



# Top 10 Factors for IELTS Success

**By Michael Wattie**

## **IELTS help and preparation:**

1. Read my [IELTS books](#) to gain key insight about the exam
2. Have your [IELTS writing corrected](#) and receive valuable feedback on your mistakes
3. Practice [IELTS speaking online over SKYPE](#).
3. Join my site and [receive study information](#)
4. Watch my [Youtube videos](#)
5. Follow me on [Facebook](#)

## 1. Improve your overall English ability

The IELTS exam has been designed to test your ability to communicate in English, so ultimately you cannot score well without a high level of English. Learning any language is a slow process that requires hard work and perseverance. The best way to improve your English is to immerse yourself in English.....take every opportunity you can to read, write, speak, and listen to English. In addition, try to develop regular habits for doing things in English, such as, reading the daily news in English or starting a blog in English. Research shows that it is important to interact in English frequently as opposed to big chunks of infrequent study.

You can improve your **listening** skills by listening to the BBC news or watching movies. In doing so, try to understand as much as you can about what the speaker is saying, and do NOT rely on subtitles – they only improve your reading!

**Reading** can be improved by regularly reading English newspapers and novels. Try to guess the meaning of words you don't know and only use a dictionary to check your guesses or for words you can't guess the meaning.

**Writing** can be improved by writing more often.....but to really make improvements you need to have someone to correct it. I provide a correction service for a modest fee. If you are interested in finding out about that you can see my website at:  
<http://www.ieltsanswers.com/writing-correction-ielts.html>

**Speaking** can be a tricky one if you are in a non-English speaking country. One thing you can do is to record yourself speaking and listen to it for mistakes. Another thing you can do is to try to meet people over Skype – even if they are non-native speakers you can still benefit from this kind of interaction.

Here is a novel way to eliminate pronunciation errors! Use your smartphone voice search function to improve Pronunciation errors! If you know you have a problem with any of the sounds in the English language here is a novel approach to practicing them and solving them. Here is how t to do it:

1. open any voice recognition software on any device
2. say words that contain the sound you can not pronounce well
3. see if the device recognizes the word correctly

As an illustrative example: Students from Japan typically have problems with "r" and "l" so you could say some words like: "really long rules"

## **2 Understanding the Exam**

The exam always follows the same format, so you should learn about the different question types, and how to answer them. First of all, you should be clear about whether you will be taking the General Exam or the Academic Exam because the requirements are quite different for each.

**Reading:** You should know about the different text types that are used in the reading exam, and also the different question types. This will help you develop reading skills and strategies to answer each type of question, and also let you develop time management skills for each question type. Note: many students have trouble completing the reading section and as a result, their grade is often lower than their actual level of English.

**Writing:** All candidates will write a 250 word essay, so everyone should practice writing a complete 250 word essay within 40 minutes. Many students practice essay writing, but they fail to practice with the time requirement – as a result, they are unable to complete their essay during the actual exam. You need to make sure you are preparing for the correct type of exam because general candidates will write a letter whereas academic candidates will write a report based on a graph/diagram. Clearly, the requirements are different, so the preparation for each type should be different.

## **3 Understand how the exam is graded.**

Although your exam grade is a single number for each of the four sections of the exam, this is not how all sections are assessed. In the speaking and writing sections, there are four criteria for assigning a grade. Understanding how each of the criteria is evaluated is essential to maximising your score. This is because we should try to give the examiner what they are looking for so that they will assign a high grade! As an example, in the speaking test – you need to use some idioms or some infrequently used language in order to score a 7 for the vocabulary component of your score. As for grammar, you need to use some complex or compound sentences or your score is limited to a 5, in terms of grammar.

## How the writing test is graded

Your writing test is graded and marked from 1-9 in accordance with four key criteria, as follows:

Task Fulfillment: this concerns whether you addressed all parts of the question, and also whether you fully developed all parts of your answer.

Coherence & Cohesion: Coherence refers to your writing being easy to understand and cohesion refers to the way it fits together – such as the quality of your sentence structure, paragraphing, and use of **connective devices**.

