

Frequently asked questions from test takers and candidates



What IELTS preparation books do you recommend?

An order form for the 'Official IELTS Practice Materials', volumes 1 and 2, is available at www.ieltsessentials.com/prepare/for_purchase.aspx. This page also includes a list of other popular preparation materials, however, please note that these books are not produced by or officially endorsed by IDP.

I'm worried that if the IELTS examiner does not like me or is in a bad mood they will give me a low mark.

The mood of the examiner will not affect your result. Remember that every Speaking test is recorded and every examiner is monitored closely to be fair to every candidate. The questions are designed to assess how well you can use your English (not to judge your opinions). Every examiner uses the same clearly defined IELTS assessment criteria to rate your performance.

Should I choose British Council or IDP?

IDP Education and British Council are joint owners of the test alongside Cambridge English Language Assessment. The IELTS test itself will be the same no matter where you sit it and all IELTS examiners use the same assessment criteria to mark your performance. This means that wherever you sit the test, it will be of the same level of difficulty and the examiners will be marking to the same standard. All IELTS examiners are monitored to ensure consistent standards are maintained across test centres managed by IDP and British Council right around the world.



What is the best way to improve my language skills?

It takes time to learn and improve your language skills. One of the best ways to improve your English is to take an English course, where you will receive helpful advice and feedback from a teacher. Also, make sure you practise your English skills every day - speak to friends, listen to English radio, read English newspapers and write something in English every day.

Practising sample questions will also ensure you are familiar with the test format. Download a helpsheet with other advice from www.idp.com/pdf/IELTSPauseReflectPrepare16052011.pdf

Will an IELTS result that is more than two years old be accepted

You are advised to contact your chosen institution/organisation directly to see if it will accept an IELTS result that is more than two years old

How many correct answers do I need to get in the Listening or Reading test to get a particular band score?

A guide to how IELTS Listening and Reading band scores are calculated can be found at www.ieltsessentials.com/results/about_your_result.aspx



What score do I need to pass IELTS?

There is no pass or fail mark for the IELTS test. Each organisation sets its own IELTS score requirements for entry. This means the entry score you need for one university, profession or visa application may be different to the entry score you need for another. Check out the different requirements at www.IELTSessentials.com/whoaccepts or check with the institution/organisation to which you are applying. You can read more about IELTS at www.IELTSessentials.com

Will I lose marks if I write less than 250 words for Task 2 in the Writing test?

The instructions for each task are very important. Task 2 Writing asks for 250 words; if you fall short by 10 words or more you may lose a half-band. (There is no penalty for providing more than 250 words.)



Will my IELTS test centre send my test results to universities overseas?

Yes, your IELTS test centre will send your results to up to five universities if you request this when you take the test. Regular post within your country is normally free (excluding India) and the cost of a courier or overseas postage will be passed onto you. Your IELTS application form gives you this option every time you sit an IELTS test. If you have already sat the test and would now like your results sent to universities, then you can contact your test centre and ask it to send your results.

If I have taken other English tests can this count towards my IELTS score?

IELTS is a separate test and therefore no other test results will contribute towards your IELTS score.

I am very nervous about my Speaking test. How can I control my nerves?

It is completely natural to feel nervous before a test. Did you know that feedback from IELTS test takers has shown that they are relieved they took their Speaking test with an examiner rather than with a computer? For example, the first part of the Speaking test is designed to help calm your nerves. Unlike computer-based speaking tests, you are in a private room. No other test takers will be able to hear you or distract you. Also, because you are speaking to a person, not a computer, you can take your time and don't have to rush to keep up with the computer.

I heard it is easy to cheat at an IELTS test. Is this true?

All IELTS test centres ensure tight security at all times. Personal belongings such as mobile phones, music devices and books cannot be taken into the test room and strict identity checks are carried out at test entry and during the test. These security measures are in place to ensure that no test takers are disadvantaged by others who attempt to cheat.

Do not trust anyone offering IELTS results for sale. These promises are fake.

Report IELTS scams or cheating to security.ielts@idp.com

When does the Speaking test take place?

The Speaking component of the IELTS test is conducted separately to the Listening, Reading and Writing components. The Speaking test takes between 11-14 minutes. Your test centre will inform you of your Speaking test details. If you have booked your test and not received these details, please contact your test centre.

