

Guide for teachers

Introducing IELTS, from
test format and scoring
through to preparing
students for the test.

IELTS™



www.ielts.org

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“IELTS makes for a confident student.”

Senior Teacher, Turning Point, India



1 IELTS overview

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) assesses the English language proficiency of people who want to study or work where English is used as the language of communication. It provides a fair, accurate and relevant assessment of language skills, based on well-established standards, and covers the full range of proficiency levels, from non-user to expert user.

There are two versions of IELTS. Test takers can choose either IELTS Academic or IELTS General Training. Both versions of the test consist of four separate components, assessing the four language skills – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking.

IELTS results are reported on a 9-band scale designed to be simple and easy to understand. This scale has remained consistent and has acquired currency around the world over the past three decades.

- IELTS is the world's most popular high stakes English language test, with over two million tests taken in the last twelve months.
- Over 8,000 organisations in over 130 countries recognise and use IELTS for selection purposes.
- IELTS is offered at over 900 test locations worldwide.
- Test questions are developed by testing specialists in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US.
- Test questions are based on authentic materials sourced from all over the world.

IELTS for teachers of English

IELTS is well-known by teachers of English around the world through IELTS preparation courses offered at their institution or local language school. The IELTS partners encourage teachers to facilitate English learning with a view to improve students' general English skills, as well as preparing their students to take the test. Globally, teachers have increasingly become interested in IELTS. The *Guide for Teachers* provides further information about the test and offers detailed descriptions of test scores. In addition, it offers teacher resources to assist in preparing students for IELTS, as well as facilitate teacher professional development opportunities through examining or research.

View the materials and advice available for teachers at www.ielts.org

2 IELTS test format

“Although we accept other English language tests, we always assess them by comparing them directly with the required IELTS score. IELTS test takers are thoroughly tested in the four main communication skills required for academic work.”

*Senior Student Recruitment Officer,
The Scottish Agricultural College, UK*



View available teacher resources and materials at www.ielts.org

A test of four skills

Test takers can choose between IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training, depending on their academic or professional aspirations, or visa requirements.

The distinction with IELTS Academic lies in the subject matter and tasks of the Reading and Writing components. The Listening and Speaking components are the same.

Listening 30 minutes

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

Reading 60 minutes

The **Academic** version 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, all of which have been selected for a non-specialist audience.

The **General Training** version requires test takers to read extracts from newspapers, advertisements, instruction manuals and books. These are materials test takers could encounter on a daily basis in an English speaking country.

Writing 60 minutes

The **Academic** version includes two tasks. Topics are of general interest to, suitable for and easily understood by test takers entering undergraduate or postgraduate studies or seeking professional registration.

Task 1

Test takers 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

Test takers 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.

The **General Training** version also includes two tasks, and is based on topics of general interest.

Task 1

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

Task 2

Test takers 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 11–14 minutes

The Speaking component assesses the test taker's use of spoken English, and takes between 11 and 14 minutes to complete. Every test is digitally recorded and consists of three parts:

Part 1

Test takers answer general questions about themselves and a range of familiar topics, such as their home, family, work, studies and interests. This part lasts between four and five minutes.

Part 2

Test takers are given a booklet which asks them to talk about a particular topic. They have one minute to prepare before speaking for up to two minutes. The examiner may ask one or two questions on the same topic to finish this part of the test.

Part 3

Test takers are asked further questions which are 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 format of the Speaking test is common across both IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training. It is structured in such a way that does not allow test takers to rehearse set responses beforehand.

IELTS Academic

IELTS Academic measures English language proficiency needed for an academic, higher education 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

Key similarities

- The **Listening** and **Speaking** components are the same for both versions. The distinction between 'academic' and 'general' literacy has traditionally been seen as most marked in relation to reading and writing skills. The more socially-oriented language skills of listening and speaking are equally important in an academic study or professional context
- The same amount of time is allocated to complete the Listening and Speaking components in both the General Training and Academic versions
- The **Reading** and **Writing** components are the same length in both versions
- Both versions of the test have the same minimum word requirements
- The same assessment criteria and 9-band scale is used to grade both versions.

Differences

The **Reading** component of the Academic and General Training versions is differentiated in terms of:

- the choice of texts (topic, genre, length, number, etc)
- the level of difficulty of the 40 test items. The Academic Reading component has more items pitched at bands 5-8, whereas the General Training has more items pitched at bands 3-6. This is a reflection of the different demands of Academic and General Training.

