

IELTS (International English Language Testing System)

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Academic module

Should I take the Academic or the General Training module?

The Academic module is ideal if you want to study at undergraduate/postgraduate level or for professional registration. The General Training module is normally taken by those who want to migrate to an English-speaking country or study at below degree level. If you're still unsure, we advise you to check with the institution you're applying to.

Does IELTS include American English?

IELTS is an international English test that covers all major varieties of English (American, Australian, British).

What topics are covered in IELTS?

A wide range of topics are covered and they are relevant and accessible to those wanting to study at university level. No specialist knowledge is required.

Are there any free sample questions available?

Yes. You can find free samples on the official IELTS website: [IELTS.org](https://www.ielts.org)

Listening

Do

- Listen carefully to the introduction to each part. This will give you useful information about the situation and the speakers.
- Use the time at the beginning of each part (and in the middle of Parts 1–3) to look through the questions and think about the topic.
- Read the instructions for each task carefully. Remember to check the maximum number of words allowed.
- Write all your answers as you listen – remember, you won't hear the recording a second time.
- Check that what you write makes sense in the context.
- Keep to the word limit: if you are asked for 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS', for example, then do not write more.
- Try to answer all the questions, even if you don't feel sure about an answer – you may have understood more than you think.
- Check your spelling (and grammar, where necessary).
- If you are taking a paper-based test, transfer your answers at the end of the test. You have 10 minutes for this, which is plenty of time.
- If you are taking a paper-based test, write clearly when you transfer your answers. If an answer isn't clear on your answer sheet, you will lose the mark.

Don't

- Don't worry if you have to cross out or change an answer.
- Don't panic if you miss one question. Look ahead and concentrate on the next one.
- Don't try to rephrase what you hear. Try to write down the words you hear which fit the question.
- Don't write more than the maximum number of words or numbers allowed for each answer.
- Don't copy any words before or after the gaps on the question paper when you transfer your answers to the answer sheet.

- Don't write more than one answer when only one is required. Even if one of your answers is correct, you will not receive a mark.

Is the Listening paper different for Academic and General Training?

No. All candidates take the same paper.

What information will I get before each part?

At the beginning of each part you will hear a short description of the situation you are about to listen to. This may give information about who the speakers are, where they are and what the general topic is. This description is not written on the question paper, so it is important to listen carefully.

Will I have time to look at the questions before I listen?

Yes, there is time to look at the questions before each set of questions. The voice on the recording will tell you which questions to look at.

How many times do I hear the recording?

You will hear each recording ONCE only.

Are the questions in the same order as the information in the recording?

Yes. This is true for all question types in IELTS Listening.

Will there be a pause during the recording?

There is a pause between each of the parts. Also, there is one break during Parts 1, 2 and 3 to allow you time to look at the following questions. In Part 4 there is a short pause in the middle of the recording to allow you time to refocus if required, but this is not mentioned on the recording. The time for reading all Part 4 questions is given at the start of the part.

Will I have time to check my answers at the end of each section?

Yes.

What accents do the speakers have on the recordings?

You will hear a range of English native-speaker accents on the recordings (for example, Australian, British, New Zealand and North American speakers).

When the instructions say that I should answer in, for example, 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS', will I lose marks if I write an answer with more than three words?

Yes. Answers which are over the word limit will be marked as incorrect.

Do answers in IELTS Listening have to be correctly spelled?

Yes. You will lose marks for incorrect spelling and grammar. However, words which you have to write will usually be common words. Both UK and US spellings are accepted. When you hear the name of a person, place, company, etc., in the recording, it may be spelled out.

Reading

Do

- Keep an eye on the time and take care not to spend too much time on any one text or question. Remember that you only have 60 minutes to answer the questions and to transfer your answers onto your answer sheet.
- Start at the beginning of the test and work through it. If you cannot do a particular question, leave it and go on to the next. You can then return to that question later, if you have time. Put a mark next to this question on the question paper so that you can find it again quickly.
- Answer as many questions as you can.
- Look carefully at the title of the text and any subtitles and illustrations it may have. You can get a quick idea of what the text is about from these.
- Read the instructions for each set of questions very carefully. It is important to do exactly what you are asked to do.
- Skim the questions, where appropriate, before reading the text so that you have a purpose for reading.