If I have already taken the test, is there a waiting period before I can take the test again?

No, there is no waiting period before you can book another IELTS test. However, please bear in mind that if you did not get the result you wanted you may need to invest in further study before taking the test again. Just sitting the test again and again will not improve your result. Advice for anyone preparing to take the test again can be found at www.ieltsessentials.com/resitting

Will I lose marks if I write my answers in capital letters?

The presence or absence of capitalisation is not assessed in itself in the IELTS test. For example, if a correct answer in the Listening or Reading test is 'Apple' you could write 'apple' or 'APPLE' and not lose marks. In the Writing test, 'I AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT' is OK, as is 'i agree with the statement'. The only thing to worry about in the Writing test is to make sure that the capitalisation, or lack of it, doesn't lead to confusion about punctuation. In other words, if your full-stops aren't clearly marked, the reader might think that the use of a capital letter signifies the start of a sentence and therefore you will lose marks for punctuation.

What IELTS score is required for immigration?

If you are taking IELTS for migration/permanent residency purposes you must ensure that you check the IELTS requirements set out by the immigration authority of the country to which you are applying. Each country sets its own entry requirements.

Why do we have to provide a fingerscan/fingerprint in order to take IELTS?

The IELTS partners place great importance on maintaining the highest-level security at all times during the testing **process**. Testday photography and finger scans protect the results you earn through your hard work by ensuring that each set of IELTS results are earned by the same person sitting all four components of the test. Finger scan data is not disclosed to any organisation by the test centre and you can request a copy of your finger scan from the test centre if you wish.



I have taken the test more than once. Why do my results vary?

There are many reasons why your results can vary between tests. For example, a common reason for a lower result for Writing is not responding to all parts of the task in Writing Task 2. IELTS test questions are developed carefully and trialled extensively to ensure that all tests are of a comparable level of difficulty and assessment is very closely monitored to ensure all tests are marked to the same standard. It is possible that you felt more confident and relaxed when you first took the test.

If you are not happy with your result, you can apply for an 'Enquiry on Results' at your test centre within six weeks of the

test date. The enquiry fee will be fully refunded if your band score changes.

Keep in mind that when you repeat the test, the examiner cannot see your previous test papers or test scores. The examiner is assessing your English skills based solely on the language you use during that particular test. So it is important to fully demonstrate your language skills each time you take the test.

I have taken the test several times and keep getting different scores. Should I request a re-mark/Enquiry on Results process?

Keep in mind that when you repeat the test, the examiner cannot see your previous test papers or test scores. The examiner is assessing your English skills based solely on the language you use during that particular test. So it is important to fully demonstrate your language skills each time you take the test.

If you are unhappy with your result you have the right to request a re-mark. You should contact your test centre and request an 'Enquiry on Results'. There is a fee for this service, which will be refunded if your score is changed. During a re-mark **process**, your test is reviewed by a senior examiner and not by an examiner at the test centre where the test was taken.

The Enquiry on Results request must be made to the test centre at which you sat the test within six weeks of the test date.

What topics are covered in the IELTS Speaking test?

The topics for the Speaking test will vary from test to test, but will be general enough so that test takers from all over the world will have something they can say. The key thing to remember when you are taking your Speaking test is that the examiner is assessing the English you produce, not judging your opinions. If the topic is something that you know little about - or do not have any interest in - it is OK to say that. It is also OK to make something up from your imagination that relates to the topic.

For some sample Speaking questions visit our website,

www.ieltsessentials.com/prepare/sample_questions.aspx#Speaking



Why are my results so different? I have taken the test before and got very different results.

There are many reasons why your results can vary between tests. For example, it is possible that you felt more confident and relaxed when you first took the test. Another common reason for a lower result for Writing is not responding to all parts of the task in Writing Task 2.

If you are not happy with your result you can apply for an Enquiry on Results at your test centre within six weeks of the test date. The enquiry fee will be fully refunded if your band score changes.

Please be assured that IELTS test development and assessment criteria are very closely monitored to ensure that all tests are of a comparable level of difficulty and that all tests are marked to the same standard.