For the **Writing component**, the Academic and General Training versions are differentiated in terms of:

- the content and nature of the two writing tasks
- the contextual parameters of the tasks.

Given the level of differentiation described above, the Reading or Writing scores across the Academic and General Training versions are not interchangeable.

How we test

IELTS is a task-based test covering the four language skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking). IELTS test takers receive individual scores for each of the four test components. The average of the four provides the overall band score.

Each of the four components is carefully designed to focus on one particular skill. This results in a more equitable form of task design when compared with tests that assess multiple skills simultaneously and makes it easier to control task difficulty across the many different test versions produced each year.

For the organisations that require evidence of English language proficiency, the IELTS approach ensures that the score given for each component of the test is a clear and fair reflection of the test taker's ability in each of the four skills. This can be of particular value for professions where some language skills are deemed to be more important than others. For example, in Canada, nurses are required to achieve a higher band score in their IELTS Speaking and Writing test while teachers in Australia are required to achieve higher scores in their IELTS Speaking and Listening test.

While IELTS focuses on testing the four skills individually, there is inevitably an element of integration in each component in the same way that language skills are integrated in the real world. Test tasks often entail the use of other skills and are therefore 'integrated' to some degree, for example:

- In the Writing and Speaking components, information that is read or heard helps shape the test taker's own production. However, this is carefully controlled to ensure that the test taker is not required to carry out extensive or complex reading and listening in order to respond to the task. This is particularly important because a score for each skill is being reported and it would be unfair to test takers if their performance in one skill area was compromised by their lack of proficiency in another.

- Tasks in the Reading and Listening components can involve note-taking, labelling and completion of tables or flow charts. Nonetheless, it is important that any task or test items should focus on reading or listening and should not require detailed writing.

A full discussion of this issue is included in volume 19 of the series *Studies in Language Testing* (Taylor and Falvey, 2006).



Read more
More information for institutions that accept IELTS scores can be found in the *IELTS Guide for Institutions*, available at: www.ielts.org

3 IELTS scores and interpretation

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 inappropriate words. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate words 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, inappropriate words 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.

The 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), as shown in the table opposite.

Test takers 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 and abilities at a certain point in time. Skills and abilities inevitably diminish over time if not used. It is recommended that a Test Report Form more than **two years** old should only be accepted if it is accompanied by evidence that a candidate has actively maintained or improved their English.

How to interpret IELTS

Test takers receive scores on a band scale from 1 to 9. A profile score is reported for each skill. The four individual scores are averaged and rounded to produce an overall band score. Overall band scores and scores for each component (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) are reported in whole bands or half bands.

Overall band score

Test takers receive a Test Report Form including or listing their overall band score and their sub-scores on each of the four components: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Each of the component scores is equally weighted. The overall band score is calculated by taking the mean of the total of the four individual component scores.

Overall band scores are reported to the nearest whole or half band. The following rounding convention applies; if the average across the ends in .25, it is rounded up to the next half band, and if it ends in .75, it is rounded up to the next whole band.

Thus, a test taker achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.0 for Writing and 7.0 for Speaking would be awarded an overall band score of 6.5 ($25 \div 4 = 6.25 = \text{Band } 6.5$).

Likewise, a test taker achieving 4.0 for Listening, 3.5 for Reading, 4.0 for Writing and 4.0 for Speaking would be awarded an overall band score of 4.0 ($15.5 \div 4 = 3.875 = \text{Band } 4.0$).

On the other hand, a test taker achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.5 for Writing and 6.0 for Speaking would be awarded band 6 ($24.5 \div 4 = 6.125 = \text{Band } 6$).

Listening and Reading

IELTS Listening and Reading papers contain 40 items and each correct item is awarded one mark; the maximum raw score a candidate can achieve on a paper is 40. Band scores ranging from Band 1 to Band 9 are awarded to candidates on the basis of their raw scores.

All IELTS tasks are pre tested before being released as live items. This identifies minor differences in the difficulty level across tests. In order to equate different test versions, the band score boundaries are set so that all candidates' results relate to the same scale of achievement. This means, for example, that the Band 6 boundary may be set at a slightly different raw score across versions.

The tables below indicate the mean raw scores achieved by candidates at various levels in each of the Listening, Academic Reading and General Training Reading tests. They provide an indication of the number of marks required to achieve a particular band score.

