

PREPARATION  
**IELTS**  
assistant



IELTS SPEAKING TIPS AND SECRETS  
YOU WISH YOU FOUND EARLIER

# IELTS SPEAKING TIPS

VIRTUAL EDUCATION



Dear Student! Here is the information you should familiarise yourself with before you start practising IELTS speaking. Read the information very carefully.

## #1 IELTS SPEAKING ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

Do you know what aspects IELTS examiners look at while assessing your speaking performance?

You get 1 - 9 for each of the 4 criteria. Then they are added together and that score is divided by 4. For example, pronunciation 6, fluency 6, grammar 7, vocabulary 7. You will get  $(6+6+7+7) \div 4 = 6,5$

### 25% - Pronunciation

- 1) you don't have to speak English like a native speaker; you won't be marked on your accent
- 2) it's ok to have a different accent
- 2) you should speak clearly
- 3) you should pronounce all the words correctly
- 4) you should put the stress in words properly

### 25% - Fluency and coherence

- 1) speaking fluently does not mean speaking fast, you just need to sound natural (recall the way you speak when you chat with your friends)
- 3) you shouldn't sound mechanical; intonation is VERY important
- 4) you should expand your answers
- 5) connect your sentences and ideas using linking words, phrases and linking devices

### 25% - Grammar

- 1) you should use grammatical structures correctly
- 2) you should try to use a variety of structures, otherwise an examiner will never guess that you know a lot
- 3) don't overuse advanced structures as this will not sound natural and you will be marked down on fluency

## 25% - Lexical Resource

- 1) you should use topical vocabulary
- 2) try to avoid repetition (using the same words); try to use synonyms

# #2 IELTS SPEAKING TEST STRUCTURE + EXAMPLE

Are you sure you know what to expect during your real IELTS speaking test?  
Here is the FULL IELTS SPEAKING TEST: SAMPLE + TIPS

## INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS - NOT RATED

**WHAT FOR:** to identify a candidate

**TIPS:** give very quick and short answers;  
**don't** start a conversation about irrelevant topics

⌚ Time: about 30 seconds

### EXAMPLE:

Examiner: My name is John Johnson. What is your full name? (*comment: your full name is your first name and surname*)

You: I'm Sunita Singh.

Examiner: What shall I call you? (*comment: give the name friends and relatives call you by*)

You: Sunita.

Examiner: Sunita, where do you come from?

You: I'm from Delhi in India.

Examiner: Can I see your identification? (*comment: give the examiner your ID document*)

You: Here you are.

(*comment: if the examiner did not ask you all of these questions, don't worry, it's ok*)

Examiner: Thank you.

## PART 1

### STRUCTURE:

- on average 9-10 questions (can be fewer, can be more, depending on how long your answers are)
- the first 3 questions will be about your daily life (the examiner will choose one (more seldom 2 of the following topics:


1) work or studies  
2) country

3) hometown  
4) family

5) home

+ 2 more topics from Section 1 of IELTS Speaking Assistant

**TIPS:** don't give one-word answers and don't give too long answers; **allow** approximately 15 seconds per answer

 Time: about 4-5 minutes

**EXAMPLE:**

Examiner: Now I'm going to ask you a few questions about yourself. Do you work or are you a student?

You: I'm a student and this is my final year at school. Now I'm working hard in order to get passing grades to enter college in Canada. If everything is ok, six months from now I'll already be studying there. I want to major in Journalism as I like writing essays and articles and want to work for some famous magazine or newspaper. I'm going to do a three-year course at Seneca college.

Examiner: Please, describe your hometown.

You: Well, I come from Delhi which is the capital of India and by far the largest city in the country. It's a densely-populated place, so the city is always crowded and noisy. Also, Delhi has the highest number of vehicles, therefore traffic congestion is a norm here. Also, it has very rich history. For this reason, it's really popular with tourists who come to visit our wonderful temples and experience Indian culture. It's never boring to live here as the city provides a wide array of entertainment options. It is also home to our government and all major institutions.

