

IELTS™



Guide for agents

Information for education
and migration agents
around the world

Each year, more IELTS tests are taken than
any other high stakes English language test.

ielts.org

International English Language Testing System

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a test that measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work in environments where English is used as the main language of communication.

Over 10,000 educational institutions, professional bodies and employers, as well as governments around the world accept IELTS. This means that wherever your clients intend to go – the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK or other destinations – an IELTS result will help them get there.

Contents

Reasons your clients choose IELTS	1
The international English language test	2
Convenient test dates and locations	3
Knowing the test format	4
IELTS on Paper or Computer	5
Introducing computer-delivered IELTS	5
Understanding the IELTS band scale	6
Minimum IELTS band score requirements	7
Getting the results	8
Helping your clients prepare	9
Further information	9
Contact details	10

Reasons your clients choose IELTS

The test that sets the standard – IELTS is designed by world leaders in language assessment and test delivery to provide a reliable and consistent measure of English language proficiency.

Accepted for study, professional registration and migration – IELTS is accepted for study and employment all over the world. It is also accepted for migration by governments in more countries than any other high-stakes English language test. By preparing for just one language test your clients will gain access to the widest range of opportunities.

International recognition – IELTS is accepted by over 10,000 organizations in over 140 countries worldwide, including universities, employers, professional bodies and immigration authorities.

Organizations that request IELTS results include:

- all universities and the vast majority of training colleges and tertiary institutions in Australia, New Zealand and the UK
- over 3,400 in the US
- over 350 universities and colleges in Canada
- immigration authorities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK
- professional registration bodies covering areas such as accounting, engineering, teaching, law, medicine and nursing
- a wide range of employers from sectors such as banking and finance, government, construction, energy and natural resources, aviation, health and tourism
- universities in non-English speaking countries where English is a language of instruction

Culturally fair – Each IELTS question can take up to two years to develop to ensure it is accessible and fair for test takers of all backgrounds. Every question is trialled extensively to ensure it does not assume prior knowledge about a specific country, culture or academic subject. IELTS accepts American, British and Australian English and uses a variety of accents in the Listening section for a more comprehensive test approach.

People focussed – IELTS uses highly trained examiners to assess performance in the Speaking test. Research shows that this approach to speaking assessment is more authentic than other methods and also gives test takers the best opportunity to fully demonstrate their English language skills.

Widely available – With tests available in more than 140 countries throughout the year, IELTS is the world's most popular high stakes English language test. To find an IELTS test center near them, they can visit ielts.org.

Your IELTS, your choice – IELTS provides a choice of taking the test on paper or on computer.

Stringent security – IELTS takes a multi-layered approach to security which is trusted by organizations and protects the integrity of your clients' results. Measures include secure biometric systems and high resolution photography of each test taker on registration. A comprehensive test center audit scheme is also in place.

IELTS for UK Visas and Immigration

Find out how your clients can use an IELTS result for this purpose at ielts.org/unitedkingdom. For more information on going to or staying in the UK, visit gov.uk

“IELTS makes the world a bigger, more open place. Learning English has transformed me into a citizen of the world.”

Analyst at large accounting firm





Search the list of organizations that accept and use IELTS results at ielts.org/recognition

The international English language test

The truly international nature of IELTS makes it the preferred choice of test takers, organizations and governments. Not only is IELTS available worldwide, it has also been developed by international language experts to include content of global relevance.

- **International English:** IELTS accepts all standard varieties of native speaker English, including American, Australian, British, Canadian and New Zealand. The Listening section also includes accents from these regions.
- **International content:** The IELTS approach is recognized as being fair, reliable and valid to all test takers. The test questions are developed by a network of IELTS test material writers in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and US.
- **International consultation:** IELTS has been developed in close consultation with academics, professional bodies and immigration authorities from around the world to ensure the test is relevant to all English speaking countries.
- **International partners:** IELTS is co-owned and was co-created by a global partnership of education and language experts: the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge Assessment English. These organizations are dedicated to academic excellence, cultural understanding, student placement and enabling success worldwide.
- **IELTS USA:** IELTS supports organizations in the United States that use IELTS to measure the English language proficiency of international applicants. IELTS USA also manages the administration of IELTS test operations across the United States.

Convenient test dates and locations



There are over 1,600 IELTS test locations worldwide in over 140 countries. Find your nearest test location at ielts.org/testcenters

IELTS is one of the most widely available English language tests in the world.

- Available throughout the year in more than 140 countries
- Test centers have more places available than other high-stakes tests
- Many test centers are conveniently located within universities and college buildings or within town centers

Registering for the test

- Test takers can register for the test at an IELTS test center or by mail. Many test centers also offer online registration
- Test takers can find their nearest test location and register online at ielts.org/testcenters.
- The IELTS Application Form is also available through each test center website and at ielts.org/testtakers.

