

Ensuring quality
and fairness
in international
language testing

IELTS™



An overview of the International English
Language Testing System (IELTS).

www.ielts.org

Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is trusted by organizations 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 test taker performance and test outcomes.

Contents

IELTS overview	1
Test format	
• IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training	2
• A test of four skills	3
• The international English language test	4
• Face-to-face Speaking test	4
Test production	
• Continual research-based improvement	6
• Production of test materials	7
Test delivery	
• Availability	8
• Test takers with special requirements	8
• Results delivery	8
• Security	9
Evaluation of test taker performance	
• IELTS examiners	10
• Systems and safeguards to ensure reliability of results	11
Using IELTS	
• IELTS for study	12
• IELTS for professional registration	14
• IELTS for migration	15
IELTS scores toolkit	
• IELTS nine-band scale	18
• Understanding IELTS scores	19
• Calculating an overall band score	20
• IELTS results that are more than two years old	21
• International standards – CEFR	22
Further support	23
Notes	24
Contact details	26



More than 9000 organizations worldwide accept IELTS. Find their IELTS requirements online at www.ielts.org/recognition

IELTS overview

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 types: Academic or General Training. Test takers can choose either type of test according to their educational and professional goals as well as any visa requirements. Both tests 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 for UK Visas and Immigration

Find out how the IELTS result can be used for this purpose at www.ielts.org/uk. For more information on going to or staying in the UK, visit www.gov.uk

IELTS is jointly owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. Benefiting from the shared expertise of these three global partners, IELTS combines the world-renowned language and research expertise of Cambridge English Language Assessment 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 over **2.5 million tests** taken each year.
- **More than 9,000 organizations** in over **140 countries** recognize and use IELTS for selection purposes.
- IELTS is offered at more than 1,000 locations worldwide including over 50 locations in the USA.
- Test questions are developed by English as a second language specialists in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US.
- Test questions are based on authentic materials sourced from all over the world.

Average test scores

Average IELTS test scores by country and first language, are available to download at www.ielts.org/data

Test format

IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training

Test takers can choose between two tests – IELTS Academic or IELTS General Training.

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 emphasizes language survival skills in a broad social and workplace context.

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 the focus of their studies to date.

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, 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

* The Listening and Speaking components are the same for both IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training.

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 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 organizations* 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

Davies, A. (2008). *Studies in English Language Testing Volume 23 – Assessing academic English: Testing English proficiency 1950-1989 – the IELTS solution*. Cambridge: Cambridge ESOL/Cambridge University Press.

A test of four skills

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 organizations 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

Nakatsuhara, F. (2011). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 12 – The relationship between test-takers listening proficiency and their performance on the IELTS test*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Hawkey, R., Green, A. and Unaldi, A. (2011). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 11 – An investigation of the process of writing IELTS Academic Reading Test items*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Weir, C., Hawkey, R., Green, A. and Devi, S. (2009). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 9 – The cognitive processes underlying the academic reading construct as measured by IELTS*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Taylor, L. and Falvey, P. (2007). *Studies in Language Testing Volume 19 – IELTS Collected Papers: Research in speaking and writing assessment*. Cambridge ESOL/Cambridge University Press.

Research Notes Issue 18 (2004) – IELTS, Some frequently asked questions. Cambridge ESOL/Cambridge University Press.

Davies, A. et al. (1999). *Dictionary of English Language Testing*. Cambridge ESOL/Cambridge University Press.

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 test takers 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 test takers 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 behavior. 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 Guide* DVD, available to order from www.ielts.org/institutions

Related research

Brown, A. and Hill, K. (2007). *Studies in Language Testing Volume 19 – Interviewer style and candidate performance in the IELTS oral interview*. Cambridge: UCLES/Cambridge University Press.

Brown, A. (2006). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 6 – An examination of the rating process in the revised IELTS Speaking Test*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Lazaraton, A. (2002). *Studies in Language Testing Volume 14 – A qualitative approach to the validation of oral language tests*. UCLES/Cambridge University Press.

O'Loughlin, K. (2001). *Studies in Language Testing Volume 13 – The equivalence of direct and semi-direct speaking tests*. UCLES/Cambridge University Press.

