

Advice and Tips for Students

1. Have realistic expectations

The IELTS exam is no walk in the park, and if you seriously want to improve your score and achieve your target band score, then you need to put in the effort. The first practice test should be able to give you a good idea of where you are in terms of your language ability. Click here to try a practice test:

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

2. Focus on your weak points

After the practice test, you should have a good idea of your weak points. This should help you determine which part of the IELTS exam (Listening, Reading, Writing or Speaking) you need to focus on most. Your teacher will also help you with this by recommending additional activities.

3. Pay attention to structure

When it comes to writing, it is vital that you include all the necessary information. When describing a diagram in Task 1, make sure you write an introduction, include a clear overview of the key features and support the description with data. When writing an essay in Task 2, include an introduction, body (idea/explain/example) and a conclusion. Following this structure will help you maximise your score on the Task Achievement criteria.

4. Work on your timing

Once you've become familiar with the format of the exam, it is important to learn to complete the tasks within the set time limits. You have 60 minutes to answer all the questions on the Reading Paper which consists of three passages. However, as the questions become increasingly difficult, instead of spending 20 minutes on each section, plan to spend 15 minutes on the first passage, 20 minutes on the second, and 25 on the last.

5. Listening tips and tricks

During the one minute and thirty second gap in the listening exercises, you can look ahead at the questions. This will give you an idea of what information you need to listen for and allow you to make predictions. Also, listen very carefully to 'misspoken' words or listening distractors. An example of this is where the day, date or location is corrected by the speaker. For example, the speaker may say 'So, we shall meet on Tuesday, oh no... Wednesday'. You need to be careful to put the correct information down, as sometimes you could be distracted by the first answer and might miss the correction.

6. When it comes to Speaking – It's what is not asked that counts

In Speaking Part 1, you should provide full answers. This allows you to demonstrate your speaking skills using a wide range of vocabulary. Be sure to provide details but don't give too short or too lengthy responses. Consider the examples below:

Bad Example

Examiner: Where do you live?

Student: Hong Kong.

Good Example

Examiner: Where do you live?

Student: I live in Hong Kong. I've been living here since I was born, however, my family moved from Kowloon to North Point three years ago.

Even when you're asked closed questions, you should still provide as much information as possible.

Bad Example

Examiner: Do you have a part-time job?

Student: Nope.

Good Example

Examiner: Do you have a part-time job?

Student: No, but I used to help my uncle at his seafood restaurant during school holidays. It was quite busy and I used to have to show guests to their tables.

7. Learn to skim and scan to succeed on the Reading Paper

When it comes to reading, timing plays a vital role. If the candidate loses track of time, they can find that they have five minutes to complete a whole reading exercise. One of the best ways to keep timing to a minimum is to skim and scan. Skimming means reading quickly to get the overall idea of what the text is about – you will usually want to do this first. Scanning involves looking for particular information, such as dates, opinions, quotes, etc. Once you've skimmed the text, look at the questions and scan the text searching for relevant information. Read the relevant parts carefully to

ensure you've answered the question correctly. Do not read a passage word-for-word, as you would never complete the task in time.

8. Practice is vital

It is important to practice as often as you can. Don't just do sample tests for practice. Vary your learning and practice. For example, watch a news program to practise listening or learn vocabulary. This also gives you exposure to a wide range of different accents. Reading magazine or news articles is also a great way to improve your pace of reading. Find opportunities to practise speaking English – come to class early and chat with your classmates in English.