1. Familiarity with the assessment criteria (often referred to as the 'band descriptors') is strongly recommended. These band descriptors show that Writing and Speaking are each marked according to four criteria, which are each worth 25%. See how scores are calculated.

2. Once familiar with the assessment criteria, uncovering any underlying issues could be easier with the assistance of a qualified ESL teacher. Sometimes these issues can be quickly identified, such as use of simple sentence structures only without demonstrating to the examiner your ability to write sentences with complex structures.

3. Examiners often find that candidates have addressed only part of Task 2 in the Writing section of the test. The question, which may have several elements, must be addressed in its entirety by candidates to demonstrate understanding of the written instructions. When a candidate does not address each part of the task, the examiner is not able to award higher than a band 5 for the criteria of Task Response, which is worth 25% of the total mark for Task 2. (To see this for yourself, read down the column headed 'Task Response' on the assessment criteria for Writing Task 2.) This is a common error and it can be remedied by carefully analysing how many elements there are to the task.

As an example, consider this past test question from the Writing test. This was a Task 2 that appeared on the test some years ago.

- You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.
- Write about the following topic-Some people say that university students should pay the full cost of their education. Others say that university education should be free.
- Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.
- Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge and experience.
- Write at least 250 words.

A response to this particular question must address three points: 1. The view that university students should pay fees covering the full cost of their studies; 2. The view that university students should study for free; 3. Your own personal opinion. If a candidate only addresses two of these points in their response, the examiner must award a band 5 against the criteria for Task Response.

Let's say the candidate is a very competent writer and scores band 8 against each of the other three criteria in Task 2. For Task 2 their result is the average of all four criteria. $5 + 8 + 8 + 8 = 30$ divided by $4 = 7.25$. This person would then be awarded a 7 for Task 2. Task 2 is worth twice as many marks as Task 1. Let's say this person scored an 8 for Task 1. This then means their total result for the Writing section of the IELTS test would be calculated as $8 + 7 + 7 = 23$ divided by $3 = 7.67$.

4. IDP Education offers free IELTS Masterclasses for people striving to achieve an overall band 7 or above. These 90-minute classes are designed for people who are already familiar with the test and seek more information about the assessment criteria and how to avoid common errors.

To check if there is an upcoming IELTS Masterclass in your country visit www.IELTSessentials.com/masterclass or contact your test centre,

5. The website IELTSessentials.com contains helpful guidance for anyone preparing for the test. You can download a free IELTS Essentials pack for tips and a preparation checklist.

Are IELTS results valid for three years if I'm migrating to Australia?

The best way to verify this is to check with the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) directly as it is DIAC that makes these decisions, including the minimum IELTS results needed for each visa category. These decisions are not made by IDP Education.



I am disappointed with my IELTS Writing test score.

During a re-mark, your test will be comprehensively reviewed by a senior examiner to ensure that there are no administrative errors in your results. Before taking the test again, consider these points.

- Check how the Writing component is assessed. When marking the Writing test, examiners award marks across four criteria. You can download a summary of the assessment criteria from www.ieltsessentials.com/results/assessment_criteria.aspx
- Examiners often see tests where parts of the question in Task 2 are not answered. This is a common mistake. Demonstrate your writing skills to the examiner by answering each aspect of the question in Task 2.
- Devote twice as much time to writing your answer to Task 2 as it is worth twice as many marks as Task 1.

If you repeat the test, keep in mind that the examiner does not know your previous scores. The examiner will assess your English skills based solely on the language you use during that particular test. Therefore, it is important to fully demonstrate your language skills each time you take the test.



How can my Writing score be lower than when I sat the test for the first time, more than two years ago?

There are four criteria used to score the Writing tasks and each criterion is worth 25%. One of the criteria is whether all parts of the question have been answered (which demonstrates ability to produce a written answer that is appropriate to the question being asked).

Task 2 in the Writing component is worth twice as many marks as Task 1 and therefore it is extremely important to answer all elements of the Task 2 question. A response that does not address all aspects of the question will have a negative impact on the score, even though the other three Writing criteria (vocabulary, grammatical range and the linking of ideas to communicate effectively) may be scored highly. It is possible that this was the reason for a different score when you sat the test the second time.