Listening

Band score	Raw score out of 40
8	35
7	30
6	23
5	16

Academic Reading

Band score	Raw score out of 40
8	35
7	30
6	23
5	15

General Training Reading

Band score	Raw score out of 40
7	34
6	30
5	23
4	15

The Academic and General Training tests are graded to the same scale. The distinction between the two versions is one of genre or discourse type. Academic tests may contain source texts featuring more difficult vocabulary or greater complexity of style. It is usual that, to secure a given band score, a greater number of questions must be answered correctly on a General Training Reading component.

Writing and Speaking

When marking the Writing and Speaking components, examiners use detailed performance descriptors which describe written and spoken performance at each of the 9 IELTS bands.

Writing

Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas:

Criterion	Weighting
Task achievement (Task 1)/ Task response (Task 2)	25%
Coherence and cohesion	25%
Lexical resource	25%
Grammatical range and accuracy	25%

Speaking

Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas:

Criterion	Weighting
Fluency and coherence	25%
Lexical resource	25%
Grammatical range and accuracy	25%
Pronunciation	25%

The four criteria are equally weighted.

Assessment criteria (band descriptors)

Versions of the band descriptors for Writing and Speaking have been developed to help stakeholders better understand the level of performance required to attain a particular band score in each of the criterion areas. IELTS examiners undergo intensive face to face training and standardisation to ensure that they can apply the descriptors (these are available on page 18-23).

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

Kings College, UK



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What makes IELTS an international test?

“With IELTS, the world is a smaller place. I sat the test before leaving Japan and received a band score of 8.5, satisfying visa requirements. Before starting new employment, I was required to undertake the IELTS test again. This time it was the academic version mandated by my employer.”

*Pavel again received a band score of 8.5.
Employee, large accounting firm, Australia*



International partners

IELTS is owned by a global partnership of education and language experts: British Council, IDP:IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. These bodies are dedicated to academic excellence, cultural understanding, student recruitment, and creating success worldwide. Benefitting from the shared expertise of the three partners, the IELTS test combines the world-renowned assessment and research expertise of Cambridge English Language Assessment and the international delivery, evaluation and security expertise of the British Council and IDP:IELTS Australia.

International consultation

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

International content

The IELTS approach is recognised by academics and admissions professionals as being fair, reliable and valid to all candidates, whatever their nationality, cultural background, gender or specific needs. The test questions are developed by item writers in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US.

International delivery and accessibility

IELTS tests are offered up to four times a month at 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 an 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](http://www.ielts.org/testcentres)

International English

IELTS recognises both British and American English in terms of spelling, grammar and choice of words. It also incorporates a mix of native speaker accents from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and US in the Listening component.

What does this mean in practice?

The number of people migrating and studying abroad has multiplied over the last 20 years. This has transformed life in educational institutions. In English-speaking countries, more and more universities recruit staff internationally, and this is matched by an increasing student intake of non-native speakers of English. Simultaneously, in non-English speaking countries, more organisations are using English as a common language of communication, as well as employing rising numbers of staff from English-speaking countries. Consequently, more people are teaching, studying and working with others who speak different varieties of English.



5

Tips from teachers

The criteria for the different IELTS band scores make it clear which areas of language need to be developed, thereby setting clear goals and objectives. Teaching techniques for IELTS include presenting language elements such as grammar and vocabulary in a wider context.

The topics in IELTS are both interesting and contemporary, and are based in the real world. This means teachers can bring the outside world into their IELTS classes by using a range of authentic source materials adapted to test preparation.



Tips from Teachers

01 General

Make sure that your students:

- are familiar with the format and types of tasks in the different sections of the IELTS test
- know what is expected of them and how best to approach each section
- are aware of the time allowed for each section and include timed practice in class
- read the instructions carefully and follow them.

02 Listening

Make sure that your students:

- think about the context before they listen and identify the type of information they will need to listen for
- read the questions before they hear the text and use the time between each section to prepare for the following section.

03 Reading

Make sure that your students:

- use reading skills such as skimming and scanning – they will need to use these skills to answer all the questions in 1 hour
- know how best to approach each type of reading task
- answer the questions and transfer their answers to the answer sheet within the time allowed.

04 Writing


Make sure that your students:

- analyse the question carefully and plan their answer before starting to write
- keep in mind the reader and the purpose when writing
- structure their writing logically and clearly
- decide on a position and use examples and evidence to support points they make in task 2
- are familiar with the assessment criteria.

