

THE ACADEMIC SPEAKING TEST

The IELTS Academic Speaking test is the shortest of the components of the IELTS test - only 11 to 14 minutes. In this short time you have to convince the examiner who will be speaking with you of your level of English. Practice with good quality IELTS practice tests is very important.

The IELTS Academic Speaking Test is the same for both the Academic and General Training modules. The test is conducted with 1 examiner and 1 candidate. The Speaking test is recorded. The Speaking Test is divided into 3 sections:

Section 1 Section 1 begins with some general introductory questions. This is followed by some questions on personal information similar to the type of questions one would ask when meeting someone for the first time. Finally the examiner asks a series of questions of 2 topics of general interest. (4 - 5 minutes)

Section 2 Section 2 is a monologue (1 person speaking) by the candidate. The examiner will give the candidate a card with a subject and a few guiding questions on it. The student must talk for 1 to 2 minutes on this subject. The examiner decides on the exact length. The student has an optional 1 minute in order to prepare for his talk and is provided with some paper and a pencil in order to make some brief notes. After the candidate's talk the examiner will ask 1 or 2 brief questions in order to finish off the section. (3 - 4 minutes)

Section 3 Here the examiner will ask some more questions generally related to the subject spoken about in section 2. These questions will be more demanding and require some critical analysis on the part of the candidate. (4 - 5 minutes)

Question Types

The types of questions that come in the IELTS Academic Speaking Test are very general in nature and are designed so that anyone around the world, regardless of what background or culture they come from, should be able to answer them. The questions will not be overly personal and will avoid contentious subjects such as politics, sex or religion.

All the questions will be open questions rather than closed questions. An open question asks the candidate to give an extended answer, and so have the opportunity to show how good his English is. A closed question is one that can be answered by a single word or a couple of words. So, you will not get a question like:

Do you like living in your town?

A student could just answer yes. Any answers like this will just be followed by the question why? so you have to extend your answer (what you should have done after the "yes" anyway). Anyway, the question is more likely to be:

Why do you like living in your town?

Here the candidate has to give an explanation and therefore the examiner hears plenty of English which will help him or her evaluate you.

Marking - IELTS Academic Speaking Test Marks, Bands and Results

In the IELTS Academic Speaking Test you will be marked in 4 areas. These 4 areas are: Fluency and Coherence, Lexical Resource, Grammatical Range and Accuracy and Pronunciation. For the first 3, you get a mark out of 9. For Pronunciation you get a 2, 4, 6 or 8. Finally an average is taken to give you your final band for the Speaking. Let's look at these areas in more detail.

Fluency and Coherence: The examiner grades your fluency, which is how easy, smooth and flowing your speaking is. To get a good grade here, any gaps in your speaking should be associated with searching for the right idea rather than hesitancy with finding the right word or structure. For the coherence part, the examiner looks at how easy you are to understand. Does your flow of ideas run smoothly, logically and with consistency? Do you communicate well?

Lexical Resource: This mark grades the range of words that you use in your speaking test and whether you use the words in the right way, at the right time and in the right place.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy: This mark grades your range of grammatical structures, your accuracy at producing them and whether you use the right structure at the right time and in the right place. This is the area that worries the candidates the most as it is the dreaded grammar. Remember it is only 1 part out of 4.

Pronunciation: This mark grades you on how clearly you speak English.

The Three Sections of the IELTS Academic Listening Test

Here we will look at the three sections in more detail. Remember, the IELTS test always tries to mirror situations that you will encounter as a student or immigrant in an English speaking country. The speaking test is no different and each of the sections has a specific purpose. Like all the different modules of the IELTS, the speaking gets more difficult as it goes on. The questions that are asked in Section 1 are easier than in Section 2 and so on. This does not mean that by Section 3 they are impossible but they are more demanding linguistically.

Section 1 (4 - 5 minutes)

This section is divided into three parts.

- i) The first part involves general introductions. Here the examiner checks that he or she has the right person by checking the candidates name, origin and identification. This only takes a few seconds.
- ii) In the second part the examiner asks some personal (not too personal so don't worry) questions about some familiar topics such as yourself, your family, your home or your work/study. These questions are the type that people would use when meeting someone for the first time. This should last for a couple of minutes.
- iii) In the third part the examiner chooses 2 sets of questions from his selection. These sets of questions will cover general ideas on a theme of general interest.



