created by an international team of writers, and is marked and verified by external experts, can be considered an international exam.

### **Candidates**

If an exam is accessible to candidates from all over the world, the exam can be considered international. An exam that requires specific knowledge of country-specific or culture-specific topics may not be considered an international exam.

### **Who Studies IELTS**

Although it is hard to define a 'typical' IELTS student, there are certain goals and objectives that students share:

- Students in secondary schools or 6th form centres may take the IELTS exam in order to apply for undergraduate study in an English speaking country.
- Students who wish to study at a post-graduate level in an English speaking country may need IELTS as part of their application process.
- Some students who wish to study at undergraduate or post-graduate level, and do not get a high enough grade, can take the IELTS exam to get a place on a

pre-sessional course. You will read about this in more depth throughout the course.

- Students who plan to live and work abroad may take the IELTS exam as part of their visa process.
- Students who plan to work in a professional context in an English-speaking country may take IELTS. For example nursing, medicine, or law.

## Structure and content of the IELTS exam

Here is a brief overview of the structure and content of the IELTS exam.

### Structure

Listening	30 minutes + 10 minutes to transfer answers to answer sheet	Listen to 4 recordings: 2 conversations, 2 monologues. Answer 10 questions on each recording. 40 questions total.
Reading	60 minutes	Read 3 texts. Answer 13 or 14 questions on each text. 40 questions total.
Writing	60 minutes	Two tasks. The first task can vary, but the second task is always an essay.
Speaking	11-14 minutes	Answer questions about yourself and everyday topics. Give a short monologue based on a topic card.

The Listening, Reading, and Writing tests are always taken in this order on the same day. The Speaking test can be scheduled on the same day or in the week before or after the other sections.

### **Content**

In terms of content, students are tested on their proficiency in English; this is not an exam which tests students' general knowledge of different topics. This is a concept that students can struggle with, particularly if they are studying in a school context. Some students can be used to memorising information for an exam, so being told that they can learn a list of common words or be familiar with certain grammatical structures that may or may not come up in the exam can be a new concept for your students.

The IELTS test is designed to test your students' ability to deal with a range of texts, situations, and tasks that reflect real life. For example, in the Speaking paper, students are required to give a monologue on a topic for 2 minutes. For students who are planning to work abroad, this reflects the kind of mini presentation they may be required to give in a work environment. For students who are planning to study abroad, a 2 minute presentation reflects a short seminar or class presentation.

# Academic or general training?

The table below shows the main differences between the two tests.

	Academic IELTS	General Training IELTS
Listening	Students sit the same paper regardless of which test they are taking.	
Reading	Students read three long texts. Texts are authentic and are taken from books, journals, magazines, and newspapers.	Text 1 contains two or three short factual texts on topics related to everyday life. Section 2 contains two short factual texts focusing on work related issues. Section 3 contains one longer, more complex text on a topic of general interest.
Writing	In Task 1, students are presented with a graph, table, chart, or diagram and are asked to describe, summarise, or explain the information in their own words. In Task 2, students are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument, or problem.	In Task 1, students are presented with a situation and are asked to write a letter requesting information or explaining the situation. In Task 2, students are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument, or problem. The essay can be slightly more personal in style than the Academic Writing Task 2 essay.
Speaking	Students sit the same paper regardless of which test they are taking.	

# Computer-based test

In some countries, it is possible to take the computer-based IELTS exam. The computer-based version and paper version are the same in terms of content and difficulty, and the computer based exam is not easier than the paper based exam.

The timing is also the same for each section: 60 minutes for Reading and 30 minutes for Listening; although, there is no extra transfer time in the computer based test. For the Writing paper, students can choose to take it on the computer or on paper.

The Speaking paper is conducted face-to-face and is not taken on the computer. At the time of writing, the computer-based IELTS test is only available for the Academic IELTS Test.

In terms of marking, the Reading and Listening papers are marked by a computer and the Writing and Speaking papers are marked in the same way as the paper-based version – by qualified examiners.

## Marking the reading and listening tests

When you do practice reading and listening exams in class, either IELTS past papers or practice IELTS exams from a coursebook, you will have an answer key. When you use this answer key, you will be able to give your students a mark out of 40. However, you will probably find that your students want to know how this

converts to a band score. There are 40 questions in total and each question is worth one mark.

The band scores for the Academic and General Reading paper differ. Select [this link](#)

[\(opens in a new tab\)](#)

to see the IELTS scoring in more detail.

## Assessing the speaking test

The IELTS Speaking exam is also assessed according to band descriptors. Each IELTS speaking exam is conducted by a trained examiner who receives regular face-to-face training. All Speaking exams are recorded to ensure the examiners are working to the correct standard.

Speakings are assessed according to these criteria:

**Fluency and Coherence:** Can the student express ideas and opinions clearly and coherently without pauses and hesitations?

**Lexical Resource:** Can the student use a wide range of vocabulary appropriately and naturally?

**Grammatical Range and Accuracy:** Can the student use a wide range of grammatical structures without making too many mistakes?

**Pronunciation:** Can the student speak clearly and use pronunciation features, such as word stress and intonation, naturally?

Students will get a band score out of 9 for each of the above criteria, and their final score will be an average of these.

Click the link below to practice IELTS tests

<https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/take-ielts/prepare/free-ielts-practice-tests/listening>