Examiner: Is that a big city or a small place?

You: Oh, it's a huge sprawling city. No, to say 'huge' is to say nothing. Well, if you manage to view the city from a tall building, you get the feeling that it doesn't end. It just takes hours to go from one side of the city to the other.

Examiner: Thank you. Now let's talk about swimming. Do you like swimming?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: How can children learn to swim?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: What is the difference between swimming in the pool and swimming in the sea?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: Thank you. Now let's talk about noise. Do any noises bother you?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: Are there any sounds that you like?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: Are cities becoming noisier?


You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: Thank you.

**STRUCTURE:**

- 1 cue card
- 1 minute to prepare the answer
- 1-2 minutes to speak

**TIPS:** give good topical vocabulary, some good grammar and an extended answer; **if your** story is very long, the examiner will stop you because your answer mustn't exceed 2 minutes; **If they** did, please, stop talking immediately; **If you** continue talking after you have been asked to stop, you will not get better marks.

 Time: 3-4 minutes

**EXAMPLE:**

Examiner: Now, I'm going to give you a topic and I'd like you to talk about it for 1-2 minutes. Before you talk you'll have one minute to think about what you are going to say and you can make notes if you wish. Do you understand?

You: Yes.

Examiner: Ok, here's some paper and a pencil to make notes, and here is your topic. I'd like you to describe a piece of clothes that you received as a gift. (*comment: then the examiner gives you the booklet with written prompts; you have 1 minute to think about what to say.*)

*Cue card:*

*Describe a piece of clothes that you received as a gift recently*

You should say:

- when you received the clothes
- what the piece of clothes was like
- who gave it to you
- explain how you feel about it

(*comment: after 1 minute is over*) Examiner: Ok. You will have one or two minutes for your talk, so don't worry if I stop you. Please, start talking now.

You: Oh, there's a crazy story behind my go-to pair of jeans. Once I saw cool jeans in a shop window of a high-street shop and fell for them. However, I didn't dare to go and try them on because everybody knows that this shop is for people with deep pockets. Once my mom and I were passing by this shop window. She noticed the way I looked at the jeans and asked me whether I wanted to pop in and try them on. I tried to pretend not to be in the mood for shopping, but she insisted and we entered the shop.

It was an amazing pair of skinny jeans, the ones you have to fight to put on, but the torment is forgotten as soon as you see yourself in the mirror. These were dark wash blue jeans with sanding. One might think there was nothing special about them as they were stripped of all details which could justify the price. There were neither zippers nor welts. But they elongated the line



of my legs and felt like a second skin. They were perfect because I could match them with anything, be it formal, casual or street style. I looked at the price tag, understood they cost a fortune and made my mom quickly leave the shop.

However, I couldn't help thinking about these jeans. One day I realised that I had to buy them no matter what. Well, I took all the money from my money box and couldn't wait to purchase them. Much to my disappointment, when I came to the shop, I was told that the jeans had been sold a few days before. I was upset, but I had to put up with this fact somehow. Gradually I stopped thinking about them.

Several weeks later on my birthday I found a gift box near my bed. Guess what was inside! Those jeans! It was my mom who bought them and prepared a surprise which definitely was a success.

Follow up questions (*comment: the examiner may or may not ask you these follow up questions*)

Examiner: Do you often go shopping for clothes?


You: Oh, not as often as I want. (*comment: give a short answer*)

## PART 3

### STRUCTURE:

- 2 questions with 3 sub questions for each question; the questions are based on the topic in Section 2

**TIPS:** you are expected to compare and contrast ideas;  
allow 45 seconds-1 minute per answer

 Time: 4-5 minutes

### EXAMPLE:

Examiner: We've been talking about a piece of clothes that you received as a gift, and I'd now like to ask you some questions related to this. What kinds of clothes do people wear after work?