Qian, D. (2009). *Language Assessment Quarterly Volume 6, Issue 2 – Comparing direct and semi-direct modes for speaking assessment: Affective effects on test takers*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

**The IELTS face-to-face
Speaking test format
prompts a more realistic
performance from
test takers.**



Test production

Continual research-based improvement

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 program 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 program ensures:

- the ongoing usefulness and contemporary relevance of the test for organizations 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 English Language Assessment's Research and Validation group and are co-ordinated within a framework for ongoing test development and validation.

Cambridge English Language Assessment 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. For more information, go to www.cambridgeenglish.org/silt.

Research relating to IELTS test development and validation activities is also published in **Research Notes (RN)**. For more information, go to www.cambridgeenglish.org/researchnotes

External research

The IELTS research program, 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 100 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

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



Annual research grants

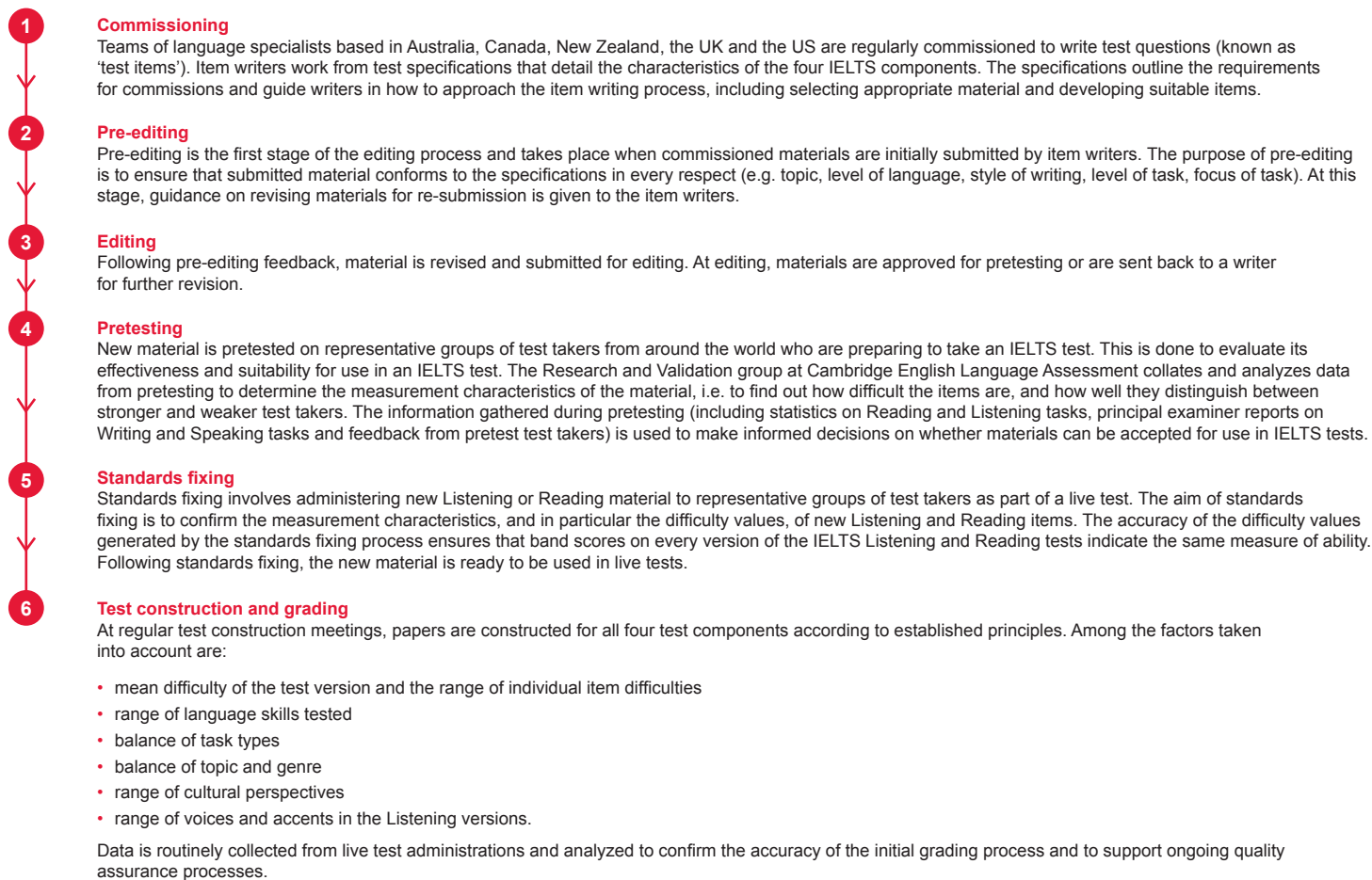
Every year, individuals and education institutions with relevant experience are invited to apply to undertake IELTS-related research projects. Details of available grants, awards and application guidelines can be found online at www.ielts.org/researchers