Vocabulary: To score highly you must use higher level words, pay attention to **collocation**, and also control your **word endings** (correctly use singular/plural and use the correct verb ending for the correct tense).

Grammar: To score highly you need to use a variety of sentence types (simple, compound, complex) and also avoid grammatical errors, such as with articles and prepositions and sentence order especially when they make your writing difficult to understand.

**Special Note**: In some instances, errors can count in two categories; for example, many grammatical errors also result in a lower score for coherence. On the positive, it is useful to learn lots of **connective devices** because they can count for Coherence & Cohesion as well as vocabulary. Part of your self-study should be aimed at efficiently using your time to maximize your grade. To understand more about the writing exam go to:

<http://www.ieltsanswers.com/writing-ielts.html>

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## How the Speaking test is graded

Your speaking test is graded and marked from 1-9 in accordance with four key criteria, as follows:

Fluency and coherence: Fluency is about your ability to speak at a normal speed without excessive hesitation and restarting. Coherence refers to your speaking being easy to understand.

Vocabulary: To score highly you must use higher level words, pay attention to **collocation**, and also control your **word endings** (correctly use singular/plural and use the correct verb ending for the correct tense). In addition, you should try to show an ability to **paraphrase** and use **colloquial** language.

Grammar: To score highly you need to use a variety of sentence types (simple, compound, complex) and also avoid grammatical errors, such as with articles and prepositions and sentence order especially when they make your speaking difficult to understand.

Accent: Your grade is influenced by the level to which your accent makes it difficult to understand what you are saying, and also the degree to which you use language features of a native speaker such as **intonation, stress, and rhythm**.

**Special Note**: In some instances, errors can count in two categories; for example, many grammatical errors also result in a lower score for coherence. On the positive, it is useful to learn lots of **connective devices** because they can count for Coherence & Cohesion as well as vocabulary. Part of your self-study should be aimed at efficiently using your time to maximize your grade. To know more about the speaking exam go to <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/speaking-ielts.html>

If you want to practice speaking or to get an assessment of your speaking level I charge \$20 USD per half hour session. I give you a mock test, followed by feedback on your performance and suggestions to improve. I also give you an mp3 of the class, so that you can review the lesson. <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/skype-speaking.html>

I also have a speaking eBook available: <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/speaking-test-book.html>

#### **4. Do lots of practice exams and receive feedback**

Doing lots of practice exams is the best way to familiarize yourself with the specific style, requirements, and necessary success factors of the IELTS exam. It is also a way to make mistakes without suffering any penalty. For example, better you find out that you have trouble with the time constraints of the exam before you actually sit the exam. Practice tests also give you insights about the types of questions you will be asked and the answers they require. For instance, many of the answers in the reading exam are synonyms (word with similar meanings) of words in the text. This is useful knowledge because there is usually no point in trying to find words in the answers in the text – instead you need to work on your skill in finding synonyms for these words. This avoids you wasting time looking for words that are not there! If you want to do some online practice exams, I have links on my resources page to sites with practice exams, see:

<http://www.ieltsanswers.com/preparing-ielts-test.html>

Doing practice exams is not enough. Make sure you maximise the effectiveness of your learning by learning from your mistakes. Try to see patterns in your errors – what kinds of errors are you frequently making? The next step is to learn to overcome these errors. If they are grammatical errors you should do some grammar quizzes focused on that area, my grammar page is at: <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/grammar-ielts.html>

Of course, if you are doing practice writing exams you will need a professional to give you feedback on your mistakes and how to avoid them. This is not just about proofreading for errors, you may have problems with the way you are structuring your essays. If you wish to have a full assessment with feedback on how to improve, I have a service for a nominal fee at <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/writing-correction-ielts.html>

## 5. Developing skills

In addition to improving your general level of English and doing practice exams, you also need to work on many skills that will help you to perform better on the test.

