Guide

for educational institutions, governments, professional bodies and commercial organisations

IELTS™

www.ielts.org

IELTS. Ensuring quality, consistency and fairness in international language testing

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a test that measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work in environments where English is used as a language of communication.

IELTS provides a valid and accurate assessment of the four language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. An easy to use 9-band scale clearly identifies proficiency level, from non-user (band score 1) through to expert (band score 9).

IELTS treats all candidates with the utmost fairness and respect by actively avoiding cultural bias and by accepting all standard varieties of native-speaker English, including North American, British, Australian and New Zealand English.

Fair and consistent delivery of the test is ensured by secure technology and the continual monitoring of examiners and test results as well as test centre management and facilities.

This high quality and secure test helps organisations like yours (whether an educational institution, government professional body or commercial organisation) identify people with the appropriate level of English language proficiency.

"IELTS gives us a reliable indication of entry level. Other tests are less satisfactory at providing this."

Lecturer in Academic English and Study Skills, Kings College London, UK

Contents

Each year, more IELTS tests are taken than any other high stakes English language tests.

A choice of two versions to better meet your needs

IELTS is the four-skills test that has become the world's most popular English language proficiency test. IELTS offers a choice of two versions, to serve both academic and non-academic purposes.

The format each version takes has remained consistent since 1995.

You can select the version that best suits the needs of your organisation.

Both Academic and General Training versions are graded using the same criteria. The distinction between the Academic version and the General Training version lies in the subject matter of the Reading and Writing components.

For a detailed breakdown of IELTS test components, please refer to page 10.

IELTS Academic

IELTS Academic measures English language proficiency needed for an academic, higher learning environment. The tasks and texts are accessible to all test-takers, irrespective of their subject focus.

Listening* (30 minutes)
• Four recorded monologues and conversations

Reading (60 minutes)
• Three long reading passages with tasks
• Texts range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical
• Includes non-verbal materials such as diagrams, graphs or illustrations
• Texts are authentic (e.g. taken from books, journals and newspapers)

Writing (60 minutes)
• Writing task of at least 150 words where the candidate must summarise, describe or explain a table, graph, chart or diagram
• Short essay task of at least 250 words

Speaking* (11 to 14 minutes)
• Face-to-face interview
• Includes short questions, speaking at length about a familiar topic and a structured discussion

IELTS General Training

IELTS General Training measures English language proficiency in a practical, everyday context. The tasks and texts reflect both workplace and social situations.

Listening* (30 minutes)
• Four recorded monologues and conversations

Reading (60 minutes)
• Three reading passages with tasks
• Section 1 contains two or three short factual texts
• Section 2 contains two short, work-related, factual texts
• Section 3 contains one longer text on a topic of general interest
• Texts are authentic (e.g. taken from company handbooks, official documents, books and newspapers)

Writing (60 minutes)
• Letter writing task of at least 150 words
• Short essay task of at least 250 words

Speaking* (11 to 14 minutes)
• Face-to-face interview
• Includes short questions, speaking at length about a familiar topic and a structured discussion

The Listening and Speaking components are the same for both versions.

Helping you select the right people from around the world

Over 8,000 organisations in 135 countries rely on IELTS to help select the right people. These recognising organisations include:

- all universities and the vast majority of education providers in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, as well as most universities in Canada

- more than 3,000 higher educational institutions and programmes in the US

- immigration authorities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK

- professional registration bodies worldwide, covering areas such as accounting, engineering, law, medicine and nursing

- a wide range of employers from sectors such as banking and finance, government, construction, energy and natural resources, aviation, health and tourism

- universities in non-English speaking countries where English is the language of instruction.

Reach out to new candidates
Let candidates know that your institution/organisation accepts IELTS results by listing the entry requirements of your institution/organisation on the IELTS website via the IELTS Global Recognition System. *See page 6 for details.*

The international English language test

International partners
IELTS is owned by a global partnership of education and language experts: the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. These organisations are dedicated to academic excellence, cultural understanding, student placement and enabling success worldwide.

International consultation
IELTS has been developed in close consultation with academics, professional bodies and immigration authorities from around the world.

International content
The IELTS approach is recognised as being fair, reliable and valid to all candidates, whatever their nationality, cultural background, gender or special needs. The test questions are developed by a network of IELTS test material writers in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and US.

