Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing

An overview of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).
Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is trusted by organisations all over the world as an accurate, reliable and fair measure of English language proficiency. Developed by world leaders in language assessment and test delivery, IELTS is supported by ongoing international research in applied linguistics, language pedagogy and language assessment.

This guide is intended for staff in educational institutions, government departments, professional bodies, and for employers who require evidence of the English language proficiency of their applicants, as well as for English language teachers. It provides an overview of some of the key features of IELTS and how they contribute to reliable, relevant and fair language assessment – from the production of test materials, through test delivery, evaluation of candidate performance and test outcomes.

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For further information please visit www.ielts.org or refer to the ‘Further Support’ section of this brochure.
The IELTS test assesses the English language proficiency of people who want to study or work where English is the language used. It provides a fair, accurate and relevant assessment of language skills based on well-established standards and covers the full range of ability, from the beginner through to a very high level of proficiency.

IELTS tests come in two versions: Academic or General Training. Test takers can choose either version according to their educational and professional goals as well as any visa requirements. Both versions comprise four separate parts that assess each of the four language skills – listening, reading, writing and speaking.

IELTS results are reported on a nine-band scale (see page 18). This scale has remained consistent and acquired general currency around the world over the past three decades.

IELTS is jointly owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations. Benefiting from the shared expertise of these three global partners, IELTS combines the world-renowned language and research expertise of Cambridge ESOL and the test delivery, security and examination expertise of the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

- IELTS is the world’s most popular high-stakes English language test with more than 1.7 million tests taken each year.
- More than 7000 organisations in over 130 countries recognise and use IELTS for selection purposes.
- IELTS is offered at more than 800 locations worldwide.
- Test questions are developed by ESL specialists in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US.
- Test questions are based on authentic materials sourced from all over the world.

The latest IELTS Annual Review, containing candidate results by country and first language, is available to download at www.ielts.org/institutions.aspx.

Average test scores
IELTS Academic is suitable for people planning to study in higher education or seeking professional registration. This option is a test of general academic English and assesses whether a test taker is ready to study or train in English. (More information about IELTS Academic is available on page 12.)

IELTS General Training is suitable for test takers planning to train, undertake work experience or study at below degree level in English-speaking environments. This option emphasises language survival skills in a broad social and workplace context.

IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training

Test takers can choose between two versions of the test – IELTS Academic or IELTS General Training.

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

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

IELTS Academic

- 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
  - May include non-verbal materials such as diagrams, graphs or illustrations
  - Texts are authentic (e.g. taken from books, newspapers)

- Writing (60 minutes)
  - Writing task of at least 150 words where the test takers 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

- 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 IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training.

A detailed breakdown of the test format can be found in the Guide for educational institutions, governments, professional bodies and commercial organisations and the Information for Candidates booklets, both available at www.ielts.org

Read more

- Read about the different uses of IELTS on pages 12-15.
- Learn more about IELTS scoring and assessment criteria on pages 18-19.

Related research

Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing

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 test 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 certain professions where some language skills are deemed to be more important than others – for example nursing, where speaking and writing skills are sometimes considered to be of greatest importance (read more on page 14).

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.

**Related research**


The international English language test

IELTS has been developed in close consultation with academics, professional bodies and immigration authorities from around the world to ensure that it is relevant and fair to candidates regardless of cultural background or where they have learnt English.

This international approach to test development extends across all aspects of the test.

• IELTS accepts all standard varieties of English.
• IELTS tasks are written and edited by an international team of language experts.
• A range of native-speaker English accents is used in the Listening test.
• Test tasks draw upon a broad range of authentic content from around the world (books, newspapers, magazines, the internet etc.).

Face-to-face Speaking test

A face-to-face Speaking test is the most effective means of assessing speaking skills.

The IELTS Speaking test is conducted one-on-one with a qualified and trained examiner who interacts with and assesses the test taker’s communicative skills in English. (For more information about IELTS examiners please refer to pages 10 and 11.)

The face-to-face format prompts a more realistic performance from test takers, who are not simply responding to recorded cues from a computer. Institutions and employers are therefore better able to identify candidates who can communicate effectively in English.

The face-to-face Speaking test format is supported by a substantial body of academic research into test taker language and behaviour. Test takers also regularly indicate that they prefer to take a face-to-face Speaking test rather than a computer-mediated test.