As an example, consider this past test question from the Writing test.

- You should spend about 40 minutes on this task.
- Write about the following topic-Some people say that university students should pay the full cost of their education. Others say that university education should be free.
- Discuss both these views and give your own opinion.
- Give reasons for your answer and include any relevant examples from your own knowledge and experience.
- Write at least 250 words.

To score highly on this question, the answer must address three points: 1. The view that university students should pay fees covering the full cost of their studies; 2. The view that university students should study for free; and 3. Your own personal opinion.

As well as making sure the Task 2 question is fully addressed, consider whether you have covered all the points that are required in Task 1. Also remember that writing an under-length essay will also lead to a lower score. The website IELTSEssentials.com contains helpful guidance for anyone preparing for the test. You can download a free IELTS Essentials pack for tips and a preparation checklist.

Are IELTS examiners fair? / Can I trust IELTS examiners? / How do I know if IELTS examiners are being fair?

Please be reassured that examiners do not know how you will use your result or what score you need.

It is also important to know that different examiners mark different the Speaking and Writing sections of the test; for example, one examiner will mark your Speaking test while another examiner will mark your Writing test. Your results are also entered into the IELTS results database twice, by two different people, to ensure that no errors are made.

Every examiner is carefully trained and monitored to ensure they mark your test according to very strict assessment criteria. You are advised to refer to the public version of the assessment criteria at www.ieltsessentials.com/criteria as it may help you determine areas in which you can improve. Finally, please remember that an IELTS examiner can only assess the sample of English you produce on each individual test day. They have no access to answers you have given in previous tests.

Do I lose marks for writing more words? / Do I get extra marks if I write more words in my Writing test??

If you are asked to write "at least 250 words" and you write fewer than 250 words you will lose marks. You will not automatically lose marks for writing more than 250 words, but bear in mind that the more you write the greater the chance you might make a mistake. Instead of writing more words, leave enough time to review and refine your work.

IELTS examiners give lower marks to stop people getting visas. / I do not trust IELTS examiners.

Please be reassured that examiners do not know how you will use your result or what score you need. It is also important to know that different examiners mark different sections of your test; for example, one examiner will mark your Speaking test

while another examiner will mark your Writing test. Your results are also entered into the IELTS results database twice, by two different people, to ensure that no errors are made.

Finally, please remember that IELTS examiners can only assess the sample of English you produce on each individual test day. They have no access to answers you have given in previous tests. Every examiner is carefully trained and monitored to ensure they mark your test according to very strict assessment criteria. You are advised to refer to the public version of the assessment criteria at www.ieltsessentials.com/criteria, which may help you determine areas in which you can improve.

What is the difference between IDP Education and British Council IELTS tests?

IELTS test centres are managed by both IDP Education and British Council. Wherever you sit the test, it will be exactly the same test with the same level of difficulty. The examiners for both IDP Education and British Council are all trained to the same standard, use the same assessment criteria and are monitored in the same way. This means you can choose the test centre that is most convenient for you and be reassured that the test will be the same.



Will I lose marks for using the wrong answer sheet in my IELTS Writing test?

Do not worry if you have continued your answer on the wrong answer sheet. This happens sometimes and the test centre is used to working out which part of a script is Task 1 and which is Task 2. The examiner will have no problem in identifying one task from the other.

Can I reschedule/change my Speaking test time?

You should contact your test centre as soon as possible to check whether it is possible to arrange another time for your Speaking test.



Can I use capital letters/upper case letters to answer the Listening test questions?

You can use upper case, lower case or sentence case to answer the IELTS Listening and Reading test questions.

Why does a re-mark take so much time?

A re-mark is quite a detailed and lengthy **process** as there are checks and balances in place to ensure that a candidate's performance has been accurately assessed. Here is what happens during the **process**.

- Your test paper, or your recording during the Speaking test, is couriered to either IDP Education or British Council head office.
- Your test paper is then re-marked by a an examiner or clerical marker at head office who are unaware of your original result
- Your test centre is then notified of the re-mark result and if the mark has changed, it will issue a new TRF.

What qualifications do IELTS examiners have?