05 Speaking

Make sure that your students:

- feel confident and remind them to relax and enjoy the conversation with the examiner
- listen carefully to the questions
- use fillers and hesitation devices if they need 'thinking time' before answering
- realise it is their language level not their opinions which are being evaluated
- are familiar with the assessment criteria.



“Test takers receive an objective assessment of their English proficiency and have a clearer idea of where they need to make most improvements.”

Lyndell King, teacher

6

Becoming an IELTS examiner

“I love teaching for IELTS
as I can make my classes
more interactive.”

*Erika Tennant, IELTS course teacher,
Australia*

The DVD can be ordered via www.ielts.org

Becoming an IELTS examiner

Becoming an IELTS examiner is one of the many possible professional development opportunities available to teachers familiar with IELTS.

The training and support provided to IELTS examiners can impact positively on classroom practice. IELTS examiners gain a good understanding of what language learning involves, the study skills which will be useful to students following a university course in English and the conventions of English Academic Writing. Given the worldwide recognition of IELTS, and the continually increasing numbers of IELTS test takers, there is a growth in demand for IELTS examiners, depending on local conditions.

As IELTS examiners are qualified to examine for IELTS all over the world, IELTS examining is a practical and flexible way to supplement income from teaching.

How to become an IELTS examiner

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 global requirements to become an examiner undergo a comprehensive and systematic recruitment process which includes the following stages: interview, induction, training, standardisation and certification. An applicant must successfully pass each stage to progress to the next and can be rejected at any stage.

Examiners participate in refresher workshops and are required to formally demonstrate their marking proficiency through the certification process. The marking performance of the 7,000-plus global IELTS examiners cohort is then 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 to ensure consistency.

Ensuring consistency across test centres:

- same operational procedures are adhered to by all test centres globally
- same examiner systems, standards and monitoring safeguard results.

Setting IELTS band score requirements for recognising organisations

IELTS test scores are just one element of the assessment of a test taker's suitability to enrol at an institution or to join an organisation. The level of English needed for a test taker to perform effectively in study, work or training varies from one situation to another. That is why each individual organisation sets its own minimum IELTS score for applicants, depending on specific requirements. Admissions professionals may also wish to take into account whether their organisation provides ongoing language support to students or employees to improve their English.

The *IELTS Scores Explained DVD* provides detailed descriptions of the test components and sample test materials. The DVD contains real examples of test takers' writing and speaking performances at different band score levels.

7

Continual research-based development

The IELTS partners – the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment – have a longstanding commitment to remain at the forefront of developments in English language testing. Therefore, the IELTS approach to the design, delivery and assessment of the test is continually informed by research.

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.

Cambridge English Language Assessment Research and Validation

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

Studies in Language Testing is a series of academic volumes published jointly by Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge University Press (CUP) and edited by Dr Michael Milanovic and Prof Cyril J Weir.

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 2*
- 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*

Research Notes is the quarterly publication of Cambridge English Language Assessment that reports on research, test development and validation of all Cambridge English language testing products and teaching awards, including IELTS. You can download issues free of charge at www.ielts.org/researchers

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 received grants under this jointly-funded scheme. Such research has become a key component in securing external validation of IELTS.

The majority of IELTS-funded research is published in the *IELTS Research Reports* series. Volumes can be ordered online through www.ielts.org/researchers/research_reports

IELTS Research Reports include:

Title	Author/Organiser	Volume and date of publication
An impact study into the use of IELTS by professional associations and registration entities in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada	Glenys Merrifield, GBM & Associates, Australia	Volume 11, 2011
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
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
Does the computer make a difference? The reaction of candidates to a computer-based versus traditional hand-written form for the IELTS Writing component: effects and impact	Cyril Weir, The University of Bedfordshire, UK; Barry O'Sullivan, The University of Reading, UK; Jin Yan, Jiao Tong University, China; Steven Bax, Canterbury University, Christchurch, UK	Volume 7, 2007
IELTS as a predictor of academic language performance, Part 1	David Ingram, Amanda Bayliss; Melbourne University Private, Australia	Volume 7, 2007
Investigating the relationship between intensive English language study and band score gain on IELTS	Catherine Elder, The University of Auckland and Kieran O'Loughlin, The University of Melbourne, Australia	Volume 4, 2003
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

IELTS Speaking assessment criteria (band descriptors – public version)