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 Cambridge English Language Assessment's *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



Ensuring appropriateness of topics

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

Related research

Cambridge English *Principles of Good Practice*, January 2013. Cambridge: Cambridge English Language Assessment. Available from www.cambridgeenglish.org/principles

Marshall, H. (2006). *Research Notes 23, 3-5 – The Cambridge ESOL item banking system*. Cambridge ESOL.

O'Loughlin, K. (2000). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 3 – The impact of gender in the IELTS oral interview*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Green, T. and Hawkey, R. (2011). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 11 – An empirical investigation of the process of writing Academic Reading test items for the International English Language Testing System*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Test delivery

Availability

- IELTS is available at more than **1,000 locations** worldwide including over 50 locations in the USA.
- There are **48 test dates per year**.
- Test fees are usually payable in local currency.
- Many IELTS test centers will deliver testing for groups of test takers onsite at their workplace or educational institution.
- Many test centers offer online booking as well as face-to-face customer support with booking the test.

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

IELTS for UK Visas and Immigration

Find out how the IELTS result can be used for this purpose at www.ielts.org/uk. For more information on going to or staying in the UK, visit www.gov.uk

Every test version includes a unique combination of questions – no two tests are the same.

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 test taker'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 center **13 calendar days** after the test.
- Only one copy of the Test Report Form is sent to the test taker.
- 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 1,000 locations in over 140 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 center selection

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

Test center audits

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

In 2006, the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia established the Cross Partner Audit Program 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: IELTS Australia of centers managed by the British Council and by the British Council of test centers managed by IDP: IELTS Australia. The same audit documentation and reporting procedures are used by both partners for auditing all test centers across the global IELTS network.

High-resolution photography and biometric systems are used to verify the identity of test takers.

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 center staff ensure access to test materials is controlled.

Test results

- Systems are in place to automatically and routinely scrutinize test results. When an anomaly is identified, the test taker, test center and any organization that has been sent the result are notified and appropriate action is taken, which may include cancellation of an a test taker's result.
- Organizations 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.



The *IELTS Test Report Form Verification Service* booklet can be downloaded from www.ielts.org/verify

Further information about IELTS security protocols can be requested by contacting the IELTS partners directly or by attending an IELTS information session. Please refer to the back cover for contact details of the Stakeholder Relations teams at the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and IELTS USA.

Read more

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

Evaluation of test taker 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. IELTS examiners worldwide are supported by the **IELTS Professional Support Network**, a system of recruitment, training, standardization 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 standardization 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 center 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 recognized 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: Standardization and recertification

Standardization sessions are held every two years and are led by an examiner trainer. Standardization is completed at the center and takes place as close as possible to the two-yearly recertification of the examiner. After the standardization session, the examiners then complete a new certification set to demonstrate they can apply the assessment criteria accurately.

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 centers 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 center**

Where significant divergence is identified between Writing and/or Speaking scores and Reading and Listening scores, test taker performances are double-marked.

- **Research and validation analyzes**

The Cambridge English Language Assessment Research and Validation group conducts routine analysis on each test version to ensure that the performances of test materials, test takers and examiners are in line with historical norms.

- **Enquiry on results service**

Test takers 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.



IELTS examiners worldwide are 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 recognize 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

Hawkey, R. (2006). *Studies in Language Testing Volume 24 – Impact Theory and Practice: Studies of the IELTS test and Progetto Lingue 2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge ESOL/Cambridge University Press.