Section 2 (3 - 4 minutes)

In this section the candidate has to give a small "speech" or monologue on a general subject chosen by the examiner. The examiner will hand you a card with the subject written on it, along with about three questions on the subject in order to guide and help your speaking. The examiner will then tell you that you have 1 minute to prepare your mini-talk and he or she will give you some paper and a pencil to make some notes during that minute. You can refer to your notes while you are speaking. After the minute, the examiner will ask you to start talking and you must talk on the subject until the examiner asks you to stop. After he has asked you to stop, he may ask you 1 or 2 general questions about what you have been discussing. You cannot ask the examiner for another card. You must use the one that he gives you.

Section 3 (4 - 5 minutes)

In Section 3 the examiner will ask you a series of questions thematically linked to the subject that you spoke about in Section 2. These questions will be of a more demanding nature and will require a more analytical and thoughtful answer. You will also probably need to use more complex language as regards grammatical structure and vocabulary.

How to do Better in the IELTS Academic Speaking Test

There are a number of things you can do to have a better performance in the IELTS Academic Speaking Test.

First of all practice. This is the key to all the different modules of IELTS. Below you will find a separate section devoted to practising the speaking. The questions we supply with our IELTS practice tests will help you practise the possible subjects that might be used.

When you are in the test, smile and look the examiner in the eye. Try and be friendly and look as though you are enjoying the conversation. This has a big effect on the examiner. If an examiner has to talk with someone who doesn't talk much, doesn't smile at all and who clearly doesn't want to be there, then it has a negative effect on the examiner. Being nervous is fine. The examiner understands that and will try and put you at ease. But be friendly. It makes a difference.

Don't worry about the occasional mistake. The examiner will expect some mistakes - after all, English is a foreign language for you and people make mistakes in speaking foreign languages. The examiner is not making a note of every single mistake that you make. This would be impossible to do and concentrate on your speaking. He will more get a general impression of your English accuracy so individual errors don't matter. More important is your communication.

You have to talk. Without your talking input, the examiner can't grade you very well. Try and give as full an answer as you can so that you show the examiner that you are comfortable at talking at length and can communicate well. Don't do this to extremes though. When you have finished what you have to say stop. Don't try and force more out as it will probably be strained and repetitive. The examiner will see that you have finished and will give you the next question. Similarly, you won't be able to answer all questions at length. Different people can talk about different questions more and the examiner knows this. If you don't

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know much about something, say so and then say what you do know. When you're finished, the examiner will give you another question. You can't duck out of every question though - the responsibility is on you to talk.

Don't try and be too clever. Just try and talk normally as that is when you will perform at your best. If you try and extend yourself too much, then that is when you will make the most errors.

Perfection is not needed. You can still make some errors and get a 9 (not many errors though). So don't let making errors upset you. Get on with the talking and concentrate on your communication.

One thing that puts candidates off is that the Speaking test is recorded. This is done so that, if necessary, the speaking can be re-marked. If the bands for a candidate's writing and speaking for instance are very different, then the candidate's test is re-checked. If the speaking was not recorded, then this could not be done. This doesn't happen very often. Sample recordings are also sent to the IELTS administration to be monitored to make sure that examiners are doing a good job and assigning the correct bands. So, try and forget that the recorder is there and get on with answering the questions.

Don't forget your ID! You need it at the start of the test.

Don't give yes/no answers unless you continue with a because. It gives a bad impression. If you do give a yes/now answer, you'll probably get a why next anyway.

Practice

As in all parts of the IELTS, this is the one thing that will really improve your band. Of course, using IELTS practice tests is important, but there are various other things that you can do to improve your performance.

Prepare the types of questions for each of the different sections.