Band	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar Speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features Develops topics fully and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics Uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content related and only rarely to search for language Develops topics coherently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning Uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies Uses paraphrase effectively as required
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence May demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction Uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics Uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation, with some inappropriate choices Uses paraphrase effectively
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation Uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriateness Generally paraphrases successfully
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going May over-use certain connectives and discourse markers Produces simple speech fluently, but more complex communication causes fluency problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility Attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction Links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some breakdowns in coherence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice Rarely attempts paraphrase
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speaks with long pauses Has limited ability to link simple sentences Gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information Has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pauses lengthily before most words Little communication possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only produces isolated words or memorised utterances
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No communication possible No rateable language 	
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not attend 	

View official sample tests at www.ielts.org

Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately • Produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety • Sustains flexible use of features throughout • Is effortless to understand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of structures flexibly • Produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriateness or basic/unsystematic errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of pronunciation features • Sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses • Is easy to understand throughout; 1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility • Frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows all the positive features of band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility • May make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control • Shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained • Can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of individual words or sounds reduces clarity at times
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy • Uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows all the positive features of band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare • Errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a limited range of pronunciation features • Attempts to control features but lapses are frequent • Mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances • Makes numerous errors except in memorised expressions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows some of the features of band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot produce basic sentence forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech is often unintelligible

IELTS Task 1 Writing assessment criteria (band descriptors – public version)

Band	Task achievement	Coherence and cohesion
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully satisfies all the requirements of the task Clearly presents a fully developed response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention Skilfully manages paragraphing
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covers all requirements of the task sufficiently Presents, highlights and illustrates key features / bullet points clearly and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequences information and ideas logically Manages all aspects of cohesion well Uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Covers the requirements of the task (Academic) presents a clear overview of main trends, differences or stages (General training) presents a clear purpose, with the tone consistent and appropriate Clearly presents and highlights key features / bullet points but could be more fully extended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout Uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses the requirements of the task (Academic) presents an overview with information appropriately selected (General training) presents a purpose that is generally clear; there may be inconsistencies in tone Presents and adequately highlights key features / bullet points but details may be irrelevant, inappropriate or inaccurate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression Uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical May not always use referencing clearly or appropriately
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally addresses the task; the format may be inappropriate in places (Academic) recounts detail mechanically with no clear overview; there may be no data to support the description (General training) may present a purpose for the letter that is unclear at times; the tone may be variable and sometimes inappropriate Presents, but inadequately covers, key features / bullet points; there may be a tendency to focus on details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression Makes inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices May be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to address the task but does not cover all key features / bullet points; the format may be inappropriate (General training) fails to clearly explain the purpose of the letter; the tone may be inappropriate May confuse key features / bullet points with detail; parts may be unclear, irrelevant, repetitive or inaccurate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response Uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to address the task, which may have been completely misunderstood Presents limited ideas which may be largely irrelevant/ repetitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not organise ideas logically May use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer is barely related to the task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has very little control of organisational features
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer is completely unrelated to the task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to communicate any message
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not attend Does not attempt the task in any way Writes a totally memorised response 	

Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings • Skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation • Produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of structures • The majority of sentences are error-free • Makes only very occasional errors or inappropriateness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision • Uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation • May produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a variety of complex structures • Produces frequent error-free sentences • Has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • Attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • Makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms • Makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task • May make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses only a limited range of structures • Attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences • May make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; error can cause some difficulty for the reader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task • Has limited control of word formation and/or spelling; errors may cause strain for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses only a very limited range of structures with only rare use of subordinate clauses • Some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses only a very limited range of words and expressions with very limited control of word formation and/or spelling; errors may severely distort the message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts sentence forms but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate and distort the meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary; essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can only use a few isolated words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot use sentence forms at all

IELTS Task 2 Writing assessment criteria (band descriptors – public version)