- Test takers must bring their current passport (or national identity card) to the test. This is the only form of identity that will be accepted on the test day. The passport/identity card must be valid/not expired at registration and on the test day
- Test fees vary from country to country and in most cases are payable in local currency. Details are provided on each test center website

Test takers with special requirements

Arrangements are available to IELTS test takers with special requirements including hearing, visual or learning difficulties. These include:

- Modified and enlarged papers
- Braille papers
- Lip reading version of the Listening section
- Amplification equipment for the Listening section
- Extra time for the Reading and Writing sections and/or use of a computer (e.g. for test takers with dyslexia)
- A scribe to write answers on a test taker's behalf

Key fact

Each IELTS test is of the same level of difficulty and is marked with the same assessment criteria all over the world. This means that test takers are no more likely to receive a higher band score in one country than another.

IELTS examiners, wherever they are in the world, are qualified English language professionals who attend regular training sessions and are required to formally demonstrate their marking proficiency through a re-certification process. The marking performance of IELTS examiners is systematically and regularly monitored. Examiner marking standards are maintained through the IELTS Professional Support Network, a quality assurance system designed and managed by the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

See also 'Reliable results', page 8.

Advise your clients

Special requirements

- If your client requires special arrangements to be made, you should advise them to discuss their needs with their test center as soon as possible
- Changes to the testing environment require six weeks' notice
- Changes to the test paper can require three months' notice
- Each case is considered individually and will need to be accompanied by medical evidence
- For more information, visit ielts.org/special_requirements

IELTS for UK Visas and Immigration

Find out how your clients can use an IELTS result for this purpose at ielts.org/unitedkingdom. For more information on going to or staying in the UK, visit gov.uk

Knowing the test format

A choice of two tests

IELTS offers a choice of two tests – Academic and General Training, to serve both academic and non-academic purposes available in both paper-based or computer-delivered options. This makes the test relevant to everyone, whether they plan to study, migrate, or work abroad.

A test of four skills

Both IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training cover the four language skills – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. All test takers take the same Listening and Speaking sections. There are different Reading and Writing sections for IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training.

Face-to-face Speaking test

IELTS has always included a face-to-face Speaking section which prompts the most authentic performance from test takers. The use of the face-to-face section in a high stakes test is supported by a body of current academic research and continues to set IELTS apart from other English language tests.

A fairer environment

A secure and fair testing environment helps people perform to the best of their ability in the Speaking test. IELTS Speaking tests are conducted in a private room, one-to-one with an examiner.

IELTS Academic

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

Listening* (30 minutes)

- Four recorded monologues and conversations

Reading (60 minutes)

- Three long reading passages with tasks
- Texts range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical
- Includes non-verbal materials such as diagrams, graphs or illustrations
- Texts are authentic (e.g. taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers)

Writing (60 minutes)

- Writing task of at least 150 words where the test takers must summarize, describe or explain a table, graph, chart or diagram
- Short essay task of at least 250 words

Speaking* (11 to 14 minutes)

- Face-to-face interview
- Includes short questions, speaking at length about a familiar topic and a structured discussion

IELTS General Training

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

Listening* (30 minutes)

- Four recorded monologues and conversations

Reading (60 minutes)

- Five or six texts of varying length 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 notices, advertisements, 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 sections are the same for both tests. The Reading and Writing sections differ.

! Advise your clients

Choosing the right test – Academic or General Training?

The IELTS test your client should take, as well as the result they need, is determined both by visa requirements and by the requirements of any educational institution or professional organization to which they intend to apply.

If you are unsure which test your client should take, contact the organization to which they are applying for confirmation.

IELTS on Paper or Computer

IELTS can be taken on paper or Computer

Paper-based IELTS

This test requires test takers to sit at a desk with the question papers and answer sheets for the Reading, Listening and Writing tests in an official IELTS test center. Test Takers will write their answers in either pen or HB-pencil.

Computer-delivered IELTS

This test requires test takers to sit the Reading, Listening and Writing tests in front of a computer with the question presented on the screen in an

official IELTS test center. The test takers then submit their answers through the use of a keyboard and a mouse.

Face-to-face speaking test

The Speaking test for both paper-based and computer-delivered IELTS is carried out face-to-face with a trained IELTS examiner.

Introducing computer-delivered IELTS

Computer-delivered IELTS is here, with faster results and more test availability

- Results in 5-7 days
- More tests, more days of the week
- Speaking test remains face-to-face

Test takers now have the choice between taking IELTS on paper or on computer.

The test content and structure remain the same in both options and, importantly, the Speaking test remains face-to-face with a certified IELTS Examiner.

