

IELTS General Training Module How To Maximize your score

Ace the IELTS



By Simone Braverman

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IELTS General Module – How to Maximize Your Score
© August 2009 By Simone Braverman

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From the author

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What this book is about

This guide is here to teach you the IELTS test, not the English language. Why? Even if English is your main language, you can forget about getting a good score in IELTS, unless you are prepared. Three main problems will get in your way: *time, tricks and logical traps*.

When it comes to IELTS, **time is your worst enemy**. You need to do things fast. Of course you would get all the answers right if you had the time. But the reality is that there are a lot of questions to be answered, a lot of writing to be done, and very little time to do it.

This guide teaches you **HOW TO**:

- Listen, hear the right answers and write them down FAST
- Scan through the text and deal with all kinds of questions FAST
- Get your essay written FAST
- Build a speech in your head on any topic FAST
- Know and avoid the traps when you see them

This book might not make your English perfect, but it will certainly help you to get in shape and Ace the IELTS!

Attitude tips

In my opinion (which was validated by the IELTS scores of the people I trained) you don't need more than 4 weeks of daily training. Set aside 3 hours that you devote to practice for IELTS – and it will get you the desired result.

I believe that if you can read and understand this e-book, your English is good enough. Just stick to the guidelines of this book and they will help you get the best IELTS score you can with your current level of English. You can even give yourself a *day off* once a week, and still be able to ace the IELTS!

How to use this book

The way this manual has been put together makes it possible for you to read the main chapters (Listening, Reading, Writing or Speaking tips) in **any** order you like - each is completely independent of the other. You don't have to follow the order in which the book is written.

If you don't have much time, I suggest reading this book and doing only the exercises that are included in it, no extra work. This is not the ideal way though.

In case you do have the time, I highly recommend that you read and pay attention to all the tips in this manual and then try to use them when you practice real IELTS tests. There are links to IELTS materials at the end of every main chapter and a detailed study plan at the end of the book.

At the end of the book there are Pocket tips – short summaries of the most important hints in each of the chapters - Listening, Reading, Writing or Speaking. Every time you practice, read them before you start a test – they will refresh your memory and focus you on what's really important.

Enjoy!

The IELTS Routine

The IELTS test consists of four parts in the following order:

Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking.

Listening takes about 30 minutes - 20 minutes to listen to a recording and to answer questions on what you hear, and 10 minutes to transfer your answers to the Answer Sheet.

Reading takes 1 hour and your task is to read passages of text and to answer questions according to what you have read. There are also other types of assignment which I will cover later on.

Writing also takes 1 hour and is divided into 2 sub-parts: 20 minutes to write a letter and 40 minutes to write an essay.

Speaking takes up to 15 minutes and consists of 3 parts: a Personal Interview, a Short Speech and a Discussion.

All the parts continue one after another, and only before the Speaking do you get a little break. In some cases the Speaking section is held a day later.

The Listening test at a glance

Listening consists of 4 sections. There are 40 questions in total. You need to answer all the questions as you listen to the recording. The recording is not paused at any time and you hear it only once. The questions get more difficult as you progress through the test.

Are you scared yet? Don't be! There is a technique to get you through it. Just make sure that your answers are readable and easy to understand when you copy them to the Answer Sheet. You may write in **pencil only**.

The Reading test at a glance

The Reading test consists of about 4 text passages and has 40 questions in total. Your job is to read the passages and either answer questions, label diagrams, complete sentences or fill gaps. For every type of task there are instructions and an example. Passages are taken from books, newspapers, magazines and the topics are very diverse, from scuba diving to space exploration. Passages progress in difficulty, with the first being the easiest and the fourth is the hardest.

The good news is that you don't really have to read the whole passage, thanks to techniques that I will refer to later. The not-so-good news is that there is no additional time to copy your answers to the Answer Sheet and you need to squeeze it into the 60 minutes that you have. Please, don't forget to do this – I witnessed someone who did forget, and it was not a pretty sight. The poor guy was crying, he received a score of 0 for the **whole** Reading test. Here too you may write **in pencil only**, no pens are allowed.

The Writing test at a glance

Writing has 2 sub-tasks. The first one is to write a letter based on a scenario you receive, using about 150 words. The second task is to write an **essay** on a given topic, to present and justify an opinion or give a solution to a problem, using no fewer than 250 words.

Nothing to worry about here! Once you start using certain structures which I'll explain later on for the letter and the essay, in addition to your imagination, it is a piece of cake. This task requires a bit of training, but after you have written a few essays and letters you will be well-prepared for the test and you will feel **confident**.