International delivery and accessibility
IELTS tests are offered up to four times a month in over 900 test venues in more than 130 countries. The cost of taking the test is set locally and payable in the local currency, making registration more convenient for candidates. Results are issued to candidates 13 calendar days after the test.

IELTS test centres can send Test Report Forms directly to your organisation or institution (provided it has been nominated by the candidate), either by mail or as an electronic download.

View the worldwide list of IELTS test centres at www.ielts.org/testcentres

International English
IELTS accepts all standard varieties of native-speaker English, including North American, British and Australian. The listening component also includes a variety of native speaker accents from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and US.

> **"IELTS makes the world a bigger, more open place. Learning English has transformed me into a citizen of the world."**
>
> *Analyst at global accounting firm*

Relevant test content

Over the past three decades, feedback provided by organisations and institutions which recognise IELTS has been instrumental in developing the IELTS test to better meet your needs. One such development was to introduce a choice of two IELTS versions: Academic or General Training *(See page 1)*.

IELTS General Training is recognised by employers, professional bodies and immigration authorities and their feedback has influenced the content sources used. For example, section two of the Reading component of IELTS General Training was changed to focus more on a work context (e.g. applying for jobs, company policies, pay and conditions, workplace facilities, staff development).

Real life contexts

The IELTS test consists of questions that are relevant to the way test takers need to use English in their studies or working lives. IELTS has always included a face-to-face Speaking component which prompts the most realistic performance from candidates. The use of the face-to-face component in a high stakes test is supported by a body of current academic research and continues to set IELTS apart from other English language tests.

The test you can trust

Setting the standard

First released in 1989, IELTS is a test of all four language skills. The IELTS test has established strong credentials for consistently assessing proficiency in listening, reading, writing and speaking. The effectiveness of IELTS rests on four key test qualities:

- Validity — the extent to which test results can be considered a true measure of underlying ability

- Reliability — the extent to which test results are both consistent and accurate, and therefore dependable

- Impact — the positive effect of a test on candidates and society as a whole

- Practicality — the extent to which a test is workable in terms of the resources needed.

Evidence based

The ongoing development, improvement and validation of the IELTS test is supported by research encompassing applied linguistics, language pedagogy and language assessment.

You can read more about IELTS related research initiatives on page 8.

Strength in partnership

IELTS is jointly owned by a partnership of education and language testing experts – British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. Benefitting from the shared expertise of these three global partners, the IELTS test combines the world renowned language and research expertise of Cambridge English Language Assessment and the international delivery, evaluation and security expertise of the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

IELTS examiners

All IELTS examiner applicants must have:

- an undergraduate degree or qualification(s) that can be demonstrated to be equivalent to an undergraduate degree

- a TEFL/TESOL qualification from a recognised institution

- substantial relevant teaching experience. The majority of this teaching experience must relate to adult students (16 years and over).

Applicants fulfilling the above minimum professional requirements to become an examiner undergo a comprehensive and systematic recruitment process which includes the following stages: interview, induction, training, standardisation and certification.

Examiners attend regular training sessions and are required to formally demonstrate their marking proficiency through a re-certification process. The marking performance of the 7,000-plus IELTS examiners is systematically and regularly monitored. Examiner marking standards are maintained through the IELTS Professional Support Network, a quality assurance system designed and managed by British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

"We want qualified applicants who can communicate effectively. The IELTS examination is a strong, well-constructed test that caters to this demand."

Graduate Program Administrator, Brigham Young University, USA

Rigorous test development

The IELTS test is developed to provide a fair, accurate and reliable assessment of English language proficiency for non-native speakers. The IELTS test development process ensures test consistency and fairness to all candidates regardless of their culture or where the test is taken.

Each IELTS test contains a unique combination of questions.

Every test is carefully constructed to ensure a consistent level of difficulty. This involves pre-testing (or trialling) each question on a culturally diverse range of language students to determine its suitability and fairness. Statistical analysis is then undertaken to ensure every question performs as designed.

Strict security

IELTS is a high stakes test which leads to local and international opportunity. Therefore test integrity is of paramount importance to recognising organisations and to candidates alike. The IELTS partners are scrupulous in the management of test delivery. British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia manage the security and quality control of IELTS test centres globally, and are highly selective in the identification of prospective test centres.

Each prospective IELTS test centre must undergo a demanding selection process and agree to a stringent set of contractual conditions. IELTS test centres adhere to a detailed code of practice and strict test centre operating conditions, including a comprehensive audit programme involving onsite scheduled and/or spot audits.