- Read through the text quickly so that you are familiar with the topic and how it is developed in the text. An understanding of the text structure can be very helpful when answering the questions.
- Look at the dictionary definition, if one is provided, to help you understand unfamiliar words.
- Pay attention to any examples that are provided.
- Keep to the word limit. If you are asked for 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS', for example, then do not write more.
- Copy words accurately from the text. Spelling mistakes will mean that you will lose the mark for that question.
- Make sure your answer is grammatically correct where you have to write your answer in words, e.g. short-answer questions, sentence completion, summary completion.

Don't

- Don't waste time reading the whole text each time for each set of questions. Remember that many task types ask you to locate or check details in the text. In cases like this, you need to skim quickly through the text rather than reading it all carefully.
- Don't go back to the beginning of the text for each question when you know from the task type that the answers will come in the order of the information in the text.
- Don't become anxious if there are questions you cannot answer. Leave them and move on to the next question. You can always come back to the ones you couldn't answer at the end of the test, if you have time.
- Don't worry if you don't understand every word. It may not be necessary to understand all the words in order to answer the questions correctly.
- Don't forget that you must write your answers on your answer sheet. You will NOT be given extra time to do this at the end of the test.
- Don't write more than one answer when only one is required. Even if one of your answers is correct, you will not receive a mark.

How do I record my answers?

You must write all of your answers on the answer sheet within the 60 minutes. You may write your answers on the question paper first, if you like, but the marker will not read these. No extra time is allowed to copy answers to the answer sheet.

When the instructions say that I should answer in, for example, 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS', will I lose marks if I write an answer with more than three words?

Yes. Answers which are over the word limit will be marked as incorrect.

Will I lose marks for spelling and grammar mistakes in my answers?

All the words you will need in order to answer the questions will be given in the text. Remember to transfer your answers to the answer sheet with care. You will lose marks for poor spelling and grammar.

How long should I spend on each text?

You have 60 minutes to read three texts and answer 40 questions. You should spend about 20 minutes on each text. Make sure that you do not waste time worrying about questions you can't answer – use your time sensibly to read what you can and answer as many questions as possible.

Writing

Do

- Read all of the information in the questions very carefully and respond appropriately.
- Follow all instructions, including the number of words that you need to write.
- Finish Writing Task 1 after about 20 minutes to allow enough time to answer Writing Task 2.
- Remember Task 2 contributes twice as much as Task 1 to the Writing score, so you need plenty of time to answer it.
- Make sure that for Task 1, you use figures or data from the visual information accurately.

- Plan your ideas before you begin to write. For Writing Task 1, locate and select the most important pieces of information first. For Writing Task 2, take time to organise your ideas and argument.
- Provide supporting evidence for any of your claims or views in Writing Task 2.
- Leave time to check your answers for careless mistakes at the end. Try to check for spelling mistakes, verb and subject agreement, singular/plural nouns, tense mistakes and problems of fluency.
- Make sure all your ideas are relevant to the question.
- Try to avoid repeating the same words and phrases too often. Try to use a range of vocabulary.
- Make sure that you do not repeat the same idea too often – explore different ideas to provide a well-balanced response.
- Write as clearly as possible.
- Produce organised and linked paragraphs and make sure that the style of your language is academic.

Don't

- Don't write less than the required number of words.
- Don't use note form or bullet points.
- Don't leave out any required information.
- Don't waste your time learning essays by heart to use in the exam. You will be penalised for this and you will waste valuable time that could be spent developing good writing skills.
- Don't simply copy words and phrases from the question paper – try to use your own words at all times by paraphrasing the question.

Where do I write my answers?

Write your answers on the Writing answer sheet. You will not get any paper for making notes, but you may write notes on the question paper. The examiner will not see these.

Can I write in pen or pencil?

You can write in pen or pencil, but you must write clearly. You may erase/cross out and change parts of your writing, but you must make sure that your work is easy to read.

Should I write my answers in upper case (capitals) or lower case?

You will not automatically be penalised if all your letters are capitals. However, remember that punctuation is assessed in the Writing test and you may be penalised if it is not clear to the examiner where your sentences begin and end.

Will I be penalised if I don't write enough words?

There is no direct penalty for writing fewer than 150 words for the Task 1 question and 250 words for the Task 2 question. However, writing fewer words may impact on the range of ideas and evidence produced and may therefore affect your score.

If I make notes, will the examiner read them?

No. You will not get any paper for making notes, but you may write notes on the question paper. The examiner will not see this.