You: Well, to my mind it depends on where people spend this time after work. If they first go to the gym or play tennis and then meet friends for a cup of tea or just to have a chat, they can have jogging suits or warm-ups or any other active casual clothes on. If they plan to have an informal dinner with friends in some upscale restaurant, then girls can put on some blouse or turtle-neck, crisp jeans and a fashionable belt as well as flats or mid-heel shoes and men some long-sleeve shirt and dress trousers with a tipped belt and leather loafers or dressy slip-ons. If people go to some event in an art gallery or theatre and then to dinner with friends, they should stick to dressy casual like a dress or coordinated separates in semi-dressy fabrics for women and a dress or silk sport shirt and dress trousers for men. The shoes should take on a dressier tone both for male and female. If somebody just plans to run errands or go for a massage, they can wear something like cotton pants and a button-down or polo-style shirt with some sneaker-type shoes just to feel comfortable.

Examiner: What kinds of clothes should people wear at work?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: Do you think students need to wear school uniforms?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: Where do people in your country buy clothes?

You: bla-bla-bla

Examiner: Thank you. That's the end of the IELTS speaking test.

## #3 HOW THE TEST DATE AFFECTS YOUR RESULTS

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There is one thing that you should know about IELTS before you choose a test date. You may be surprised to know that your results depend not only on your knowledge, being hardworking or lucky, but also on the day you choose to take your exam. The reason is new topics are added every 4 months.

How do we know? Several years ago we read on one reliable IELTS portal that topics change every 4 months. The only way to understand whether this claim was true or false was to do some research and make long-term observations. It took us almost 2 years of observation, collecting and comparing data, searching the Internet and talking to our IELTS students to confirm that this rule exists.

So, at any given moment, you have to review about 150 topics to be fully prepared for your test! But they aren't always the same. New IELTS speaking topics are added every 4 months, at the beginning of January, May and September. 50% of previously used topics remain the same (it's about 70-75 topics). 50% of topics become old and are removed from the list. And the new ones are added instead of the old topics (it's about 70-75 topics). So the worst dates are at the beginning of September, May and January. You will know just half of the topics, and the other half will be a surprise.

The best dates to take the test are right before the topics change, that is for the end of December, April and August. This will allow you to know 100% topics, and you will have enough time to prepare ALL of them. Do you agree that you will be more prepared if you have 4 months to practise something than when you find out about it one week before your exam?

## #4 LET'S TALK ABOUT FLUENCY AND COHERENCE

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**FAQ 1: IF I LEARN ANSWERS FROM THE IELTS SPEAKING ASSISTANT APP, DOES THAT MEAN THAT I MEMORISE ANSWERS? WILL I HAVE A LOWER BAND SCORE BECAUSE OF THAT?**

Well, everyone says that you should avoid memorised answers in IELTS speaking because examiners can spot such answers easily. That's right. But don't be so afraid. It is clear that all learning requires memorisation. Just don't confuse memorising answers with learning words, phrases, and even parts of the answer which you can easily adapt and change while you speak.

**BAD APPROACH:** If you learned the whole answer by heart, but you don't understand what you are talking about. You just learned a sequence of sounds. As a result, you won't sound natural, you will sound mechanical. If you forget some part of the answer and continue from some point, your

answer will make no sense. For example, I learned the answer in some fictional language: 'Thjiihb jjjiu dsagm bhjkl kkiufc llppoh jj hffdd sss dsdfhb hhhh' I don't have any idea of what this answer is about. All I can do is learn all these sounds by heart. If I forget any part, I don't even know how that will influence the meaning. Any experienced tutor and examiner will easily recognise such answers.

**GOOD APPROACH:** You read some answer in the app, learn some good phrases, some parts of the answer, even the whole answer. But the most important thing is to understand what each expression or phrase means, which words to emphasize, where to make pauses. Thus, you will sound natural even if you tried to learn the whole answer because you will change and adapt your answer while you speak. Also, even if you forget some part, you will say something appropriate because you will understand what exactly you are saying. So, it's okay to learn answers as long as you understand them!