The Speaking test at a glance

This is the fun part of the test, for many reasons. You get to rest before it. You are a little tired from the previous 3 parts and therefore more relaxed. The examiners are trained to smile no matter what, so you feel as if you are speaking to your best friend.

The first sub-part of the Speaking test is an interview, which means that the examiner asks you questions about yourself, your work, studies, parents, brothers/sisters, pets, etc. This is an easy task to prepare for.

In the second sub-part of the Speaking test you receive a card with 3-4 questions. After one minute, during which you have to think about something to say, you should give a short speech for one to two minutes, which answers those questions. At the end the examiner might ask you a couple of additional questions.

In the third sub-part of the test you have a discussion with the examiner. The topic is somehow related to the one from section two, but it is about more abstract ideas. You have to express and justify your opinions.

The examiner will record your session. Don't worry about it; the recording is to test the examiner and not you.

Tips for the Listening Test

In general

The Listening Test is probably the one people get most scared of. To help yourself overcome that fear, start watching TV programs in English. These are better than radio or audio books, because you also see images that help you understand the words you hear.

Listening – a skill, not a gift!

From my experience, in many cases listening is the least developed skill. So if you feel especially weak in that area, pay attention to the following tips, as they will help you improve your Listening ability. Remember – nobody is born with it, it's just a skill and you learn it. If you think your listening needs no improvements – skip the “Teach yourself the words” part, move forward to the tips which follow that part.

Teach yourself the words

The only way to improve your Listening ability is to train your ears to separate and understand the words you hear in the flow of a sentence. Often what you hear is a “Blablablable”, which you can't break into words, and for that reason it makes no sense to you. When training, make a recording of the news, a lecture, a television program, a movie or an actual IELTS Listening test and work with it. I suggest using an MP3 player. You can easily record English from the radio or any other source onto it. It is also easy to repeat (re-play) sentences you didn't understand. An MP3 player is small and light, so you can use it in any spare moment that you have – riding on a bus or on a tram, walking the dog, taking a walk, etc.

First, listen, remember what you heard and stop the recording after each phrase. Even if you didn't understand the phrase, play it in your head a couple of times, like a broken record – “Tonight we have a special guest”, “Tonight we have a special guest”, “Tonight we have a special guest”.

Then say it out loud. If you understood that phrase at first, this exercise will improve your pronunciation. If you didn't understand the phrase the first time, this repetition will give you more time to hear it better, break it into words and make sense out of them. If it is still difficult, you can always rewind and hear the phrase again.

There is a big difference between **seeing** a word printed on paper while reading, and **hearing** it. If you saw a word, it doesn't mean you will recognize it when you hear it. **This is why you must hear every word you have seen at least once.**

Instructions will keep you safe

Every task in the IELTS Listening test has its instructions. It may sound stupid, but you really need to read them carefully. Why? Because they will tell you exactly what to do with the information: how many words you can use to answer questions, whether or not there is a table you must fill in, whether there is a list to choose words from, how many items you must name, etc. Remember, too, that if the answer must be in 3 words – write EXACTLY 3 WORDS, because writing four or two words will get you 0 score.

To make my point crystal clear, let's take the following scenario as an example:

The speaker on a tape says:

“Well, if you are dieting, try to avoid fruits with lots of fructose like watermelon, mango, peaches or grapes.”

The question in the booklet is:

“Name 2 fruits a person on a diet should not eat”.

The answer may be “watermelon, mango” or “mango, peaches” or any combination of **two** items, but **never three or four!!!** Anyone who writes "watermelon, mango, peaches, grapes", just to be on the safe side, receives a score of zero for that question.

Note: when counting words – “a” or “the” counts as a word.

Divide and conquer!

The recording divides questions into **groups**, so for every grouping you are instructed to answer a group of 4-5 questions. There are 20-30 seconds of silence before each group.

The first thing you should do when the tape starts playing, is understand which group of questions you need to answer.

For example, the tape says: “Look at questions one to four”. It means that you have about 20 seconds to look at those questions. Go over the questions, read them and underline keywords. Keywords are the words that contain the main idea of the question. They will help you guess what you will hear – numbers, opening hours, names, locations, etc.

Draw a line under the fourth question, so you won't look further before it's time to do so.

Next you will hear a piece of spoken language and answer the questions one to four **as you listen**. It means that you should be able to write one answer and listen to another.

After that, the recording will say the numbers of the questions in the next group. Repeat the same process, including drawing the line. This dividing technique is very efficient because every time you concentrate on a **limited** number of questions, it makes you more focused and in control.