- **Identity resolution**
  Biometric registration systems are used to record candidate identity and process the results. A high resolution photograph of each candidate is taken at the time of registering for the test. This photograph is used to verify that the person who sits the test is the person that registered.

- **Checking the result**
  The IELTS partners strongly recommend you use the online results verification service. This allows you to check the authenticity of paper test report form results. If you have any questions regarding a test result, follow the links as instructed by the verification service. *For more information about the IELTS Verification Service see page 6.*

More information relating to IELTS security protocols can be obtained by attending information sessions and face-to-face meetings organised by the IELTS partners for recognising organisations. If you have any questions, or would like to find out about information sessions in your region, please contact the stakeholder relations teams at the British Council and IDP:IELTS Australia.

Meeting your needs

Dedicated team

British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia have stakeholder relations teams ready to respond to questions and provide further information. The IELTS partners also deliver regular information sessions and newsletters to keep you up-to-date with the latest IELTS developments.

To keep updated with information sessions or to receive the newsletter please complete the online enquiry form via www.ielts.org/contact

Setting IELTS band score requirements for your organisation

IELTS test scores are just one element of your assessment of a candidate's suitability to join your institution or organisation. The level of English needed to perform effectively in study, work or training varies from one situation to another. Each individual organisation can therefore set its own minimum IELTS score, depending on its own specific requirements.
For more band score setting advice, see page 13.

IELTS Scores Explained DVD
This DVD includes examples of candidates' writing specimens and filmed footage of candidates' speaking performances at different band score levels. The DVD can be ordered via www.ielts.org

Reach out to more candidates with the IELTS Global Recognition System

In the last 12 months, www.ielts.org received more than eight million unique visitors from more than 200 countries. Benefit from this interest by listing your organisation or institution on the IELTS website, within the IELTS Global Recognition System. This online database lists the thousands of organisations around the world which accept IELTS results.

Listing your organisation's URL and minimum band score requirements on the IELTS Global Recognition System database will increase your reach to millions of existing and potential test takers. This system also makes it easy for you to compare your band score requirements with those of other organisations around the world.

Registering your organisation is easy at www.ielts.org/recognition

To register you will simply need to provide the following information via the online registration form:

- contact details for your organisation

- minimum IELTS band scores required for entry to your organisation

- a relevant URL for your organisation (e.g. admissions page, international student page).

Have your IELTS minimum entry requirements changed?

If so, update your organisation's listing on the IELTS website by completing the 'IELTS Recognition Form' which can be downloaded at www.ielts.org/recognition

Verify IELTS results online

The IELTS Verification Service is a free, secure online service which lets you:

- quickly verify that an applicant is presenting a genuine Test Report Form by checking that the results you receive match the results held on the IELTS database

- conveniently download electronic Test Report Forms in batches.

Please note: The IELTS partners recommend that a Test Report Form which is more than two years old should only be accepted if it is accompanied by proof that a candidate has actively maintained or tried to improve their English.

Gain access to the IELTS Verification Service at www.ielts.org/verify

Once your organisation is accepted into the Global Recognition System, you can request access to the IELTS Verification Service by downloading and completing the Administrator Application Form at www.ielts.org/verify

For further information please refer to the *IELTS Verification Service* brochure, available at www.ielts.org/institutions

> "To avoid the risk of accepting fraudulent documents, we use the IELTS Verification service"
>
> *International Section Manager and Registered Nurse, Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, Australia*

Support materials

A range of support tools for organisations can be found at www.ielts.org/institutions including:

- *Ensuring Quality and Fairness in international English language testing*

- *The IELTS Annual Review*

- *IELTS Guide for Teachers*

- *IELTS Guide for Agents*

- *IELTS Results Verification Service* application form and brochure

- Analysis of test data and candidate performance

- Answers to frequently asked questions.

Support for test takers and teachers

The IELTS partners publish a wealth of support material for test takers and teachers.

The *Official Practice Materials* books (two volumes available) can be purchased at IELTS Test Centres or ordered from www.ielts.org

The *Information for Candidate*s booklet and sample test materials can be accessed, free of charge, within the Test Takers section of the IELTS website.

Research

IELTS related research can be found at www.ielts.org/researchers

Continual research based development

The IELTS partners have a longstanding commitment to remain at the forefront of developments in English language testing.