### FAQ 2: IS IT BAD TO USE FILLERS IN THE IELTS SPEAKING TEST?

Fillers are the words such as "well", "um", "like", or "you know", frequently combined in the phrase "like, you know . . ." These words are essentially meaningless, but they help you avoid hesitation while answering questions. And they are frequently used by people in their everyday conversations. Therefore these words will help you sound more natural, which is good. However, you will definitely have a lower band score if you overuse them.

### FAQ 3: CAN SPEAKING TOO FAST AFFECT MY IELTS SPEAKING BAND SCORE?

Absolutely! It can, and not for the better. Fluency and coherence account for 25% of your mark. One part of it is intonation. If you speak too fast, you are likely to sound MECHANICAL. As a result, you might be marked down.

### FAQ 4: HOW CAN I IMPROVE FLUENCY AND MAKE MY ANSWERS SOUND MORE NATURAL?

One way is to record your answers and listen to them. If they don't seem natural to you, an examiner won't like them either. So you should keep practising until you are satisfied with what you hear.

## #5 LET'S FOCUS ON GRAMMAR

What do different bands mean?

### Band 5:

- simple tenses
- basic modal verbs
- degrees of comparison
- there be
- quantifiers such as many and a lot of



**SAMPLE SENTENCE 1:** Nowadays many people try to lead a healthy lifestyle. That's why they go to the gym and do not eat fast food that is bad for their health. (this sentence is simple but correct)

**SAMPLE SENTENCE 2:** Many people think that it is better to work from home. (also simple, but correct)

**SAMPLE SENTENCE 3:** People should use public transport to reduce the level of pollution in cities.

**SAMPLE SENTENCE 4:** This issue can be solve by ... or Children has never played computer games as much as now... (here are attempts to use modals + passive and the present perfect tense, but these are used incorrectly; the correct sentences would be 'this issue can be solved' and 'children have never played...')

## Band 6:

appr. 50% simple structures + appr. 50% complex structures

- active tenses
- passive tenses
- modals + modals in the past
- comparisons: as... as..., the... the..., far + comparative degree, by far + superlative degree
- gerund + infinitive
- both... and...
- either ... or \ neither ... nor...
- not only.... but also...
- conditionals 0, 1, 2

+ some grammatical errors are ok

## Band 7:

appr. 60-70% complex grammar structures from the list above + appr. 40-30% simple structures

+ a few mistakes are ok

## Band 8:

Band 7 structures + emphatic structures

- cleft sentences
- inversion
- conditional 3, mixed
- + 1-2 minor grammatical errors (with articles, for example)

### **INVERSION:**

'Only if such information is available in advance, will there be time to take measures to prevent any possible collisions or exposure of people to solar radiation.'

'Never before have people been bombarded by as many advertisements as now.'

'Only by working hard can people achieve success.'

### MIXED CONDITIONAL:

'Had it not been for emergence of the telephone, nowadays people would still have to arrange face-to-face meetings in order to discuss whatever issues they have.'

### CLEFT-SENTENCES:

'Planting trees is what should be done to neutralize dire effects of carbon dioxide emissions.'

'It is swimming that is considered by far the most effective exercise.'

'To boost sales is the reason why companies advertise their products.'

'It was not until the plane was invented (past simple) that people started (past simple) being able to cover long distances almost in no time.'