O'Loughlin, K. and Arkoudis, S. (2009). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 10 – Investigating IELTS exit score gains in higher education*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Golder, K., Reeder, K. and Fleming, S. (2009). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 10 – Determination of an appropriate IELTS band score for admission into a program at a Canadian post-secondary polytechnic institution*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Lloyd-Jones, G., Neame, C. and Medaney, S. (2011). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 11 – A multiple case study of the relationship between the indicators of students' English language competence on entry and students' academic progress at an international postgraduate university*. British Council, and IDP: IELTS Australia.



IELTS Academic is suitable for people entering higher education or seeking professional registration in an English-speaking country.



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 programs.

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 organizations*
- order the *IELTS Scores Guide* DVD. This DVD includes examples of test takers' speaking and writing performance at different band score levels.



Related research

Breeze, R. and Miller, P. (2011). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 12 – Predictive validity of the IELTS Listening Test as an indication of student coping ability in Spain*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Golder, K., Reeder, K. and Fleming, S. (2009). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 10 – Determination of appropriate IELTS band score for admission into a program at a Canadian post-secondary polytechnic institution*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Hyatt, D. and Brooks, G. (2009). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 10 – Investigating stakeholders' perceptions of IELTS as an entry requirement for higher education in the UK*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Khalifa, H. and Weir, C. (2009). *Studies in English Language Testing Volume 29 – Examining Reading: Research and Practice in Assessing Second Language Reading*. Cambridge University Press.

Ingram, D. and Bayliss, A. (2007). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 7 – IELTS as a predictor of academic language performance*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Elder, C. and O'Loughlin, K. (2003). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 4 – Investigating the relationship between intensive English language study and band score gain on IELTS*. IDP: IELTS Australia.

Read, J. and Hayes, B. (2003). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 4 – The impact of IELTS on preparation for academic study in New Zealand*. IDP: IELTS Australia.

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 organizations 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 type of IELTS test – 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

Read, J. and Wette, R. (2009). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 10 – Achieving English proficiency for professional registration: The experience of overseas-qualified health professionals in the New Zealand context*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Smith, H. and Haslett, S. (2008). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 8 – Use of the IELTS General Training module in technical and vocational tertiary institutions: A case study from Aotearoa, New Zealand*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Merrifield, G. (2011). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 11 – An impact study into the use of IELTS by professional associations and registration entities: Canada, the United Kingdom and Ireland*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Singh, M. and Sawyer, W. (2011). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 11 – Learning to play the ‘classroom tennis’ well: IELTS and international students in teacher education*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

IELTS for migration

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 Visas and Immigration (UKVI), the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP), Immigration New Zealand (INZ) and by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC).

IELTS for UK Visas and Immigration

Find out how the IELTS result can be used for this purpose at www.ielts.org/uk. For more information on going to or staying in the UK, visit www.gov.uk

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 test were changed to feature workplace settings more prominently.

Related research

Merrifield, G. (2012). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 13 – The use of IELTS for assessing immigration eligibility in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK*. IDP: IELTS Australia and British Council.

Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship. (2006). *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia*, available at www.immi.gov.au/media/research/lisia/

Merrylees, B. (2003). *IELTS Research Reports Volume 4 – An impact study of two IELTS user groups: Candidates who sit the test for immigration purposes and candidates who sit the test for secondary education purposes*. IDP: IELTS Australia.



IELTS is a requirement for skilled migration and permanent residency in many English-speaking countries.



IELTS scores toolkit

Contents

- IELTS nine-band scale 18
- Understanding IELTS scores 19
- Calculating an overall band score 20
- IELTS results that are more than two years old 21
- International standards – CEFR 22

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.

IELTS Writing and Speaking assessment criteria

Public versions of the assessment criteria for Writing and Speaking are available at www.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 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 familiar situations.
5	Modest user	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, although 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	Non-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.

Understanding IELTS scores

IELTS scores are reported on the nine-band scale. The Academic and General Training tests 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.