Band	Task response	Coherence and cohesion
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully addresses all parts of the task Presents a fully developed position in answer to the question with relevant, fully extended and well supported ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses cohesion in such a way that it attracts no attention Skilfully manages paragraphing
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficiently addresses all parts of the task Presents a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequences information and ideas logically Manages all aspects of cohesion well Uses paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses all parts of the task Presents a clear position throughout the response Presents, extends and supports main ideas, but there may be a tendency to over generalise and/or supporting ideas may lack focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logically organises information and ideas; there is clear progression throughout Uses a range of cohesive devices appropriately although there may be some under-/over-use Presents a clear central topic within each paragraph
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses all parts of the task although some parts may be more fully covered than others Presents a relevant position although the conclusions may become unclear or repetitive Presents relevant main ideas but some may be inadequately developed/unclear 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arranges information and ideas coherently and there is a clear overall progression Uses cohesive devices effectively, but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical May not always use referencing clearly or appropriately Uses paragraphing, but not always logically
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses the task only partially; the format may be inappropriate in places Expresses a position but the development is not always clear and there may be no conclusions drawn Presents some main ideas but these are limited and not sufficiently developed; there may be irrelevant detail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents information with some organisation but there may be a lack of overall progression Makes inadequate, inaccurate or over-use of cohesive devices May be repetitive because of lack of referencing and substitution May not write in paragraphs, or paragraphing may be inadequate
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responds to the task only in a minimal way or the answer is tangential; the format may be inappropriate Presents a position but this is unclear Presents some main ideas but these are difficult to identify and may be repetitive, irrelevant or not well supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presents information and ideas but these are not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression in the response Uses some basic cohesive devices but these may be inaccurate or repetitive May not write in paragraphs or their use may be confusing
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not adequately address any part of the task Does not express a clear position Presents few ideas, which are largely undeveloped or irrelevant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not organise ideas logically May use a very limited range of cohesive devices, and those used may not indicate a logical relationship between ideas
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barely responds to the task Does not express a position May attempt to present one or two ideas but there is no development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has very little control of organisational features
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer is completely unrelated to the task 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to communicate any message
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not attend Does not attempt the task in any way Writes a totally memorised response 	

Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of vocabulary with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of structures with full flexibility and accuracy; rare minor errors occur only as 'slips'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings • Skilfully uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation • Produces rare errors in spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a wide range of structures • The majority of sentences are error-free • Makes only very occasional errors or inappropriateness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a sufficient range of vocabulary to allow some flexibility and precision • Uses less common lexical items with some awareness of style and collocation • May produce occasional errors in word choice, spelling and/or word formation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a variety of complex structures • Produces frequent error-free sentences • Has good control of grammar and punctuation but may make a few errors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses an adequate range of vocabulary for the task • Attempts to use less common vocabulary but with some inaccuracy • Makes some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but they do not impede communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a mix of simple and complex sentence forms • Makes some errors in grammar and punctuation but they rarely reduce communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a limited range of vocabulary, but this is minimally adequate for the task • May make noticeable errors in spelling and/or word formation that may cause some difficulty for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses only a limited range of structures • Attempts complex sentences but these tend to be less accurate than simple sentences • May make frequent grammatical errors and punctuation may be faulty; errors can cause some difficulty for the reader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses only basic vocabulary which may be used repetitively or which may be inappropriate for the task • Has limited control of word formation and/or spelling; errors may cause strain for the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses only a very limited range of structures with only rare use of subordinate clauses • Some structures are accurate but errors predominate, and punctuation is often faulty
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses an extremely limited range of vocabulary; essentially no control of word formation and/or spelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot use sentence forms except in memorised phrases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can only use a few isolated words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot use sentence forms at all

How IELTS maps to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR)

How should the CEFR be used by recognising institutions wishing to set language ability requirements?

In fulfilling its purpose as a common reference tool, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was not designed to provide the basis for precise equating, nor was it intended to be a prescriptive tool to impose standardised solutions. Rather it was designed as a common framework of reference, primarily intended as 'a tool for reflection, communications and empowerment', as described by John Trim, its coordinating author, (Saville, N (2005)). The IELTS partners recommend that all test result users should look at the IELTS bandscore descriptors and use the *IELTS Scores Explained DVD* to establish the appropriate level of language ability required for their particular institution or course.

However, test users may also find the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages helpful. The Framework, a series of descriptions of abilities at different learning levels, which can be applied to any language, can provide a starting point for interpreting and comparing different language qualifications, and is increasingly used as a way of benchmarking language ability not only within Europe but worldwide.

To help test users understand the relationship between IELTS band scores and the six CEFR levels, Cambridge English Language Assessment has conducted a number of studies to map the IELTS scale to the CEFR, drawing on the interrelationship between IELTS and other Cambridge English Language Assessment qualifications and the known relationship of these latter qualifications to the CEFR.