Still the same trusted IELTS test

Whether test takers take IELTS on paper or computer, they can be confident that they are taking the same trusted English language test, with no differences in:

- Content
- Question types
- Test timings*
- Security
- Structure
- Speaking test
- Marking
- Test Report Form

*In the computer-delivered Listening test, the timings are slightly different from the paper-based test.

This is because the paper-based test requires users to transfer answers to an answer sheet.

This step becomes redundant when answering directly on a computer.

- Before the start of each part of the Listening test, users will have some time to read the questions.
- After the end of each part of the Listening test, users will have some time to review their answers.
- At the end of the Listening test, users will have 2 minutes to check their answers.

The timing of the Listening test is between 30 – 34 minutes.

With computer-delivered IELTS there are more test dates and sessions available, allowing test takers to choose a test time most convenient for them.

With this new option, the test results will be available in 5-7 days.

“I really wanted my results quicker, so that’s why I took IELTS on a computer. The test was otherwise the same.”

Tom, Germany



Helping your client prepare for computer-delivered IELTS

Before they head into their test, make sure you encourage them to get familiar with the computer-delivered experience. They can do this by sampling the practice questions and reviewing the official test support materials online.

Try the free sample test questions and watch tutorial videos on ielts.org/oncomputer

“Students tend to be more focussed and motivated by IELTS. They have clearer goals.”

English language teacher,
Perth, Australia



Understanding the IELTS band scale

IELTS provides a profile of a test taker’s ability to use English. Results are reported as band scores, on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 9 (the highest), as shown below. Test takers receive an overall band score and individual scores for each test section (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking).

This 9-band scale has remained consistent and reliable for over three decades.

Read more about band scores, examiners, marking and assessment criteria at ielts.org/criteria

9	Expert user	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very good user	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex, detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has fully operational command of the language, although with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	Competent user	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in own field.
5	Modest user	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	Limited user	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely limited user	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent user	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	Not user	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

Key fact

The Speaking test

Test takers should not be afraid to express their opinions in the Writing and Speaking tests. The examiner’s role in the Speaking and Writing tests is to assess how well a test taker is able to present ideas and arguments that are appropriate to the question, using good English. In the Speaking test, the examiner will ask test takers to explain or extend on their answers in order to encourage them to demonstrate their English as fully as possible, not in order to judge or challenge their opinions.

Key fact

Band score 9

IELTS band score 9 should not be equated with ‘native speaker standard’ because the English used by native speakers varies greatly. In fact, band score 9 represents an ‘Expert User’, that is, someone who has fully operational command of the language and makes almost no errors.



“I got the band score required by the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools, paving the way for my immigration to the US.”

IELTS test taker from China

Minimum IELTS band score requirements

Level of English

The level of English needed to perform effectively in study, work or training varies from one situation to another. This is why each individual organization sets its own minimum IELTS score requirements for applicants. Details of organizations that ask for IELTS and the minimum scores they require can be found at ielts.org/recognition

Read more about IELTS scores

- Read more about band scores, examiners, marking and assessment criteria at ielts.org/research
- Order the 'IELTS Scores Guide' (available from ielts.org). The Guide includes samples of test takers' writing and speaking responses so that test takers can see different levels of proficiency for themselves. Examiner comments are also provided.



Advise your clients

What score is required?

IELTS provides a valid and accurate assessment of English language proficiency on an easy to use 9-band scale, from minimal ability (band score 1) through to expert (band score 9).

The minimum band score a test taker must achieve is determined by the requirements of the visa, education program or employment for which they are applying.



Key fact

The same test standards all over the world

Some test takers falsely believe that by taking the test in a country where English is not the main language of communication that they will have a better chance of being one of the best performers at that test center – therefore increasing their chances of getting a higher score. However, IELTS scores are based solely on test taker performance. The band score awarded to each test taker is not dependent on the results of other test takers in any way.

Getting the results

Delivery of results

- Provisional results are released online to test takers on the 13th day after the paper-based test or within five to seven days after the computer-delivered test
- Test Result Forms are posted or available for pick up from the test center on the 13th day after the paper-based test or within 5 to 7 days after the computer-delivered test
- Test takers will only receive one copy of their Test Report Form or two copies if they are applying to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
- Test takers may also nominate up to five organizations to receive their Test Report Form automatically, free of charge. These organizations must be nominated when registering for the test

Test Report Forms (TRF) include a high resolution photograph of the test taker as well as a number of other security features.

Calculating the result

Test takers receive a Test Report Form showing their scores on each of the four sections: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Each of the four scores is equally weighted. The overall band score is then calculated by taking the average of the total of the four individual section scores.

Overall band scores are reported to the nearest whole or half band.