The steady evolution of IELTS is in parallel with advances in applied linguistics, language pedagogy, language assessment and technology. This ensures the ongoing validity, reliability, positive impact and practicality of the test. Adherence to these four qualities is supported by two streams of research.

Internal research

Cambridge English Language Assessment has been creating English examinations for speakers of other languages since 1913 and has unrivalled experience in the field. Internal research activities are managed by Cambridge English Language Assessment's Research & Validation unit. The Research and Validation unit brings together specialists in testing and assessment, statistical analysis and item-banking, applied linguistics, corpus linguistics, and language learning/pedagogy, and provides rigorous quality assurance for the IELTS test at every stage of development.

Through publications and presentations in the public domain the division makes a valuable contribution to the wider field of language assessment more generally. In particular, *Studies in Language Testing* is a series of academic volumes edited by Dr Michael Milanovic (Chief Executive of Cambridge English Language Assessment) and Prof Cyril J Weir of the University of Bedfordshire.

It is published jointly by Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge University Press (CUP). The series addresses a wide range of important issues and new developments in language testing and assessment and is an indispensable resource for test users, developers and researchers. There are currently over 30 titles available; a number of these deal specifically with IELTS.

Research Notes

Research Notes is a quarterly publication that reports on Cambridge English Language Assessment's research, test development and validation activities. You can download issues at www.cambridgeenglish.org/researchnotes

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Studies in Language Testing. Volumes include:

Volume 25:   *IELTS Washback in Context: Preparation for academic writing in higher education*

Volume 24:   *Impact Theory and Practice: Studies of the IELTS test and Progetto Lingue 2000*

Volume 23:   *Assessing Academic English: Testing English proficiency, 1950-1989 - the IELTS solution*

Volume 19:   *IELTS Collected Papers: Research in speaking and writing assessment*

Volume 4:   *The Development of IELTS: A study of the effect of background knowledge on reading comprehension*

External research

An external IELTS research scheme, funded by IDP: IELTS Australia and the British Council, ensures an ongoing relationship with the broader linguistics and language testing community and demonstrates the partners' commitment to continuous improvement of the test.

Since 1995, over 100 external studies by over 140 unique researchers from a wide cross-section of countries have attracted funding under this jointly-funded scheme.

Such research has become a key component in securing external validation of IELTS.

IELTS Research Reports include:

Below is a sample of the articles which have been published in *IELTS Research Reports*. The majority of IELTS-funded research is published in the *IELTS Research Reports* which can be accessed online through www.ielts.org/researchers/research_reports

Title	Author/Organisation	Volume and date of publication
Investigating IELTS exit score gains in higher education	Kieran O'Loughlin, Sophie Arkoudis, The University of Melbourne, Australia	Volume 10, 2009
Investigating stakeholders' perceptions of IELTS as an entry requirement for higher education in the UK	David Hyatt, Greg Brooks, The University of Sheffield, UK	Volume 10, 2009
Determination of appropriate IELTS band score for admission into a program at a Canadian post-secondary polytechnic institution	Katherine Golder, British Columbia Institute of Technology, Kenneth Reeder, University of British Columbia and Sarah Fleming, Simon Fraser University, Canada	Volume 10, 2009
Achieving English proficiency for professional registration: The experience of overseas-qualified health professionals in the New Zealand context	John Read and Rosemary Wette, The University of Auckland, New Zealand	Volume 10, 2009
An impact study into the use of IELTS as an entry criterion for professional associations in Australia, New Zealand and the USA	Glenys Merrifield, GBM & Associates, Australia	Volume 8, 2008
IELTS as a predictor of academic language performance, Part 1	David Ingram, Amanda Bayliss; University of Melbourne, Australia	Volume 7, 2007
Exploring difficulty in Speaking tasks: An intra-task perspective	Barry O'Sullivan, Roehampton University, UK; Cyril Weir, The University of Bedfordshire, UK; Tomoko Horai, Roehampton University, UK	Volume 6, 2006
An impact study of two IELTS user groups: candidates who sit the test for immigration purposes and candidates who sit the test for secondary education purposes	Brent Merrylees, LTC Language and Testing Consultants Pty Ltd	Volume 4, 2003

The four components of IELTS

Listening
30 minutes

Candidates listen to four recorded texts, monologues and conversations by a range of native speakers, and write their answers to a series of questions.