IELTS scoring summary

Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking
<p>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 test takers on the basis of their raw scores.</p>	<p>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 test takers on the basis of their raw scores.</p>	<p>Examiners use detailed performance descriptors to award a band score for each of four assessment criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task Achievement (for Task 1), Task Response (for Task 2) – 25% Coherence and Cohesion – 25% Lexical Resource – 25% Grammatical Range and Accuracy – 25% 	<p>Examiners use detailed performance descriptors to award a band for each of four assessment criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fluency and Coherence – 25% Lexical Resource – 25% Grammatical Range and Accuracy – 25% Pronunciation – 25%
<p>Differences between IELTS Academic and General Training:</p> <p>No difference</p>	<p>Differences between IELTS Academic and General Training:</p> <p>The Reading component of IELTS Academic and General Training is differentiated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. 	<p>Differences between IELTS Academic and General Training:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Writing component of IELTS Academic and General Training are differentiated by the tasks (topic and genre). 	<p>Differences between IELTS Academic and General Training:</p> <p>No difference</p>

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 test takers' 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.




Calculating the overall band score

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.

Some examples						
	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Average score*	Band score
Test taker A	6.5	6.5	5.0	7.0	6.25	6.5
Test taker B	4.0	3.5	4.0	4.0	3.875	4.0
Test taker C	6.5	6.5	5.5	6.0	6.125	6.0

*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 test taker 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

Bardovi-Harlig, K. and Stringer, D. (2010) *Studies in Second Language Acquisition Volume 32 - Variables in Second Language Attrition*. Cambridge University Press.

Weltens, B. and Cohen, A. (1989). *Studies in Second Language Acquisition Volume 11 – Language attrition research, an introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

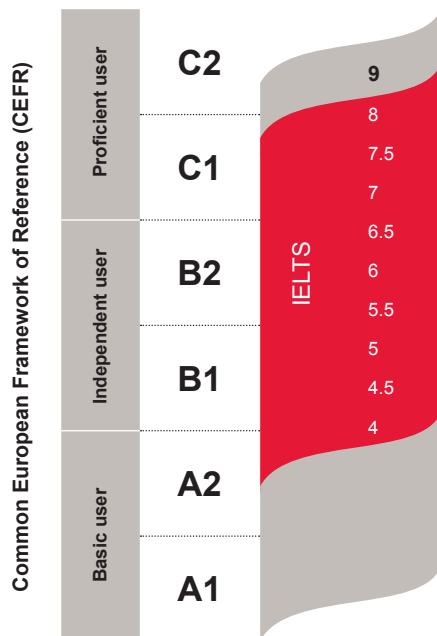
International standards – CEFR

The IELTS partners recommend that all organizations that accept IELTS results should look at the IELTS band score descriptors and use the *IELTS Scores Guide* 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 English Language Assessment has conducted several studies to map the IELTS nine-band scale to the CEFR, drawing on the interrelationship between IELTS and other Cambridge English Language Assessment qualifications and the known relationship of these latter qualifications to the CEFR.

Further information can be found at www.ielts.org/cefr



Related research

Khalifa, H. and Ffrench, A. (2009). *Research Notes 37, 10–14: Aligning Cambridge ESOL examinations to the CEFR: issues and practice*. Cambridge ESOL.

Milanovic, M. (2009). *Research Notes 37 – Cambridge ESOL and the CEFR*. Cambridge ESOL.

Saville, N. (2005). *Language Assessment Quarterly, Volume 2, Issue 4 – An interview with John Trim at 80*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Further support

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

For organizations and institutions

- Visit www.ielts.org/institutions for a range of support materials including:
 - » *Guide for educational institutions, governments, professional bodies and commercial organizations* brochure
 - » *IELTS Scores Guide* (DVD)
 - » *IELTS Results Verification Service*
 - » *IELTS Guide for Agents*
 - » *IELTS Guide for Teachers*
 - » Analysis of test data
- 'Who accepts IELTS' search tool:

The IELTS website attracts over ten 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 – Organizations 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 centers. 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 for UK, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand visas and immigration

Find out how the IELTS result can be used for these purposes at:

- www.ielts.org/uk
- www.ielts.org/australia
- www.ielts.org/canada
- www.ielts.org/nz



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