For example:

- A test taker achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.0 for Writing and 7.0 for Speaking would be awarded an overall band score of 6.5 ($6.5 \div 4 = 6.25 =$ rounded up to the nearest band score of 6.5)
- A test taker achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.5 for Writing and 6.0 for Speaking would be awarded band 6 ($24.5 \div 4 = 6.125 =$ Band 6)

For more information on how IELTS band scores are calculated visit ielts.org/criteria

Marking of IELTS Reading and Listening sections is carried out by clerical markers using an answer key. IELTS clerical markers are carefully selected and trained. Systematic monitoring and double marking of a proportion of answer sheets is carried out each test day and clerical markers are required to undergo re-certification on a regular basis.

Reliable results

Assessment of IELTS Writing and Speaking sections is carried out by highly qualified and experienced examiners who work to clearly defined criteria and are subject to extensive and detailed quality control procedures. Their performance is monitored by the IELTS Professional Support Network which manages training, standardization, certification and stringent monitoring procedures globally.

Read more about IELTS examiners and assessment processes in the 'Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing' guide, available to download at ielts.org/institutions



Advise your clients

Right of appeal

An 'Enquiry on Results' service is available to test takers who are not satisfied with their results. Tests are remarked by a Senior Examiner. If the result is changed, the fee for this service is refunded.

Applications for an Enquiry on Results must be made to the test center at which the test was taken within six weeks of the test date.



Advise your clients

How long is an IELTS score valid?

The IELTS test provides an accurate picture of a test taker's English language skills at a given point in time. The IELTS partners recommend that organizations and institutions that accept IELTS results should only accept a Test Report Form which is more than two years old if it is accompanied by proof that the test taker has actively maintained or tried to improve their English.

**“In Iran I saw the IELTS test as an obstacle!
But now that I’m studying in Australia
I can see the value of taking the test.
When I’m in a university exam I need
to read even more quickly and write
my answers in even less time than during
the IELTS test. I really think now that
the IELTS test was my best friend.”**

Law student from Iran, studying in Australia



Helping your clients prepare

Preparation materials and advice for test takers can be found online at ielts.org/prepare

Test takers are advised to:

- consider taking an English language course. Although it is not a requirement for test takers to attend a language course, it is proven to be one of the most effective ways to improve language proficiency. A course will not only provide more opportunity for your client to practice their English, it will also ensure they receive constructive feedback to help them improve
- read the *Information for Candidates* booklet. This contains essential guidance which every test taker should read in relation to test format, task types, time limits and test procedures
- understanding the IELTS band scale (page 6) and the IELTS assessment criteria (ielts.org/criteria). This will help your client determine whether they are ready to sit the test
- use their English everyday at home and at work/university – this includes speaking English with friends, watching and listening to English language programs, reading English publications and practising their written skills wherever possible
- practice with the free test samples available at ielts.org/testtakers in order to better understand what is expected in each part of the test
- consider purchasing the *IELTS Official Practice Materials* books from an IELTS test center. Many independent IELTS products are also available
- take an official IELTS practice test online at ieltsprogresscheck.com to check your IELTS progress
- think about taking an IELTS preparation course where test takers will receive feedback on their answers to practice questions

Advise your clients

Re-sitting the test

There are no restrictions on retaking the test. If the required score is not achieved, test takers can register for another test as soon as they feel they are ready. Test takers should be advised, however, that they are unlikely to gain a better score unless they work to improve their English and prepare for the test (see above).

Further information

Further IELTS information and resources can be found online at ielts.org including:

- ‘Find a test center’ search tool
- ‘Who accepts IELTS?’ database listing of over 10,000 organizations
- Information on IELTS for UK visas and immigration
- Sample test questions
- Data showing the average performance of takers by nationality and language group
- *Information for Candidates* booklet
- *Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing*

IELTS for UK, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand visas and immigration

Find out how your clients can use an IELTS result for these purposes at:

- ielts.org/unitedkingdom
- ielts.org/australia
- ielts.org/canada
- ielts.org/newzealand

BRITISH COUNCIL

Bridgewater House
58 Whitworth Street
Manchester, M1 6BB
UK

TEL: +44 (0) 161 957 7755

Email: ielts@britishcouncil.org

IDP: IELTS AUSTRALIA

Level 8

535 Bourke Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000
AUSTRALIA

TEL: +61 (0)3 9612 4400

Email: ielts.communications@idp.com

CAMBRIDGE ASSESSMENT ENGLISH

The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge,
CB2 8EA
UK

www.cambridgeenglish.org/helpdesk

IELTS USA

825 Colorado Boulevard
Suite 221
Los Angeles, CA 90041
USA

TEL: +1 323 255 2771

Email: ielts@ieltsusa.org

IELTS is jointly owned by the British Council,
IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge Assessment English



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