These include questions which test the ability to understand main ideas and detailed factual information, ability to understand the opinions and attitudes of speakers, ability to understand the purpose of an utterance and ability to follow the development of ideas.

A variety of voices and native-speaker accents is used and each section is heard only once.

Section 1
A conversation between two people set in an everyday social context, e.g. a conversation in an accommodation agency.

Section 2
A monologue set in an everyday social context, e.g. a speech about local facilities.

Section 3
A conversation between up to four people set in an educational or training context, e.g. a university tutor and a student discussing an assignment.

Section 4
A monologue on an academic subject, e.g. a university lecture.

Reading
60 minutes

The Reading component consists of 40 questions. A variety of question types is used in order to test a wide range of reading skills.

These include reading for gist, reading for main ideas, reading for detail, skimming, understanding logical argument, recognising writers' opinions, attitudes and purpose.

IELTS Academic
IELTS Academic includes three long texts which range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical. The texts are authentic and are taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers. These have been selected for a non-specialist audience but are recognisably appropriate for candidates entering undergraduate or postgraduate courses or seeking professional registration.

IELTS General Training
IELTS General Training requires candidates to read extracts from books, magazines, newspapers, notices, advertisements, company handbooks and guidelines. These are materials candidates are likely to encounter on a daily basis in an English speaking environment.

"**IELTS provides a reliable and internationally accessible means for doctors coming from overseas to demonstrate their language proficiency before they start work.**"

Director of Registration and Education, General Medical Council, UK

Writing
60 minutes

IELTS Academic
The Writing component of IELTS Academic includes two tasks. Topics are of general interest to, and suitable for candidates entering undergraduate or postgraduate studies or seeking professional registration.

Task 1
Candidates are presented with a graph, table, chart or diagram and are asked to describe, summarise or explain the information in their own words. They may be asked to describe and explain data, describe the stages of a process, how something works or describe an object or event.

Task 2
Candidates are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. Responses to both tasks must be written in a formal style

IELTS General Training
The Writing component of IELTS General Training includes two tasks which are based on topics of general interest

Task 1
Candidates are presented with a situation and asked to write a letter requesting information or explaining the situation. The letter may be personal, semi-formal or formal in style.

Task 2
Candidates 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
11 to 14 minutes

The Speaking component assesses the candidate's use of spoken English, and takes between 11 and 14 minutes to complete. Every test is recorded. The Speaking component is delivered in such a way that does not allow candidates to rehearse set responses beforehand.

Part 1
Candidates answer general questions about themselves and a range of familiar topics, such as their home, family, work, studies and interests. This part lasts between 4 and 5 minutes.

Part 2
Candidates are given a card which asks them to talk about a particular topic. They have one minute to prepare before speaking for up to two minutes. The examiner then asks one or two questions on the same topic to finish this part of the test.

Part 3
Candidates are asked further questions connected to the topic in Part 2. These questions give the candidate an opportunity to discuss more abstract issues and ideas. This part lasts between four and five minutes.

The Listening and Speaking component is the same for both the Academic and General Training versions.

IELTS 9-band scale

There is no pass or fail in IELTS. Rather, all test results are reported on a clear 9-band scale (from 1, the lowest, to 9, the highest). The scale has remained consistent and acquired currency around the world over the past three decades.

Candidates receive an overall band score as well as individual scores for each test component (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking).

The IELTS test provides an accurate picture of a candidate's language skills at a certain point in time. Language ability diminishes over time if not actively maintained.

Read more about band scores, examiners, marking and assessment criteria at www.ielts.org/researchers

9	Expert user	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very good user	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	Competent user	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	Modest user	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	Limited user	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely limited user	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent user	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	Non user	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

IELTS test score guidance for educational institutions

The level of English needed for a non-native speaker student to perform effectively varies by situation and institution. That is why each individual institution should set its own minimum IELTS score for applicants, depending on specific institutional and programme requirements.

Read more about band score setting on page 6 of this brochure and at www.ielts.org/institutions

Please note: The table below gives guidance on acceptable IELTS band scores for different courses. It should be noted, however, that many diverse variables can affect performance on courses, of which language ability is but one.

Band score	Linguistically demanding **academic** courses	Linguistically less demanding **academic** courses	Linguistically demanding **training** courses	Linguistically less demanding **training** courses
7.5 – 9.0	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
7.0	Probably acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.5	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.0	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable	Acceptable
5.5	English study needed	English study needed	English study needed	Probably acceptable

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