Watch samples from IELTS Speaking tests on the IELTS Scores Explained DVD, available to order from www.ielts.org/institutions

Related research


The IELTS face-to-face Speaking test format prompts a more realistic performance from candidates.
The success of IELTS rests on attention to four key test qualities – validity, reliability, impact and practicality. These four factors have been the subject of a great deal of research involving academics, administrators, teachers and other practitioners throughout the world for more than 40 years.

The IELTS partners lead an extensive programme of international research designed to ensure the quality and continual improvement of IELTS tests.

Advances in applied linguistics, language pedagogy, language assessment and technological capabilities constantly challenge test developers to review, refine and reshape their approaches to test design, development, delivery and evaluation. The steady evolution of IELTS clearly demonstrates how such factors shape the development of a large-scale, high-stakes language test.

The IELTS research programme ensures:

- the ongoing usefulness and contemporary relevance of the test for organisations that use IELTS results
- that IELTS contributes more broadly to the growing understanding of the nature of language proficiency and its place within linguistics and language education.

Internal research

Internal research activities are managed by Cambridge ESOL’s Research and Validation group and are co-ordinated within a framework for ongoing test development and validation.

Cambridge ESOL makes a valuable contribution to the wider field of language assessment through a number of presentations and publications, in particular, Studies in Language Testing (SILT). SILT is a series of academic volumes that addresses a diverse range of important issues and new developments in language testing and assessment that are of interest to test users, developers and researchers. Research relating to IELTS test development and validation activities is also published in Research Notes (RN). For more information, go to www.ielts.org/researchnotes.

External research

The IELTS research programme, jointly funded by IDP: IELTS Australia and the British Council, ensures an ongoing relationship with the broader linguistics and language testing community and demonstrates the IELTS partners’ commitment to continuous improvement of the test.

Since 1995, more than 90 external studies by over 130 researchers around the world have attracted funding under this scheme. Selected reports are published in print and online in IELTS Research Reports www.ielts.org/researchers.

Annual research grants

Every year, individuals and education institutions with relevant experience are invited to apply to undertake IELTS-related research projects. Details of available grants, awards and application guidelines can be found online at www.ielts.org/researchers.
Production of test materials

The IELTS test production process is based on the ethical standards described in the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) Code of Practice and on the systems and processes outlined in the Cambridge ESOL Principles of Good Practice. These ensure appropriate qualitative standards for the production of test materials, involving the judgement of qualified specialists and quantitative statistical standards for the selection of suitable test material, as well as the maintenance of consistent levels of test difficulty over time.

Test production process

1. Commissioning
   Teams of language specialists based in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US are regularly commissioned to write test questions (known as ‘test items’). Item writers work from test specifications that detail the characteristics of the four IELTS components. The specifications outline the requirements for commissions and guide writers in how to approach the item writing process, including selecting appropriate material and developing suitable items.

2. Pre-editing
   Pre-editing is the first stage of the editing process and takes place when commissioned materials are initially submitted by item writers. The purpose of pre-editing is to ensure that submitted material conforms to the specifications in every respect (e.g. topic, level of language, style of writing, level of task, focus of task). At this stage, guidance on revising materials for re-submission is given to the item writers.

3. Editing
   Following pre-editing feedback, material is revised and submitted for editing. At editing, materials are approved for pretesting or are sent back to a writer for further revision.

4. Pretesting
   New material is pretested on representative groups of test takers from around the world who are preparing to take an IELTS test. This is done to evaluate its effectiveness and suitability for use in an IELTS test. The Research and Validation group at Cambridge ESOL collates and analyses data from pretesting to determine the measurement characteristics of the material, i.e. to find out how difficult the items are, and how well they distinguish between stronger and weaker candidates. The information gathered during pretesting (including statistics on Reading and Listening tasks, principal examiner reports on Writing and Speaking tasks and feedback from pretest candidates) is used to make informed decisions on whether materials can be accepted for use in IELTS tests.

5. Standards fixing
   Standards fixing involves administering new Listening or Reading material to representative groups of candidates as part of a live test. The aim of standards fixing is to confirm the measurement characteristics, and in particular the difficulty values, of new Listening and Reading items. The accuracy of the difficulty values generated by the standards fixing process ensures that band scores on every version of the IELTS Listening and Reading tests indicate the same measure of ability. Following standards fixing, the new material is ready to be used in live tests.

6. Test construction and grading
   At regular test construction meetings, papers are constructed for all four test components according to established principles. Among the factors taken into account are:
   - mean difficulty of the test version and the range of individual item difficulties
   - range of language skills tested
   - balance of task types
   - balance of topic and genre
   - range of cultural perspectives
   - range of voices and accents in the Listening versions.