Reading skills such as **skimming** (which parts you should strategically read) and **scanning** (best choices for searching for information) are essential to deal with the time pressure of the reading exam. Learn more about these skills on my reading page at <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/reading-ielts.html>

Writing skills such as how to structure an essay and how to highlight your key points are necessary to score 7 and above. If you are doing the academic test you will need to learn how to write a report based on a graph/diagram – this requires a lot of specific vocabulary as well as a high level of ability in using the correct tense to describe trends. Learn more about these skills on my writing page at: <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/writing-ielts.html>

For the speaking exam you need to learn how to structure answers to questions and to quickly paraphrase words you don't know (part of the criteria for level 7 and above) and you will need to develop skills in note making and speech making for the part 2 long answer. Learn more about these skills on my speaking page at <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/speaking-ielts.html>

To score well in the listening exam, you should develop excellent pre-listening skills, so that you can predict answers and establish listening objectives. It is also useful to have skills in guessing the meaning of words – as you are likely to encounter many of these! Learn more about these skills on my listening page at <http://www.ieltsanswers.com/listening-ielts.html>

## 6. Work on your time management

In the IELTS test, time management is a vital element and so part of your preparation should focus on how you will manage your time in the exam. Candidates who do not perform as well as they had hoped often complain that they were unable to finish all parts of the test.

In order to improve upon your time management, you should improve your general English ability, do lots of practice exams under time restrictions, and work on skills that assist your ability to deal with the time pressures of the exam (such as skimming and scanning in the reading exam).

The table below shows the amount of time you will have for each part of the exam.

Module	Maximum Time	Questions	Time per question
Listening	30 minutes	40	.75 minutes
Reading	60 minutes	40	.67 minutes
Writing	60 minutes	2	Approximately: 20 mins for Task 1 40 mins for Task 2
Speaking	11-14 minutes	N/A	N/A

## 7. Get a tutor or join a class

If you really want to make progress, especially in a short period of time, you really need to join a class or hire a tutor. This is because a tutor or teacher can guide you on how to prepare for the exam, what skills to develop, and also give you valuable feedback on your practice exams and performance in class. Of course, it is better to have a face to face class. However, if for some reason you are not able to meet with someone face to face, I have a low priced online service where we can chat online. My essay correction and feedback service may be of use to you also – even if you already have a teacher; do they have the time and experience to give you the level of correction and feedback that you require?  
<http://www.ieltsanswers.com/ielts-teacher.html>

## 8. Find a study partner

One of the most overlooked resources of most English learners is a study partner. It seems many people think that they can only practice their English with a native speaker; however, it's not true. There are a lot of mutual benefits of having a conversation with another student or with reading each other's essays. Even though you may be at the same IELTS level you will have different strengths and weaknesses. Also, any kind of practice is still worthwhile because it still gets you using and thinking in the language. Finally, you can help motivate each other!



## **9. Set realistic goals**

Part of knowing the exam and understanding the grading criteria is about knowing where you personally are and what you must do to get to the next level. It takes about 10 weeks of full-time study for most students to rise to the next IELTS level. Therefore if you are a level 5 student, it is not likely that you will be able to get a 7 within 10 weeks. It is best to be working on raising one level. To illustrate this if you are a level 5 student you should be focusing on things like correctly using complex sentences, learning to paraphrase unknown words, and the overall structure of an essay.

## **10. Establish a timetable and reward system**

Based on the goals you have set for yourself you should set up a timetable for reaching those goals. A timetable will help you to push yourself to study and to get through sufficient work to achieve those goals. As mentioned above it takes about 10 weeks of full-time study to raise one level – so if you really do want to jump two levels within 10 weeks, you will need to work twice as hard as a full time student – and study about 10-12 hours per day! If you are gifted it may take less, but don't kid yourself.

Set aside the maximum number of hours you can spare each day to practise English for all four parts of the test. Practice regularly and give yourself a reward between tasks (I like ice-cream!). Take at least one day out of your week to rest and forget the test completely or you will become stale and depression may start to kick-in! Take every opportunity to immerse yourself in English whenever you can. Watch TV and films, listen to the radio, visit English websites and have as many conversations with native English speakers as you can.

Final note:

Thanks for taking the time to read my ebook, I welcome any feedback or suggestions you have about it. Feel free to send me email or to comment on the forums in my website. My website has more information and links to help you improve your score on the IELTS exam.

**Cheers!**

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