## Band 9:

Band 8 structures + NO grammatical errors

# #6 LET'S TALK ABOUT LEXICAL RESOURCE

## What do different bands mean?

**Band 5:** basic words such as want, need, help, money etc.

**Band 6:** topic-related vocabulary (these are the words that are used when discussing specific topics or subjects) such as 'exhaust fumes' if you write about pollution or 'academic performance' if you write an essay about education + basic words

**Band 7:** less common vocabulary (topical vocabulary + more advanced synonyms of basic words). For example, 'financial resources' instead of 'money', 'assist' instead of 'help'

**Bands 8-9:** uncommon vocabulary (some words that you will only find in the articles on [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com) or in the tests called GRE or SAT). For example, 'pecuniary' instead of 'financial' or words like predilection, dire, noxious, innocuous.

**NOTE:** Please remember that you won't get a higher band score if you use uncommon vocabulary incorrectly, if you use one uncommon word per interview or if you use uncommon vocabulary just for the sake of it. First and foremost, your answers should sound natural.

**ATTENTION:** One of the requirements for getting a high band score for Lexical Resource is using idioms. Idioms are expressions that aren't meant to be taken literally.

**EXAMPLE:** to work one's fingers to the bone (to work very hard)

Let's have a look at IELTS speaking band descriptors

**Band 7:** uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices

**Band 8:** uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skillfully, with occasional inaccuracies

**Band 9:** uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately

**EXAMPLE:** Well, I'm between jobs right now (It's a clever and discreet way of saying you are unemployed. This means that you had a job, you are not currently working, but will be working in the near future)

**ATTENTION:** One more important requirement for getting a high band score for Lexical Resource is using phrasal verbs.

**EXAMPLE:** to reflect on (to influence)

Examiner: Do you work or study?

You: Currently, I'm unemployed. The thing is I expect my experience to reflect on my remuneration package, but nowadays it's somewhat difficult to find such a vacancy. And I'm not ready to work for less money that I think I deserve to get.

## #7 PRONUNCIATION

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What is pronunciation? It's the way you say words. You make some sounds which English speakers recognize as words. So good pronunciation is important for speaking and understanding spoken English. However, pronunciation is hard to improve. The main reason is in order to improve you have to change it. But if you've pronounced some sound or sounds incorrectly for many years, you are now used to pronouncing the sound or sounds this way. It's already an old habit. The problem is that habits are hard to break. And it takes a lot of time. But you should remember that you don't have to speak English like a native speaker. It's ok if you don't have a British or American accent. The most important thing is to pronounce English words correctly and clearly.

First of all, we recommend you to check out a course of English pronunciation created by BBC English.

Click on the link to watch the videos

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/pronunciation>

There is one more exercise that will be very useful. After you finish working on a listening test, take a tapescript, listen and read along. Also, you can listen and repeat.

## #8 MATERIALS YOU'LL NEED TO PREPARE FOR IELTS SPEAKING

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### IF LITTLE TIME AVAILABLE

If you don't have a lot of time for studying, all you need to use is IELTS Speaking Assistant. You need to download the app either on Google Play or the AppStore and subscribe.

### **IF PLENTY OF TIME AVAILABLE**

If you have a lot of time for studying, you can also use the following books. These books will help you enrich your vocabulary. You may not need it during the test, but you will definitely need it in many other situations abroad.

Here's the list of our favourite books:

Check your Vocabulary for IELTS by Rawdon Wyatt

Cambridge vocabulary for IELTS by Pauline Cullen

Vocabulary for IELTS ADVANCED by Pauline Cullen

Here are the links which you can follow in order to buy these books online or, at least, look at the cover of each book to find it somewhere, for example, borrow from friends or buy in your local bookstore.

Check your vocabulary for IELTS by Rawdon Wyatt:

3rd edition <https://amzn.to/2MhIKbB>

4th edition: <https://amzn.to/2McYtrf>

Vocabulary for IELTS with answers by Pauline Cullen

<https://amzn.to/2KNxEEt>

Vocabulary for IELTS ADVANCED with answers by Pauline Cullen

<https://amzn.to/2MuzAXG>

Congrats! You are done! RETURN TO YOUR STEP-BY-STEP STUDY PLAN AND TAKE STEP 7

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