Section 1

In section 1 you start with personal questions such as about yourself, your family, your home or your work/study. So, sit down with your dictionary and try and think of all the vocabulary you would need to completely describe all parts of your life, home, family and work/study. Then sit down with a piece of paper and write down every question you can think of about these ideas. Try and come up with about 20. Our IELTS practice tests will help you to think of ideas. You can then practice them in 2

ways:

- i) Get a friend to ask you the questions and practice giving long, full answers. Do this again and again. It doesn't matter if you do the same question frequently, as you will give better and better answers with more and more information. The more often you practice this, the better you'll get.



ii) If you don't have a friend who can do this, then you can do it by yourself. You just look at your list and imagine that someone has asked you the question. Then, off you go. You can do this sat at home, you can talk to the cat, the mirror or do it driving on the way to work. It may feel a bit strange at first, talking by yourself, but it works and you will improve. You don't have to do either method i or ii, you can mix both. It all helps.

In the second part of Section 1 you have to answer questions on themes of general interest. These are not complicated but are more demanding than the ones that you did in the part before. See our IELTS practice tests for examples. Let's say for example that the theme the examiner chooses is travelling. The examiner will have a set of questions to ask you. How many he asks depends on how long you talk for in your answers. The first question could be:

Do you enjoy traveling and why/why not?

Then this could be followed by:

Where would you like to travel to and why?

You can find other sample themes and questions in IELTS Help Now IELTS practice tests and from other sources. Once you have an idea of the types of theme and question, you can start to make your own examples and practice answering them in the ways (i and ii) above. I have done this with classes and it works very well. Students doing this, more often than not, come up with actual themes and questions from the test itself!!

Section 2

Preparation and practice for Section 2 is similar to the practice in Section 1. You have to talk for 1 to 2

minutes in English. Speaking for this time in your own language is quite hard, so in a foreign language it is harder. The reason it is hard is that you don't often talk uninterrupted for 1 to 2 minutes about anything, whether it is in your language or English. So, how do you get better at it? By practising it again and again. Let's say that your task is as follows:

Describe a favourite holiday destination that you like.

You should say:

- When you first went there.
- How you get there.
- What you do when you're there.
- And explain why this place is so special for you.

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So, you can see the format of this section. The practice procedure is as before. Check out other question types and soon you're be able to develop your own. Then practice them with someone or by yourself. Soon, talking for 2 minutes without stopping won't be a problem. Remember you don't have to talk fast or without breaks. They want you to talk normally. Talk at a normal speed, pause to take breaths and take time to consult your notes to give yourself ideas about what to talk about next.

The follow up question to end Section 2 is not so important that it needs to be practiced as it only requires a few words as an answer. An example question from the examiner for the subject above could be:

"Do you think I would enjoy a holiday in this place too?"

The candidate would just be expected to say something like:

"Oh yes, I think so." Or:

"Maybe not. It might be too hot for you."

You can see that nothing very long is required.

At this point I'd like to explain about the 1 minute preparation time and the notes that you can write during it. First of all, use your preparation time and make notes. Before you begin your monologue, you will have 1 minute to prepare for it. Some people think that they don't need the time at all and will start straight away. Very often these people will dry up early and be at a loss about how to continue. Use your time. Someone starting straight away does not get any advantage at all over someone who takes the full minute to prepare.

So, what should you write in your notes? First of all, don't try and write out your whole talk word for word. You don't have enough time. Looking at the question above (which is a typical layout for this section) you can see that there is a main question (Describe a favourite holiday destination that you like.) and then 3 mini-questions following (Say when you first went there, how you get there what you do when you're there and explain why this place is so special for you).

These questions are here to help you as they give you ideas to talk about and give your talk a bit of structure. However, it asks you to talk about these things so you should talk about them. In your notes quickly jot down one or two ideas for each of the questions, so that they will remind you about things to talk about when you look at your notes during your talk. Finally, if you have time, maybe make a note of something from your own experience connected to the talking theme. When you are talking about something from your own experience, it is easier to talk at length. For example, for the question above, you could be just finishing and still have 45 seconds left to talk. You could be saying why the place is so special to you. As you run out of ideas you could give an example out of your own experience. You could say:

"Actually why I like the place so much is shown from something that happened to me the last time I was there. I was in a restaurant having some food and..."

The subject of your story doesn't matter as you are still on the subject of your talk. The main thing is that it's keeping you talking.