Distractions

Don't get confused by all the different voices you are going to hear. The recording uses several different voices – of younger and older people, men and women. You may also hear different accents - Australian, British, American, Japanese, etc. The background noises also vary. It can be from an airport, a coffee-shop, a street, a university lecture hall, you name it. Be ready for it and don't let it distract you – because that is exactly what they want. Ignore the noises and listen for the answers.

Listen for specifics

When you are listening, look for descriptions and details, such as dates, places, telephone numbers, opening hours, years (1995), transportation (car, bike, train), etc. If you hear them, but don't know where to place them yet – write them in the margins of the Listening booklet. Later you will have some time to check your answers. Going over the questions that you couldn't answer during the Listening passage, you might see if what you've written on the margins fits.

Answer as you listen

The reason you have to “answer as you listen” is that you immediately forget the sentences after you have heard them – because of stress, foreign language, constant flow of information, etc. After hearing the third sentence you won't be able to repeat the first. It means that when any part of the Listening is over you won't be able to remember any of the answers. So write them as you hear them, leave nothing for later.

Keep moving forward

A worst case scenario is you “losing the sequence of answers” – so you miss one answer and then you miss another one and so on. To prevent that from happening, always look one or two questions ahead. It sounds confusing, but after a little practice it becomes very natural and helps a lot. Even if you have missed the answer to a question – **admit it** and move to the next one, otherwise you will lose it too.

Know your clues

The answer is usually pronounced **louder and clearer**, so it is easier to hear and understand. If you can't hear something clearly (because the speaker swallows words or whispers), then probably the answer is not there. With some practice you will be able to tell the difference.

A good clue to an answer is when you hear a repetition of a word, a word being **spelled** out (G A R F U N K E L) or a number **dictated**.

Spelling tasks

As simple as it sounds, the spelling task is not so easy. You should practice a little to be prepared for it. Just ask someone to spell the names of cities from the following list for you. If you study alone, you could record yourself spelling those names and numbers, and then play it. The same goes for the list of telephone numbers I've included here. It is good practice and will only add to your confidence. Note: in numbers, "00" is sometimes read as "double o" instead of "zero-zero".

<u>Cities</u>	<u>Numbers</u>
Antananarivo	423-5207-0074
Brazzaville	628-2087-2311
Conakry	5167-832-0155
Gaborone	8746-221-0302
Johannesburg	5337-298-0132
Kinshasa	5900-231-7621
Libreville	4348-663-980
Lilongwe	11-267-55410
Mogadishu	101-9020-7624
Ouagadougou	413-2567-9011
Windhoek	782-6721-0412
Islamabad	479-2001-6792

Typical Listening tasks

Do you remember my promise – no surprises in IELTS? The following table shows you every type of task you may see in the Listening test booklet. Different task types come with different instructions, so if you see and remember them now, it will save you time later.

Of course, you won't get every type I show here in your test and the table looks a bit boring. Anyway, my advice is to get to know them **now**.

Don't let them catch you off-guard!

Task Type	What you do	Instructions in the booklet
Selecting pictures	From 3-4 pictures choose a picture that best describes what you hear	Circle the appropriate letter
Multiple choice questions	There is a question and a number of answers (three, four or five), your job is to pick the right one (sometimes more than just one).	Circle the appropriate letter /Circle the correct answer
Short-answer questions	Answer in 3 words, as the instructions say	Complete the notes/table. Use NO MORE THAN 3 WORDS for each answer
Sentence completion	Complete a sentence according to what you hear	Complete the notes/table. Use NO MORE THAN 3 WORDS for each answer
Form completion	A form is given and you need to fill in blank fields	Complete the form. Write NO MORE THAN 3 WORDS for each answer
Chart/Table completion	A table with some blank cells is given; your job is to fill them according to the passage you hear.	Complete the notes/table. Use NO MORE THAN 3 WORDS for each answer
True/False/Not Given task	A statement is given, decide whether it is True, False or Not Given in the recording, according to what you hear	Complete the notes/table. Use NO MORE THAN 3 WORDS for each answer
Gap-fill	There are several sentences with missing Words. You should pick the correct word and write it in the gap. Choose from the list(if there is one), or from what you have heard.	Complete the notes below by writing NO MORE THAN 3 WORDS in the spaces provided
Diagram labeling	Write a description in 1 to 3 words for different parts of a drawing according to what you hear	Complete/label the diagram by writing NO MORE THAN 3 WORDS in the boxes/spaces provided

Eliminate wrong answers

When you deal with multiple-choice questions, elimination is a good strategy. Usually only one answer is correct, unless the instructions say something else.