   Data is routinely collected from live test administrations and analysed to confirm the accuracy of the initial grading process and to support ongoing quality assurance processes.

Ensuring appropriateness of topics

IELTS test materials are designed to be accessible to all candidates irrespective of their nationality, age, gender or first language. Topics or contexts of language use that might introduce a bias against any group of candidates are proscribed in the test specifications.

The pretesting stage (described in the diagram above) provides an additional check that all materials used in IELTS tests are appropriate to the culturally diverse international IELTS candidate.

Related research


Test delivery

Availability

• IELTS is available at more than 800 locations around the world.
• There are 48 test dates per year.
• Test fees are usually payable in local currency.
• Many IELTS test centres will deliver testing for groups of test takers onsite at their workplace or educational institution.
• Many test centres offer online booking as well as face-to-face customer support with booking the test.

Search for IELTS test centres around the world at www.ielts.org

Test takers with special requirements

To ensure that language proficiency is assessed fairly and objectively, IELTS provides a comprehensive service for test takers who have special requirements including hearing, visual and learning difficulties. These services include:

• modified and enlarged test papers
• Braille papers
• a hearing-impaired (lip-reading) version of the Listening test
• extra time
• a scribe to write answers on a candidate’s behalf
• use of assistive technology.

Results delivery

• Results for test takers can be previewed online on the 13th calendar day after their test.
• Test Report Forms are posted or are available for pick-up from the test centre 13 calendar days after the test.
• Only one copy of the Test Report Form is sent to the test taker unless they are applying to the Canadian government.
• A test taker may request to have their Test Report Form automatically sent to five institutions of their choice free of charge.

IELTS is available in more than 800 locations in over 130 countries.
Security

IELTS is a high-stakes test that leads to educational and professional opportunity at home and overseas. IELTS takes a multi-layered approach to test security, including measures before test day, on test day and after test day. These mechanisms ensure that the integrity of the test is upheld at all times.

While some examples of IELTS security measures are shared here, many others cannot be not disclosed to the public.

Test centre selection
Each prospective IELTS test centre goes through a rigorous selection process and agrees to a stringent set of contractual conditions.

Test centre audits
The conditions of IELTS test centre operation include a comprehensive audit programme involving both scheduled site audits and spot audits, without prior warning, to ensure test centre operations are maintained at a consistently high level.

In 2006, the British Council and IDP established the Cross Partner Audit Programme as an additional measure to help ensure consistent service delivery across the global IELTS network. This program enables spot audits to be conducted by IDP of centres managed by the British Council and by the British Council of test centres managed by IDP. The same audit documentation and reporting procedures are used by both partners for auditing all test centres across the global IELTS network.

Identity authentication
- Every test taker must present a valid identity document before being accepted to sit a test.
- A high-resolution photograph of each test taker is captured at registration. This ensures that the photograph which appears on the Test Report Form is that of the person who sat the test.
- Biometric systems are used to capture and record each test taker’s finger scan at test registration and before entry to the test. This finger scan is checked on test day to verify test taker identity and ensure that the same person sits all four components of the test.

Test materials
- Every test version includes a unique combination of questions – no two versions of the tests are the same.
- Restricted user rights among test centre staff ensure access to test materials is controlled.

Test results
- Systems are in place to automatically and routinely scrutinise test results. When an anomaly is identified, the test taker, test centre and any organisation that has been sent the result are notified and appropriate action is taken, which may include cancellation of an a test taker’s result.
- Organisations are strongly advised to use the IELTS Test Report Form Verification Service. This free, secure online service lets you:
  » quickly verify that an applicant is presenting a genuine result
  » conveniently download electronic Test Report Forms in batches.

Read more about the measures underpinning the consistency and reliability of results on page 11.
Evaluation of candidate performance

IELTS examiners

Writing and Speaking assessments are carried out by trained and certificated examiners. The examiners work to clearly defined criteria and are subject to extensive and detailed quality control procedures. There are more than 7000 IELTS examiners worldwide supported by the IELTS Professional Support Network, a system of recruitment, training, standardisation and monitoring. The Professional Support Network is jointly managed by British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

The Professional Support Network exists to:
• establish a clear framework for the professional support of IELTS Speaking and Writing examiners
• ensure that IELTS examiners are appropriately qualified and have the relevant professional experience (see ‘Recruitment’ section below)
• provide effective training for ESL teachers to enable them to carry out consistent IELTS assessments
• provide ongoing support through feedback from monitoring and through standardisation and certification, which ensures examiners maintain their high level of accuracy
• ensure that all examiners are given opportunities for professional development (e.g. the opportunity to apply to become an examiner trainer) throughout their career.