Are the two tasks both worth the same number of marks?

No. Task 2 contributes twice as much as Task 1 to the Writing score.

How long should I spend on each task?

You have 1 hour to write your answers for the two tasks. It is your choice how you divide this time. However, remember that Task 2 contributes twice as much as Task 1 to the Writing score – so you may wish to spend 20 minutes on Task 1 and 40 minutes on Task 2. You should plan your work carefully before writing, and you should allow time to check your writing after completing a task or at the end of the test.

Do I need to write a separate introduction and conclusion for Academic Writing Task 1?

In Task 1, you need to describe the visual information and present this information in an organised, coherent way. Therefore, you need to write an introduction, although this can be very short. Also, a short summary of the main trends or features is a good way to finish. Remember that you do not need to guess about the reasons for things in Task 1. (For example, do not write I think this is probably because ...)

Will I be penalised if I do not write a formal introduction and conclusion for Academic Writing Task 2?

There is no separate assessment for introductions and conclusions. However, if you do not write an introduction and conclusion, you may be penalised under 'Task response' and/or 'Coherence and cohesion'.

Speaking

Do

- Be prepared to answer all the examiner's questions – you will feel more involved in the conversation.
- Listen carefully to the questions you are asked so that your answers are relevant.
- Answer the questions with some detail so that your answers are long enough.
- Practise speaking for 2 minutes for the long turn in Part 2.
- Use the preparation time in Part 2 to think about what is written on the card.
- Use the instructions and prompts on the card in Part 2 to help organise your long turn.
- Practise ways of delaying answers to give yourself time to think in Part 3.
- Explain your opinions and give examples to support them.

Don't

- Don't learn answers by heart.
- Don't give very short answers. A short answer is usually expected only when the examiner asks a question at the end of the long turn in Part 2 as they need to move on to Part 3 of the test. The examiner needs to move on to Part 3 of the test and only expects short answers to the questions.
- Don't talk about something different from what is on the card in Part 2.
- Don't worry if the examiner stops you in the Part 2 long turn. It means you have spoken for 2 minutes. The examiner has to keep to the timing of the test.
- Don't write on the Part 2 task card.
- Don't worry if you realise you have made a mistake. It is OK to correct yourself. If you can't correct yourself, forget it and carry on.
- Don't ask the examiner if what you say is correct.

Are there any free IELTS Speaking test samples?

You can listen to free sample [IELTS Speaking tasks on the official IELTS website](#).

What can I take into the test room?

You can only take your identity document. The examiner will give you everything you need in the test.

Why is the IELTS Speaking test recorded?

The recording is needed in case your performance needs to be re-marked.

Is it a good idea to learn short speeches about my town or job by heart?

No, you should listen carefully to the examiner and just respond to the questions. If you say something you have memorised, you probably won't answer the examiner's question exactly.

What if I don't know anything about the topic in Part 2?

The topics are carefully chosen to reflect common experiences, so you don't need special knowledge to talk about them.

Can I start speaking before the 1-minute preparation time is over in Part 2?

Yes. If you don't need the whole minute, you can begin speaking when you are ready. However, it is a good idea to use all of the preparation time. The examiner will check that you are sure you are ready before they ask you to start speaking about the topic.

Do I have to write notes in Part 2?

No, making notes is just an option. Some candidates prefer just to think about what to say, whereas others find that making notes helps them to organise their ideas and to keep talking.

How long should I talk for in Part 2?

You will have the opportunity to talk for 2 minutes. You should try to talk for the full 2 minutes to give the examiner a good sample of your English.

What should I do if I don't understand a question, a word, or the Part 2 task?

You should tell the examiner that you don't understand. In Part 1, the examiner will be able to repeat the question. In Part 2 you should look carefully at the task card because you may be able to guess the meaning of a word you have not understood. In Part 3, the examiner will be able to repeat the question or ask it in a different way, or may be able to help you to understand the question. If you don't understand a word, the examiner will be able to give you a brief explanation. The most important thing is not to ask the examiner to repeat every question or explain every word.

Will the examiner tell me if I have done well or not?

No, the examiner is not allowed to give feedback, and you should not ask them to do so.

For more information about IELTS, visit our website: [cambridgeenglish.org/ielts](https://www.cambridgeenglish.org/ielts) or [IELTS.org](https://www.ielts.org)