

## TOP SCORE VOCABULARY FOR THE SPEAKING TEST

Using occasional, idiomatic or phrasal expressions in your IELTS interview can enrich vocabulary. However, they need to be used **naturally and only occasionally**.

'Sounding natural' is really important when trying to achieve a higher score. It means being fluent and using language in a way that makes the listener feel they are talking to someone who could belong to the same language community.

Below is a list of expressions, each with a meaning and an example of possible use in the Speaking test. Asterisk (\*) shows **the most flexible, and perhaps frequently used expressions**.

Expression	Meaning	How to use in a Speaking test
<b>* a drop in the ocean</b>	a very small amount compared to the amount needed	<i>Assessor:</i> Do you give money to charity? <i>You:</i> No I don't, mainly because I feel that my \$50 donation would only be <b>a drop in the ocean</b> .
<b>a lost soul</b>	without direction or purpose	<i>Assessor:</i> Do you feel you belong in Australia now? <i>You:</i> In some ways, yes, but deep down I'm still a bit of <b>a lost soul</b> .
<b>a real can of worms</b>	uncovering a range of complex problems	<i>Assessor:</i> Have you ever had to solve a tricky problem at work? <i>You:</i> Yes, I once found out that someone at work had a criminal record and it was <b>a real can of worms</b> when I tried to sack him.
<b>a straight talker</b>	someone who talks directly and openly	<i>Assessor:</i> What can you tell me about your best friend? <i>You:</i> My best friend, Paul, is a really <b>straight talker</b> ; he never just tries to say what I would like to hear.
<b>all at sea</b>	very confused	<i>Assessor:</i> Do you adapt well in new situations? <i>You:</i> Yes, eventually, but I tend to be <b>all at sea</b> at first, until things settle down.
<b>* at the end of the day</b>	finally/in the end	<i>Assessor:</i> Overall then, which is more important to you - love or respect? <i>You:</i> <b>At the end of the day</b> , it all depends on your priorities at different times.
<b>drop dead gorgeous</b>	very attractive	<i>Assessor:</i> Do you know a person who is very attractive? <i>You:</i> Yes, a friend of mine. She's a beauty; I mean she is <b>drop dead gorgeous</b> .
<b>full of beans</b>	has a lot of energy	<i>Assessor:</i> Is it true that children have more energy than adults? <i>You:</i> Oh yes, my son, for example, is always <b>full of beans</b> .

<b>life in the fast lane</b>	to seek many colourful experiences in order to chase success or self-improvement	<i>Assessor:</i> Do you enjoy taking risks? <i>You:</i> Well, you only live once, don't you, and I've always liked <b>life in the fast lane</b> .
<b>life in the slow lane</b>	life without any excitement or danger	<i>Assessor:</i> How do you feel about extreme sports? <i>You:</i> Well, some people go for them, but they're not for me - I prefer <b>life in the slow lane</b> .
<b>nothing to write home about</b>	mediocre/not as good as expected	<i>Assessor:</i> Have you seen any new movies lately? <i>You:</i> Yes, I saw the new Spielberg movie, but it was <b>nothing to write home about</b> .
<b>* over the top</b>	excessive	<i>Assessor:</i> Do you think a CEO can ruin a company? <i>You:</i> To blame one person for the collapse of the whole company seems to be a bit <b>over the top</b> .
<b>quality time</b>	time spent with someone without distractions	<i>Assessor:</i> If you could change something about your life, what would it be? <i>You:</i> I would work less and instead spend more <b>quality time</b> with my children.
<b>* the bottom line</b>	the final outcome	<i>Assessor:</i> Children these days often argue that learning in a classroom should be replaced with online studies, do you agree? <i>You:</i> The methods may vary, but the <b>bottom line is</b> they still need to go to school.
<b>* the tip of the iceberg</b>	the visible part of something but the main part is hidden	<i>Assessor:</i> Is there any corruption in your country? <i>You:</i> Yes, one of our government ministers was arrested recently for stealing public money and I'm pretty sure it's only <b>the tip of the iceberg</b> .
<b>tough love</b>	helping someone to change their behavior by treating them in a very severe way	<i>Assessor:</i> Do you believe in strong discipline? <i>You:</i> Well my dad was really strict, but I think his brand of <b>tough love</b> helped me to become more responsible.

Expression (verbal)	Meaning	How to use in a Speaking test
* I fancy a (something)	I would like a (something)	Assessor: Do you have a favourite café or restaurant? You: Definitely, there is a little cafe that I always go to when I <b>fancy a</b> coffee, and also the cupcakes they serve are heavenly.
* to be a disaster	to end very badly	Assessor: Are you good at building relationships? You: No, I'm afraid I'm not. My last relationship <b>was a (complete) disaster</b> .
* to be a joke	to be ridiculous, or ineffective	Assessor: Do you think the government should do more to protect the environment? You: With all due respect to the government of my country, their current attempts to protect the environment <b>are a joke</b> .
to be a waste of space	to be useless	Assessor: If you had a problem, would you ask your neighbour for help? You: My neighbour <b>is a waste of space</b> ; I wouldn't even bother.
to be an outsider	to be a stranger, new to something	Assessor: Have you got many friends in the place where you live? You: I'm still a <b>bit of an outsider</b> in my town, even 10 years after moving there.
* to be put out	to be offended/annoyed	Assessor: How did you feel when you didn't get that job? You: I <b>was a bit put out</b> when they sent me the rejection letter.
* to be up against it	to experience difficulties created by a situation or a group of people	Assessor: Have you ever been in a difficult situation? You: Yes, when I had to apply for my visa and saw all the paperwork involved, I realized that I <b>was really up against it</b> .
to be up on (something)	have good, up-to-date knowledge of (something)	Assessor: What are your interests? You: I like sports, especially football. I'm really <b>up on</b> the Premier League in the UK; I know all the teams.
to bite the bullet	to take an unpleasant action or decision	Assessor: Have you ever had to make an unpleasant decision? You: Yes, I once had to quit a well-paid job. It wasn't a good career move but I just had to <b>bite the bullet</b> .
to come together	to happen in a satisfactory way, without problems	Assessor: How did you feel when you found a new job? You: Like my life was finally starting to <b>come together</b> .
to do (something) up	to make improvements	Assessor: What would you like to change about your house? You: Everything! The whole place needs <b>doing up</b> .
to drink like a fish	to drink large amounts of alcohol regularly	Assessor: Do you think that drinking alcohol can be dangerous? You: Well, I suppose if you <b>drink like a fish</b> , you have to expect health problems.