The key point is to practice before you go into your exam, so that you will be at ease with the process of preparation and talking on your own for 2 minutes. IELTS practice tests give typical subjects that you might come across.

Section 3

Section 3 really carries on from where Section 2 left off. The examiner will ask you questions that are thematically linked to the subject that you talked about in Section 2. For example, for the question we looked at above about a holiday destination, the examiner might choose to ask you questions about tourism and the airline industry. The examiner will have a set of questions to ask you. How many he asks depends on how long you talk for in your answers. None of the questions will be of a technical nature or require any specialist knowledge as that would be unfair, but you will be expected to give your opinion on what is asked you. Look at our IELTS practice tests to see how the questions in Section 3 lead in from Section 2.

So, let's look at some examples.

Tourism

- Can you predict any major changes that could happen in the Tourist Industry over the next 50 years?
- Can you compare the tourist industry in your country today with the tourist industry when your grandparents were young? Can you identify some of the factors that have led to the Industry success of the airline industry?

Airline

- Can you suggest any ways in which air travel could be made safer?
- You can see that the questions here are more analytical and require more thought than the questions in the previous sections.

As regards practice, the procedure is as in the previous sections. You need to get someone to do the questions with you, or do them alone and then develop your own questions and practice with them.

ielts helpnow.com IELTS practice tests also provide practice and often we provide much fuller examples. Our tests are also at least half the price! The choice is yours.

Anyway, work hard and good luck with the IELTS Academic Speaking Test. I hope that this free tutorial has helped you. Below are links to the other free IELTS academic tutorials. We strongly recommend that you practice for the tests with good IELTS practice tests. Of course, we would like you to use ours as we believe ours are excellent and the cheapest on the market, but any good IELTS practice tests will do.



SMART VOCABULARY FOR SPEAKING AND WRITING

EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

1) ELATION

2) MELANCHOLY

3) CONTENTMENT

4) DISQUIET

5) JUBILATION

6) PENSIVE

7) AWE

8) RESTLESSNESS

9) SERENITY

10) VULNERABILITY

DESCRIBING EXPERIENCES

1) ENTHRALLING

2) BITTERSWEET

3) CAPTIVATING



- 4)PROFOUND
- 5)WHIMSICAL
- 6)TRANSFORMATIVE

- 7)MUNDANE

- 8)ENLIGHTENING

- 9)CATHARTIC

- 10)UNFORGETTABLE

PERSONAL GROWTH AND REFLECTION

- 1)INTROSPECTION
- 2)SELF-DISCOVERY
- 3)EVOLVE
- 4)INSIGHTFUL
- 5)RESILIENCE
- 6)PROGRESS
- 7)SELF-AWARENESS
- 8)PERSPECTIVE
- 9)DEVELOPMENT
- 10)ADAPTATION



NATURE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 1)TRANQUIL
- 2)VERDANT
- 3)AROMATIC
- 4)IDYLLIC
- 5)SOLITUDE
- 6)SCENIC
- 7)WHISPERS OF THE WIND
- 8)DAPPLED SUNLIGHT
- 9)RUSTLING LEAVES
- 10)GLISTENING DEW

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS

- 1)CONNECTION
- 2)EMPATHY
- 3)BOND
- 4)CAMARADERIE
- 5)DISCORD



6)NURTURING

7)AFFECTIONATE

8)COMMUNICATION

9)RECIPROCITY

10)UNDERSTANDING

SELF-CARE AND WELL-BEING

1)REJUVENATE

2)NURTURE

3)SERENITY

4)RENEWAL

5)INNER PEACE

6)RESTORATION

7)MINDFULNESS

8)WELLNESS

9)GRATIFYING

10)BALANCE

CREATIVITY AND INSPIRATION

1)MUSE



2)IMAGINATION

3)INGENUITY

4)INNSPIRING

5)EXPRESSIVE

6)INNOVATION

7)VISIONARY

8)ARTISTIC

9)FLOURISH

10)SPARK

CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE

1)ADVERSITY

2)PERSEVERANCE

3)GRIT

4)OVERCOME

5)ENDURANCE

6)TRIUMPH

7)STEADFAST

8)RESOLUTE

9)CONQUER

10)FORTITUDE