The major objectives of the Professional Support Network are for examiners to:
• rate the test takers’ spoken and written performance accurately and consistently using pre-defined descriptions of performance
• consistently apply Speaking test procedures to obtain consistent, representative, valid samples of the test taker’s spoken English.

Every IELTS examiner in every IELTS centre around the world is supported by this system.

The examiner system

Recruitment
The assessment of professional attributes and interpersonal skills of examiner applicants occurs at three stages in the recruitment process: application form, interview, and training. All examiners 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)

Induction
Shortlisted applicants are interviewed and, if successful, complete an induction process.

Training
Applicants who successfully complete induction proceed to training, which is carried out by an examiner trainer and lasts four days.

Certification
They then complete a certification set to demonstrate that they can apply the assessment criteria accurately and reliably and are certificated as examiners.

Year 1: Monitoring
Examiners are monitored at least once every two years. New examiners (and those who have not recently worked as IELTS examiners) are monitored three times in their first year. Monitoring is carried out by examiner trainers. All examiners receive written feedback on their rating and also on the delivery of the Speaking test. They may be required to take corrective action if any issues are raised about their performance.

Year 2: Standardisation and recertification
Standardisation sessions are held every two years and are led by an examiner trainer. Standardisation is completed at the centre and takes place as close as possible to the two-yearly recertification of the examiner. After the standardisation session, the examiners then complete a new certification set to demonstrate they can apply the assessment criteria accurately.
Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing

Systems and safeguards to ensure reliability of results

The consistency and reliability of IELTS results are safeguarded through several measures.

- **Sample monitoring of all examiners**
  Examiners are monitored at least once every two years. (See ‘Monitoring’ on page 10, opposite).

- **Targeted monitoring of examiners**
  Selected centres worldwide are required to provide samples of recordings and scripts from marked Speaking and/or Writing tests. These are then second-marked by a team of IELTS Principal Examiners/Assistant Principal Examiners and feedback is provided to each examiner.

- **Double marking at centre**
  Where significant divergence is identified between Writing and/or Speaking scores and Reading and Listening scores, candidate performances are double-marked.

- **Research and validation analyses**
  The Cambridge ESOL Research and Validation group conducts routine analysis on each test version to ensure that the performances of test materials, candidates and examiners are in line with historical norms.

- **Enquiry on results service**
  Candidates who feel that their score does not reflect their performance may apply to have their tests re-marked. An Enquiry on Result (EOR) is re-marked by a senior examiner.

Read more

- Data relating to IELTS examiner inter-rater correlations and reliability (i.e. comparing examiner marking) can be viewed at www.ielts.org/researchers/analysis_of_test_data.aspx

Related research


There are more than 7000 IELTS examiners worldwide who are all managed by the IELTS Professional Support Network.
Using IELTS

IELTS for study

IELTS Academic is suitable for people planning to study in higher education or seeking professional registration. It assesses whether a test taker is ready to begin studying or training in the medium of English. Making effective use of written texts in academic work is a skill to be acquired at college or university, not one that students at all levels should be expected to possess on entry. For this reason, IELTS Academic testing reflects some features of academic language but does not aim to simulate academic study tasks in their entirety. This approach is widely supported by the institutions that recognise IELTS.

IELTS General Training is suitable for test takers planning to train, undertake work experience or study at below degree level in English-speaking environments. IELTS is also a requirement for migration to some countries.

The IELTS partners work to help university admissions departments and other test users better understand the complex relationship between English language proficiency and subsequent academic success. This includes building awareness of key influences on academic outcomes and other factors, such as provision of ongoing language and study skills and support for international students.

Related research


Setting IELTS requirements for academic entry
Universities and other academic institutions are responsible for setting their own IELTS band score requirements. It is vital that these institutions have a clear understanding of the contribution that IELTS scores can make in determining an applicant’s suitability for entry, including the relative importance of scores in the four skills for particular academic courses.

The IELTS partners deliver information sessions to assist academic institutions in setting appropriate IELTS band score requirements. For more information, please contact the IELTS partners (see back cover for contact details).

Further support relating to interpreting IELTS scores
Visit www.ielts.org/institutions from where you can:
- download the Guide for educational institutions, governments, professional bodies and commercial organisations
- order the IELTS Scores Explained DVD. This DVD includes examples of candidates’ speaking and writing performance at different band score levels.