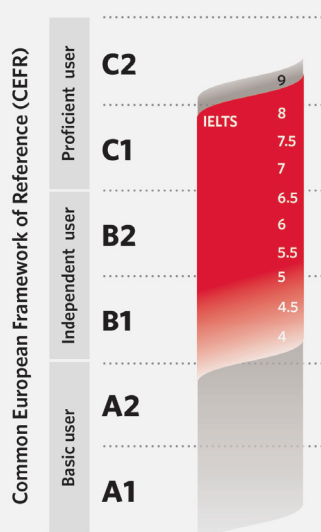


Figure 1: The mapping of the IELTS scale to the Common European Framework above is derived from the interrelationship between IELTS and the Cambridge English Language Assessment Main Suite qualifications and the mapping of these latter qualifications to the CEFR. Further information on this can be found at www.cambridgeenglish.org/cefr

General information

Making comparisons between scores on different tests is challenging because many of the current range of test products differ in their design, purpose, and format (Taylor, 2004a). Candidates' aptitude and preparation for a particular type of test may also vary and individual candidates or groups of candidates may perform better in certain tests than in others.

Specifying the relationship between a test product and the CEFR is challenging because, in order to function as a framework, the CEFR is deliberately underspecified (Davidson & Fulcher, 2007; Milanovic, 2009; Weir, 2005). Establishing the relationship is also not a one-off activity, but rather involves the accumulation of evidence over time (e.g. it needs to be shown that test quality and standards are maintained).

The relationship of IELTS with the CEFR is complex as IELTS is not a level-based test, but rather designed to span a much broader proficiency continuum. It also utilises a different 9-point band scoring system; thus, there will not be a one-to-one correspondence between IELTS scores and CEFR levels. It is important to bear in mind the differences in test purpose, test format, test populations, and measurement scales when seeking to make comparisons.

With the above in mind, Cambridge English Language Assessment has conducted a number of research projects since the late 1990s to explore how IELTS band scores align with the CEFR levels. A number of these were summarised in Taylor (2004b), while cautioning that, "As we grow in our understanding of the relationship between IELTS and the CEFR levels, so the frame of reference may need to be revised accordingly."

Note that the IELTS band scores referred to in Figure 1 above are the overall band scores, not the individual band scores for listening, reading, writing and speaking. It is important to recognise that the purpose of this figure is to communicate the relationship between IELTS performances and the CEFR. They should not be interpreted as reflecting strong claims about exact equivalence between assessment products or the scores they generate, for the reasons given in Taylor (2004a).

The current alignment is based upon a growing body of internal and external research, some of which has also appeared in peer-reviewed academic journals, attesting to their quality (e.g. Hawkey & Barker, 2004). This research has been further combined with long established experience of test use within education and society, as well as feedback from a range of stakeholders regarding the uses of test results for particular purposes.

As further work, such as that being undertaken in the English Profile project, enriches our understanding of the CEFR levels, further refinements may be possible.

Further information

Q1. Some IELTS band scores are shown as borderline (e.g. it is not clear whether band 5 is B1 or B2). How should institutions and organisations interpret this?

As IELTS preceded the CEFR, IELTS band score thresholds have never aligned exactly with the CEFR transition points. Previously (Taylor 2004a), we provided advice as to the score on IELTS that a candidate who was at a given CEFR level might achieve. However, our research shows that a C1 minimum threshold would fall between the 6.5 and 7 thresholds on the IELTS scale. Therefore, whilst many 6.5 candidates would be at C1, a number will be marginally below. The present table makes this clearer. So if an institution requires a high degree of confidence that an applicant is at C1, they may wish to set a requirement of 7, rather than 6.5.

Q2. Does IELTS differentiate at C2 level?

Band scores of 8.5 and higher constitute C2 level performance. Band 8 is borderline.

Q3. If a student has an IELTS score of 6.5 should this be treated as a B2 equivalent score?

6.5 is borderline B2/C1. It is for institutions to decide alignment to a particular level of the CEFR is critical. Otherwise, our general advice remains that an overall IELTS band 7.0 will probably meet the language requirements of most university courses, though 6.5 may be adequate for courses which are less linguistically demanding. Institutions need to consider a range of factors in setting their requirements, including, for example the amount of pre-sessional or in-session language-learning support which will be available to prospective students, and whether a minimum standard should also be specified in a particular individual skill.

Q4. How does this compare to the mappings that other language testers have published?

We do not comment on the benchmarking exercises that other language testers have provided.

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