All IELTS examiners are qualified and experienced English language specialists with graduate qualifications in TESOL (or equivalent) and experience teaching English to adults. Writing and Speaking assessments are conducted by trained and certified examiners. The examiners work to clearly defined criteria and are subject to extensive and detailed quality control procedures.

Every examiner is carefully trained and monitored to ensure they mark your test according to very strict assessment criteria. You are advised to refer to the public version of the assessment criteria at www.ieltsessentials.com/criteria as it may help you determine areas in which you can improve.

Remember that IELTS examiners can only assess the sample of English you produce on each individual test day. They have no access to answers you have given in previous tests

Is there a dress code for the IELTS test?

There is no formal dress code for IELTS, but the photo taken on test day will be the one that appears on your IELTS Test Report Form. Cultural sensitivities have been considered and special arrangements may be in place for female candidates in certain countries. If you wear glasses, you will be asked to remove them before your photo is taken. For more information, you should call the test centre where you plan to take the test. You can find the contact details of all our test centres at www.IELTSessentials.com/testcentres

How can I write about a topic I know nothing about?

Task 2 of the IELTS Writing test assesses your ability to express an opinion relevantly and clearly in English. Needless to say, the opinions will have to address a topic of some sort. The topic will never be highly specialised or technical (like software engineering). The topic of tourism is a good example of something that IELTS believes is sufficiently universal and accessible for all candidates to discuss. You may never have considered the pros and cons of tourism but you will presumably have personal experience of tourism and tourists both within and outside your own country.

Don't overthink the question. Don't imagine you need to have specialised knowledge. The ideas you come up with must be relevant, but they don't necessarily need to be very sophisticated. As an example, let's consider the topic of tourism in relation to the following questions: What problems can be caused by too many people visiting a country and what can be done to fix these problems?

If you do not have much knowledge of the topic of tourism then you could say this in your response but give an opinion, to the best of your ability. You might be able to think of examples from the news or films that you have seen that could help you. Remember that there will be no 'right' or 'wrong' answer.

For example, you could write something like this:

'Personally I am not familiar with the topic of tourism. I do not go on holiday and therefore am unable to comment fully on the subject. However, I imagine that the impact of tourism on the environment could be negative - due to the increasing number of flights. Tourism is not as important in the country where I live but, undoubtedly, deciding how to control the negative effects of tourism is difficult and a problem for governments all over the world.'

In the Writing task 2 and indeed throughout the IELTS test, you are not assessed on your knowledge of the topic but rather on the standard of your English. This is also true for the Speaking test. The topics will vary from test to test, but will be general enough so that test takers from all over the world will have something they can say. IELTS test questions are extensively tested with people from different cultures to ensure they are understood before they are used in a real test.

The key thing to remember is that the examiner is not testing your opinions in this task. If the topic is something that you know little about - or do not have any interest in - it is OK to say that. It is also OK to make something up from your imagination that relates to the topic.

Why are my results delayed and how do I make a complaint?

We do understand that the delay to your results is frustrating and that your IELTS result may be required as part of your application for employment, study or migration. These are all important, life-changing applications and we understand and respect this. If this is the case, and you are concerned that this delay to results may mean missing your application deadline, you are advised to contact the organisation to which you are applying.

As your test centre may already have explained, on very rare occasions, results may be delayed for security reasons. As stated in the 'Declaration' section of the IELTS application form, which you have signed and acknowledged: "I understand that my result may not be issued 13 days after the test if any of the IELTS Test Partners deem it necessary to review any matter associated with my test, including making enquiries as to whether any rules or regulations have been breached, as outlined in the IELTS Notice to Candidates. I understand that in exceptional circumstances I may be required to re-take one or more IELTS components."

It is also important to note that results will not be altered or improve, under any circumstances, to compensate for these necessary procedures to take place. If you would like to make a formal complaint, please contact ieltsocialmedia@idp.com or contact your local test centre.



General complaint about IDP Education that is vague/unspecific.

It sounds as though something happened with your test. Would you like to talk to someone about this in more detail? We know how important test day is to you and other candidates and we strive to make sure that you have the best possible environment so you can do your best. Please send an email to ielts.further.assists@idp.com with the details of your test and the nature of your complaint and our team will investigate and get back to you as soon as possible.