Related research


IELTS for professional registration

In most countries where English is the main language of communication, evidence of acceptable English language skills is a prerequisite for international graduates/applicants seeking professional registration.

Professional registration bodies around the world trust IELTS as a quality test that has proven to be reliable, consistent and secure for more than 20 years. Research has also shown that many professional associations prefer the IELTS approach to testing speaking skills using a face-to-face test.

• IELTS is accepted by professional registration bodies and associations in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the US, the UK as well as many non-English-speaking countries.

• Many of the registration bodies that accept IELTS represent the health care professions, such as nursing, medicine and pharmacy, where English language competence is of critical importance.

• Other professional bodies in particular countries requiring an IELTS result include accounting, engineering, law and veterinary practice.

• A wide range of other employers from sectors such as banking and finance, government, construction, energy and natural resources, aviation and tourism also require IELTS.

• Professional associations and registration bodies that accept IELTS are listed at www.ielts.org/recognition

Setting IELTS requirements for professional registration

The level of English language proficiency required by organisations varies by profession, by country and by jurisdiction. It is up to individual professional registration bodies to determine the level of English language ability (and which version of IELTS – Academic or General Training) they require.

Many professional registration bodies conduct their own research or seek advice from language experts to establish minimum standards of language proficiency in IELTS. Some nursing boards make a distinction between the productive skills and the receptive skills, requiring a higher minimum score for the Writing and Speaking tests than for Listening and Reading.

The IELTS partners deliver information sessions to assist professional bodies in setting appropriate IELTS band score requirements. For more information, please contact the IELTS partners (see back cover for contact details).

Related research


Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing

Evidence of English language proficiency is a requirement for skilled migration visas for most English-speaking countries. IELTS is accepted as evidence of English language proficiency by the UK Border Agency (UKBA), the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), Immigration New Zealand (INZ) and by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

Responding to government and stakeholder needs
IELTS testing is under continual review because of the evolving test taker pool worldwide and the increasing use of IELTS for migration purposes. For example, following extensive consultation with stakeholders in New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the UK, the Reading and Writing components of the General Training module were changed to feature workplace settings more prominently.

IELTS for migration

Evidence of English language proficiency is a requirement for skilled migration and permanent residency in many English-speaking countries.

Responding to government and stakeholder needs
IELTS testing is under continual review because of the evolving test taker pool worldwide and the increasing use of IELTS for migration purposes. For example, following extensive consultation with stakeholders in New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the UK, the Reading and Writing components of the General Training module were changed to feature workplace settings more prominently.

Related research


# IELTS scores toolkit

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## IELTS scores toolkit

## IELTS nine-band scale

Each band corresponds to a level of competence in English. All parts of the test and the overall band score are reported in whole or half bands, e.g. 7.0, 8.5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Band</th>
<th>Level Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Expert user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Very good user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Good user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><strong>Competent user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Modest user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Limited user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Extremely limited user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Intermittent user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Non-user</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td><strong>Did not attempt the test</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Public versions of the assessment criteria for Writing and Speaking are available at [www.ielts.org/criteria](http://www.ielts.org/criteria).
Understanding IELTS scores

IELTS scores are reported on the nine-band scale. The Academic and General Training versions are marked using the same criteria.

- The tasks and grading used for the Listening and Speaking components are the same for IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training. The more socially oriented language skills of listening and speaking are equally important in an academic study or workplace context.
- The tasks, test content and grading of the Reading and Writing components differ between IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training. This is because the distinction between ‘academic’ and ‘general’ literacy has usually been seen as most marked in reading and writing skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IELTS scoring summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The IELTS Listening test contains 40 questions. Each correct item is awarded one mark. Band scores, ranging from Band 1 to Band 9, are awarded to candidates on the basis of their raw scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The IELTS Reading test contains 40 questions. Each correct item is awarded one mark. Band scores, ranging from Band 1 to Band 9, are awarded to candidates on the basis of their raw scores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examiners use detailed performance descriptors to award a band score for each of four assessment criteria:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Task Achievement (for Task 1), Task Response (for Task 2) – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Coherence and Cohesion – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lexical Resource – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grammatical Range and Accuracy – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speaking</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examiners use detailed performance descriptors to award a band for each of four assessment criteria:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fluency and Coherence – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lexical Resource – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grammatical Range and Accuracy – 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Pronunciation – 25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Differences between IELTS Academic and General Training: |
| No difference |