This task is similar to True/False/Not Given. In multiple choice questions consider each option and ask yourself whether it is true, false or not given according to the passage. Of course the one option that is true is the correct answer! Any other answer is obviously incorrect.

Keep in mind that there are cases when all the choices are correct or none of them is correct. Read the instruction carefully and you will know what to do in such cases.

Gap-fill strategy

Look at the words around the gap to understand what's missing, a noun (like boy, toy, truck), an adjective (little, pretty, shiny) or a verb (stands, looks, moves).

For instance, if you see a **Noun** before the blank ("The boy is ___"), it means that it's an **Adjective** ("The boy is small") or it's a **Verb** ("The boy is smiling") that is missing.

Once you have picked a word, write it above the gap and then read the whole sentence to be sure that it makes sense.

"Chameleon" questions

They might use different words with the same meaning to confuse you. It could be expressions or synonyms.

For example, the recording might say "All the candidates **have to** fill an application form" and the question says "The candidates **must** fill an application" – is it True, False or Not Given? The correct answer is True because "**have to**" means "**must**".

Watch out for traps

Trap Number One – unexpected turn

You might hear a speaker starting to say one thing and then, suddenly, continuing to something completely different. This is a trap, so make sure you don't fall for it. The rule here is "The last word counts". For example, if the speaker says "I want to visit that gallery on Monday. No, wait, I've just remembered that it is closed on Monday, so I will go on Wednesday.", and the question is "When...?" – the correct answer here is Wednesday, and Monday is a trap.

Trap Number Two – generalizations

You might hear a speaker first give a list of things and then say them **all in one word**. For example: "Well, I like to swim, hike, and camp – to be involved in outdoor activities." If the question is "What kind of activities..." the correct answer is "outdoor" and not "swimming", "hiking" or "camping".

Trap Number Three – explicit answer choices

Explicit answer choices can be (and mostly will be) traps. The following example demonstrates what I mean:

The recording says: "This course is a must for all the first year students, excluding foreign students".

The Question is "All the first year students have to take this course",

The Answer should be **F**(alse), because there is an exception – foreign students.

All the explicit answers that mean "no exceptions" are a bit suspicious and call for more attention.

Check the grammar

If the answer you give is grammatically incorrect – it cannot be the right one.

Checking the grammar of your answers will give you an idea whether your answer is correct or not, especially in tasks like:

- Gap-fill
- Sentence completion

Use your time wisely

During the test, you have a little time between Listening sections. Use it to check and complete your answers.

Copy answers smartly

After the 20 minutes or so of the Listening test, there are 10 additional minutes. During the test you have written all of the answers in the Listening test booklet. These 10 minutes are given you to copy your answers onto the Answer Sheet, and you should use them **smartly**.

The Answer Sheet has 2 sides, one for the Reading test and one for the Listening test, so make sure you are writing on the Listening side. I include here an example of an Answer Sheet so you can get familiar with it and use it for practicing. First, copy all the answers from the booklet onto the Answer Sheet, and pay attention to the following guidelines (as simple as they sound – they are BIG time savers):

- For multiple-choice questions and picture selection - just copy the letter of the correct answer, don't circle it.
- For sentence completion – just copy your answer, not the whole sentence.
- For True/False/Not Given questions – just copy T, F or NG, whatever your choice is.
- For gap-fills – just copy the word you have chosen for the gap.
- For answers written in short (like prof. advice) – write the full version (professional advice).
- Check that all the answers are clear and understandable.

Now, if you missed some questions – it is a good time to guess.

Answer Sheet looks something like this:

1		22	
2		23	
3		24	
4		25	
5		26	
6		27	
7		28	
8		29	
9		30	
10		31	
11		32	
12		33	
13		34	
14		35	
15		36	
16		37	
17		38	
18		39	
19		40	
20		41	
21		42	

For those of you who wonder why all the answers have to consist of a maximum of 3 words – here is the answer: there is not enough space on the Answer Sheet for anything longer than that!

Practice, practice, practice!

I strongly recommend that you use all the tips while practicing. In order to practice you are going to need samples of the Listening test, which can be found on the following internet sites (good quality, free of charge):

http://ielts-blog.com/moodle/file.php/1/resources_shared/Practice_tests/login.html

<http://www.ieltsgym.com/?id=FreeEnglishlessons> - online exercises with answers

<http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/IELTS/> - take it online, or print the booklet

<http://www.esl-lab.com/> - for this one you will need Real Audio Player

http://esl.about.com/cs/toefl/a/a_ielts_2.htm

Play the Listening samples and start using the tips while searching for answers. This is the only way to really understand how these tips work. You may have to play the same Listening file more than once, to practice different techniques.