Differences between IELTS Academic and General Training:

- The **Reading** component of IELTS Academic and General Training is differentiated by:
  - The texts (topic, genre, discourse type, length, number, etc.). Academic papers may contain source texts featuring more difficult vocabulary or greater complexity of style. To secure a given band score, a greater number of questions must therefore be answered correctly on a General Training Reading test.
  - The range of item difficulties. The Academic Reading component has more items pitched at bands 5-8, whereas the General Training module has more items pitched at bands 3-6. This is a reflection of the different demands of Academic and General Training discourse for language learners.

| Differences between IELTS Academic and General Training: |
| No difference |

Band score boundaries

Although all IELTS test materials are pretested and standards fixed before being released as live tests, there are inevitably minor differences in the difficulty level across tests. 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 individual test versions.
IELTS test takers receive a Test Report Form setting out their overall band score and their scores on each of the four components: **Listening**, **Reading**, **Writing** and **Speaking**. Each of the component scores is weighted equally. The overall band score is calculated by taking the average 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 four skills 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.

### Calculating the overall band score

Some examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Average score*</th>
<th>Band score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate A</strong></td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.25</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate B</strong></td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>3.875</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidate C</strong></td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.125</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Average score = total of the four individual component scores divided by four.
IELTS results are reported as an overall band score and a score for each of the four skills.

IELTS results that are more than two years old

The IELTS partners recommend that a Test Report Form more than two years old should only be accepted as evidence of present level of language ability if it is accompanied by proof that the candidate has actively maintained or improved their English language proficiency. This recommendation is based upon what we know about the phenomenon of second language loss or ‘attrition’, a topic that is well-researched and documented in the academic literature.

The level of second language competence gained and the extent of opportunity for subsequent practice both affect how much language ability is retained or lost over a period of time. Research points to two types of attrition. At lower proficiency levels, rapid language loss occurs soon after the end of language training/exposure (for approximately two years) and then levels off, leaving a residual competency. At higher proficiency levels the reverse pattern can be observed; a few years of non-attrition followed by steady loss.

Related research


The IELTS partners recommend that all organisations that accept IELTS results should look at the IELTS band score descriptors and use the IELTS Scores Explained DVD to ascertain the appropriate level of language ability required for their institution or course.

Test users may also find the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) helpful. The framework is a series of descriptions of abilities at different learning levels that can be applied to any language. It can provide a starting point for interpreting and comparing different language qualifications and is increasingly used as a way of benchmarking language ability around the world.

To help test users understand the relationship between IELTS band scores and the six CEFR levels, Cambridge ESOL has conducted several studies to map the IELTS nine-band scale to the CEFR, drawing on the interrelationship between IELTS and other Cambridge ESOL qualifications and the known relationship of these latter qualifications to the CEFR.

Further information can be found at www.ielts.org/researchers/common_european_framework.aspx

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### Related research


The IELTS partners publish a wide range of information and support materials for people interested in IELTS.

For organisations and institutions

- Visit www.ielts.org/institutions.aspx for a range of support materials including:
  - Guide for educational institutions, governments, professional bodies and commercial organisations brochure
  - IELTS Scores Explained (DVD)
  - IELTS Test Report Form Verification Service booklet
  - IELTS Annual Review
  - IELTS Guide for Agents
  - IELTS Guide for Teachers
  - Analysis of test data
  - Frequently asked questions.

- ‘Who accepts IELTS’ search tool:
  The IELTS website attracts several million visitors per year from more than 200 countries. Visitors to the site are able to find the IELTS requirements of different institutions by using the ‘Who accepts IELTS?’ tool. To check whether your institution is listed or to register your institution, visit www.ielts.org/recognition

- Results verification service – Organisations are advised to sign up for the free Test Report Form Verification Service to ensure that the results presented by test takers are genuine. Find out more at www.ielts.org/verify

For test takers

Face-to-face advice and support materials for test takers are available through the worldwide network of IELTS centres. Materials include Information for Candidates booklet and Official Practice Materials (for purchase) and free sample questions covering each part of the test. These resources can also be obtained via www.ielts.org/testtakers

For researchers

Visit www.ielts.org/researchers to find:

- information about IELTS research grants and awards
- analysis of past test data
- analysis of test taker performance
- information about score processing and interpretation
- examiner information
- guidance for using the Common European Framework of Reference
- teaching resources.
IELTS Bands 4-9 (NQF levels Entry 3 to Level 3) are accredited by Ofqual, England’s Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation.