

Guide for teachers

**From test format and
scoring through to preparing
students for the test**

IELTS

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“IELTS makes for a confident student.”

Senior Teacher, Turning Point, India

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IELTS overview

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) assesses the English language proficiency of people who want to study or work where English is used as the language of communication. It provides a fair, accurate and relevant assessment of language skills, based on well-established standards, and covers the full range of proficiency levels, from non-user to expert user.

There are two versions of IELTS. Test takers can choose either Academic or General Training versions of the test. Both versions of the test consist of four separate components, assessing the four language skills – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking.

IELTS results are reported on a 9-band scale designed to be simple and easy to understand. This scale has remained consistent and has acquired currency around the world over the past three decades.

- IELTS is the world's most popular high stakes English language test, with over 3.5 million tests taken last year.
- Over 11,000 organisations in over 140 countries recognise and use IELTS for selection purposes.
- IELTS is offered at over 1,600 test locations worldwide.
- Test questions are developed by testing specialists in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US.



- Test questions are based on authentic materials sourced from all over the world.

IELTS for teachers of English

IELTS is well-known by teachers of English around the world through IELTS preparation courses offered at their institution or local language school. The IELTS partners encourage teachers to facilitate English learning with a view to improve students' general English skills, as well as preparing their students to take the

test. Globally, teachers have increasingly become interested in IELTS. The Guide for Teachers provides further information about the test and offers detailed descriptions of test scores. In addition, it offers teacher resources to assist in preparing students for IELTS, as well as facilitate teacher professional development opportunities through examining or research.

View the materials and advice available for teachers at www.IELTS.org

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An overview of the test



“Although we accept other English language tests, we always assess them by comparing them directly with the required IELTS score. IELTS test takers are thoroughly tested in the four main communication skills required for academic work.”

*Senior Student Recruitment Officer,
The Scottish Agricultural College, UK*

View available teacher resources
and materials at www.IELTS.org

Test takers can choose between IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training, depending on their academic or professional aspirations, or visa requirements.

The distinction with IELTS Academic lies in the subject matter and tasks of the Reading and Writing components. The Listening and Speaking components are the same.

Listening 30 minutes

Test takers listen to four recorded texts, monologues and conversations by a range of native speakers, and write their answers to a series of questions.

Reading 60 minutes

The **Academic** version includes three long texts which range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical. The texts are authentic and are taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers, all of which have been selected for a non-specialist audience.

The **General Training** version requires test takers to read extracts from newspapers, advertisements, instruction manuals and books. These are materials test takers could encounter on a daily basis in an English speaking country.

Writing 60 minutes

The **Academic** version includes two tasks. Topics are of general interest to,

suitable for and easily understood by test takers entering undergraduate or postgraduate studies or seeking professional registration.

Task 1

Test takers are presented with a graph, table, chart or diagram and are asked to describe, summarise or explain the information in their own words. They may be asked to describe and explain data, describe the stages of a process, how something works or describe an object or event.

Task 2

Test takers are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem.

Responses to both tasks must be written in a formal style.

The **General Training** version also includes two tasks, and is based on topics of general interest.

Task 1

Test takers are presented with a situation and are asked to write a letter requesting information or explaining the situation. The letter may be personal, semi-formal or formal in style.

Task 2

Test takers are asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. The essay can be slightly more personal in style than the Academic Writing Task 2 essay.

Speaking 11-14 minutes

The Speaking component assesses the test taker's use of spoken English, and takes between 11 and 14 minutes to complete. Every test is digitally recorded and consists of three parts:

Part 1

Test takers answer general questions about themselves and a range of familiar topics, such as their home, family, work, studies and interests. This part lasts between four and five minutes.

Part 2

Test takers are given a booklet which asks them to talk about a particular topic. They have one minute to prepare before speaking for up to two minutes. The examiner may ask one or two questions on the same topic to finish this part of the test.

Part 3

Test takers are asked further questions which are connected to the topic in Part 2. These questions give the candidate an opportunity to discuss more abstract issues and ideas. This part lasts between four and five minutes.

The format of the Speaking test is common across both the Academic and General Training versions. It is structured in such a way that does not allow test takers to rehearse set responses beforehand.

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

Key similarities

- The **Listening** and **Speaking** components are the same for both versions. The distinction between 'academic' and 'general' literacy has traditionally been seen as most marked in relation to reading and writing skills. The more socially-oriented language skills of listening and speaking are equally important in an academic study or professional context
- The same amount of time is allocated to complete the Listening and Speaking components in both the General Training and Academic Versions
- The **Reading** and **Writing** components are the same length in both versions
- Both versions have the same minimum word requirement
- The same assessment criteria and 9-band scale is used to grade both versions.

Differences

- The **Reading** component of the Academic and General Training versions is differentiated in terms of the choice of texts (topic, genre, length, number, etc)
- The level of difficulty of the 40 test items. The Academic Reading component has more items pitched at bands 5-8, whereas the General Training has more items pitched at bands 3-6. This is a reflection of the different demands of Academic and General Training.

For **Writing**, the Academic and General Training versions are differentiated in terms of:

- The content and nature of the two writing tasks
- The contextual parameters of the tasks.

However, given the level of differentiation described above, this does not mean that the scores across Academic and General Training Reading or Writing components are interchangeable.

IELTS on paper or computer

To give test takers more choice, IELTS is now offered in both paper and computer formats.

IELTS on paper

This test requires test takers to sit at a desk with the question papers and answer sheets for the Listening, Reading and Writing tests in an official IELTS test centre. Test takers will write their answers in either pen or HB-pencil. Results are available 13 days after completing the test.

IELTS on computer

This test requires test takers to sit the Listening, Reading and Writing tests in front of a computer with the questions presented on the screen in an official IELTS test centre. The test takers then submit their answers through the use of a keyboard and a mouse. The Speaking test is not on computer and is carried out face-to-face with a trained IELTS examiner. Results are available within 3 - 5 days of completing the test.

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



Should test takers take IELTS on paper or computer?

This comes down to personal choice. They may be used to taking exams on paper from other exam situations they have experienced, whereas other people might feel more comfortable typing or have more experience taking tests on computer. Information on both options is available on ielts.org and they can contact their test centre if they would like further information.

Will there be any change to the IELTS Results Verification Service?

No. The IELTS Results Verification Service will continue to operate as usual. As the global roll out of IELTS on computer progresses, enhancements to the current service will continue to be evaluated.

What practice materials are available for test takers?

Sample test question and familiarisation materials are available [IELTS.org/oncomputer](https://ielts.org/oncomputer)

Is IELTS on a computer harder than IELTS on paper?

No. The test will be the same as IELTS on paper in terms of content, scoring, level of difficulty and question types.

Learn more about IELTS on computer at [IELTS.org/oncomputer](https://ielts.org/oncomputer)



A test of four skills

IELTS is a task-based test covering the four skills (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking). IELTS test takers receive individual sub-scores for each of the four test components, and 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 as compared with tasks that test multiple skills at once. For the organisations which accept IELTS results, this means that IELTS scores are clear and easy to interpret. This approach also ensures the comparability of task difficulty across each version of the test. It is unfair to test takers if their performance in one skill area is compromised by their ability in another.

While IELTS focuses on testing the four skills individually, there is 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 which is read or heard helps shape the test taker's own production. However, this is carefully controlled to ensure that the input does not require extensive or complex reading and listening.
- Tasks in the Reading and Listening components can involve note-taking, labelling, classification, 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 encourage test takers to engage in appropriate cognitive processes. Such tasks are 'integrated' in terms of the relationship between the input and the cognitive processes they elicit. Validation studies help to confirm the match between task input, cognitive processing and task output.

A full discussion of this issue is included in volume 19 of the series *Studies in Language Testing* (Taylor and Falvey, 2006).



Read more

More information for institutions that accept IELTS scores can be found in the *IELTS Guide for Institutions*, available at: www.IELTS.org

Productive Skills

Skill being tested

Writing

Test takers will need to read the task requirements before writing their answer.

Integrated Skills

Skill being tested

Speaking

Test takers will need to listen to and read task information in order to complete the task.

Integrated Skills

Receptive Skills

Listening

Test takers must read the questions and write their answers.

Integrated Skills

Skill being tested

Reading

Test takers will need to write their answers on the answer sheet.

Integrated Skills

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IELTS scores and interpretation

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 inappropriate words. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	Good user	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriate words 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, inappropriate words 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, 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	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.



The IELTS 9-band scale

There is no pass or fail in IELTS. Rather, all test results are reported on a clear 9-band scale (from 1, the lowest, to 9, the highest), as shown in the table opposite.

Test takers receive an overall band score as well as individual scores for each test component (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking).

The IELTS test provides an accurate picture of a candidate's language skills and abilities at a certain point in time. Skills and abilities inevitably diminish over time if not used. It is recommended that a Test Report Form more than **two years** old should only be accepted if it is accompanied by evidence that a candidate has actively maintained or improved their English.

How to interpret IELTS

Test takers receive scores on a band scale from 1 to 9. A profile score is reported for each skill. The four individual scores are averaged and rounded to produce an overall band score. Overall band scores and scores for each component (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking) are reported in whole bands or half bands.

Overall band score

Test takers receive a Test Report Form including or listing their overall band score and their sub-scores on each of the four components: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Each of the component scores is equally weighted. The overall band score is calculated by taking the mean 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.

Thus, 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 ($25 \div 4 = 6.25 = \text{Band } 6.5$).

Likewise, a test taker achieving 4.0 for Listening, 3.5 for Reading, 4.0 for Writing and 4.0 for Speaking would be awarded an overall band score of 4.0 ($15.5 \div 4 = 3.875 = \text{Band } 4.0$).

On the other hand, 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 ($24.5 \div 4 = 6.125 = \text{Band } 6$).

Listening and Reading

IELTS Listening and Reading papers contain 40 items and each correct item is awarded one mark; the maximum raw score a candidate can achieve on a paper is 40. Band scores ranging from Band 1 to Band 9 are awarded to candidates on the basis of their raw scores.

All IELTS tasks are pre tested before being released as live items. This identifies minor differences in the difficulty level across tests. In order to equate different test versions, the band score boundaries are set so that all candidates' results relate to the same scale of achievement. This means, for example, that the Band 6 boundary may be set at a slightly different raw score across versions.

The tables below indicate the mean raw scores achieved by candidates at various levels in each of the Listening, Academic Reading and General Training Reading tests. They provide an indication of the number of marks required to achieve a particular band score.

Listening

Band score	Raw score out of 40
8	35
7	30
6	23
5	16

Academic Reading

Band score	Raw score out of 40
8	35
7	30
6	23
5	15

General Training Reading

Band score	Raw score out of 40
7	34
6	30
5	23
4	15

The Academic and General Training tests are graded to the same scale. The distinction between the two versions is one of genre or discourse type. Academic tests may contain source texts featuring more difficult vocabulary or greater complexity of style. It is usual that, to secure a given band score, a greater number of questions must be answered correctly on a General Training Reading component.

Writing and Speaking

When marking the Writing and Speaking components, examiners use detailed performance descriptors which describe written and spoken performance at each of the 9 IELTS bands.

Writing

Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas:

Criterion	Weighting
Task achievement (Task 1)/ Task response (Task 2)	25%
Coherence and cohesion	25%
Lexical resource	25%
Grammatical range and accuracy	25%

Speaking

Examiners award a band score for each of four criterion areas:

Criterion	Weighting
Fluency and coherence	25%
Lexical resource	25%
Grammatical range and accuracy	25%
Pronunciation	25%

The four criteria are equally weighted.

Assessment criteria (band descriptors)

Versions of the band descriptors for Writing and Speaking have been developed to help stakeholders better understand the level of performance required to attain a particular band score in each of the criterion areas. IELTS examiners undergo intensive face to face training and standardisation to ensure that they can apply the descriptors (these are available on page 18-23).



“IELTS gives us a reliable indication of entry level. Other tests are less satisfactory at providing this.”

Kings College, UK

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What makes
IELTS an
international
test?



“With IELTS, the world is a smaller place. I sat the test before leaving Japan and received a band score of 8.5, satisfying visa requirements. Before starting new employment, I was required to undertake the IELTS test again. This time it was the academic version mandated by my employer.”

*Pavel again received a band score of 8.5.
Employee, large accounting firm, Australia*



International partners

IELTS is owned by a global partnership of education and language experts: British Council, IDP:IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. These bodies are dedicated to academic excellence, cultural understanding, student recruitment, and creating success worldwide. Benefitting from the shared expertise of the three partners, the IELTS test combines the world-renowned assessment and research expertise of Cambridge English Language Assessment and the international delivery, evaluation and security expertise of the British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

International consultation

IELTS has been developed in close consultation with academics, professional bodies and immigration authorities around the world.

International content

The IELTS approach is recognised by academics and admissions

professionals as being fair, reliable and valid to all candidates, whatever their nationality, cultural background, gender or specific needs. The test questions are developed by item writers in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US. International delivery and accessibility IELTS tests are offered up to four times a month at over 800 test venues in more than 130 countries. The cost of taking the test is set locally and payable in the local currency, making registration more convenient for candidates. Results are issued to candidates 13 calendar days after the test. IELTS test centres can send Test Report Forms directly to an organisation or institution (provided it has been nominated by the candidate), either by mail or as an electronic download.

View the worldwide list of IELTS test centres at www.IELTS.org/testcentres

International English

IELTS recognises both British and American English in terms of spelling,

grammar and choice of words. It also incorporates a mix of native speaker accents from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and US in the Listening component.

What does this mean in practice?

The number of people migrating and studying abroad has multiplied over the last 20 years. This has transformed life in educational institutions. In English-speaking countries, more and more universities recruit staff internationally, and this is matched by an increasing student intake of non-native speakers of English. Simultaneously, in non-English speaking countries, more organisations are using English as a common language of communication, as well as employing rising numbers of staff from English-speaking countries. Consequently, more people are teaching, studying and working with others who speak different varieties of English.

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Tips from teachers

The criteria for the different IELTS band scores make it clear which areas of language need to be developed, thereby setting clear goals and objectives. Teaching techniques for IELTS include presenting language elements such as grammar and vocabulary in a wider context.

The topics in IELTS are both interesting and contemporary, and are based in the real world. This means teachers can bring the outside world into their IELTS classes by using a range of authentic source materials adapted to test preparation.



“Test takers receive an objective assessment of their English proficiency and have a clearer idea of where they need to make most improvements.”

Lyndell King, teacher



Tips from Teachers

General

Make sure that your students:

- Are familiar with the format and types of tasks in the different sections of the IELTS test
- Know what is expected of them and how best to approach each section
- Are aware of the time allowed for each section and include timed practice in class
- Read the instructions carefully and follow them.

Listening

Make sure that your students:

think about the context before they listen and identify the type of information they will need to listen for read the questions before they hear the text and use the time between each section to prepare for the following section.

Reading

Make sure that your students:

- Use reading skills such as skimming and scanning – they will need to use these skills to answer all the questions in 1 hour
- Know how best to approach each type of reading task
- Answer the questions and transfer their answers to the answer sheet within the time allowed.

Writing

Make sure that your students:

- Analyse the question carefully and plan their answer before starting to write
- Keep in mind the reader and the purpose when writing
- Structure their writing logically and clearly
- Decide on a position and use examples and evidence to support points they make in task 2
- Are familiar with the assessment criteria.

Speaking

Make sure that your students:

- Feel confident and remind them to relax and enjoy the conversation with the examiner
- Listen carefully to the questions
- Use fillers and hesitation devices if they need 'thinking time' before answering
- Realise it is their language level not their opinions which are being evaluated
- Are familiar with the assessment criteria.

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Becoming an IELTS examiner



“I love teaching for IELTS as I can make my classes more interactive.”

*Erika Tennant, IELTS course teacher,
Australia*

Becoming an IELTS examiner

Becoming an IELTS examiner is one of the many possible professional development opportunities available to teachers familiar with IELTS.

The training and support provided to IELTS examiners can impact positively on classroom practice. IELTS examiners gain a good understanding of what language learning involves, the study skills which will be useful to students following a university course in English and the conventions of English Academic Writing. Given the worldwide recognition of IELTS, and the continually increasing numbers of IELTS test takers, there is a growth in demand for IELTS examiners, depending on local conditions.

As IELTS examiners are qualified to examine for IELTS all over the world, IELTS examining is a practical and flexible way to supplement income from teaching.

Applicants fulfilling the above minimum global requirements to become an examiner undergo a comprehensive and systematic recruitment process which includes the following stages: interview, induction, training, standardisation and certification. An applicant must successfully pass each stage to progress to the next and can be rejected at any stage.

Examiners participate in refresher workshops and are required to formally demonstrate their marking proficiency through the certification process. The marking performance of the 7,000-plus global IELTS examiners cohort is then systematically and regularly monitored. Examiner marking standards are maintained through the IELTS Professional Support Network, a quality assurance system designed and managed by British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia to ensure consistency.

Setting IELTS band score requirements for recognising organisations

IELTS test scores are just one element of the assessment of a test taker's suitability to enrol at an institution or to join an organisation. The level of English needed for a test taker to perform effectively in study, work or training varies from one situation to another. That is why each individual organisation sets its own minimum IELTS score for applicants, depending on specific requirements. Admissions professionals may also wish to take into account whether their organisation provides ongoing language support to students or employees to improve their English.

How to become an IELTS examiner

All IELTS examiner applicants must:

- Be native speakers of English or a non-native speaker with an IELTS band score of 9 in the Speaking and Writing components
- Hold relevant qualifications in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (or equivalent)
- have substantial relevant teaching experience post-qualification.

Ensuring consistency across test centres

- same operational procedures are adhered to by all test centres globally
- same examiner systems, standards and monitoring safeguard results.

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Continual research-based development

The IELTS partners – the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment – have a longstanding commitment to remain at the forefront of developments in English language testing. Therefore, the IELTS approach to the design, delivery and assessment of the test is continually informed by research.

The steady evolution of IELTS is in parallel with advances in applied linguistics, language pedagogy, language assessment and technology. This ensures the ongoing validity, reliability, positive impact and practicality of the test. Adherence to these four qualities is supported by two streams of research.

Cambridge English Language Assessment research and validation

Internal research activities are managed by Cambridge English Language Assessment's Research & Validation division. Cambridge English Language Assessment has been creating English examinations for speakers of other languages since 1913 and has unrivalled experience in the field. The Research and Validation division brings together specialists in testing and assessment, statistical analysis and item-banking, applied linguistics, corpus linguistics and language learning/pedagogy. The division also provides rigorous quality assurance for exams at every stage of development.

Studies in Language Testing is a series of academic volumes published jointly

by Cambridge English Language Assessment and Cambridge University Press (CUP), and edited by Dr Michael Milanovic and Prof Cyril J Weir

Studies in Language Testing volumes include:

- Volume 25: IELTS Washback in Context: Preparation for academic writing in higher education
- Volume 24: Impact Theory and Practice: Studies of the IELTS test and Progetto Lingue 2000
- Volume 23: Assessing Academic English: Testing English proficiency, 1950–1989 – The IELTS solution
- Volume 19: IELTS Collected Papers: Research in speaking and writing assessment
- Volume 4: The Development of IELTS: A study of the effect of background knowledge on reading comprehension

Research Notes is the quarterly publication of Cambridge English Language Assessment that reports on research, test development and validation of all Cambridge English language testing products and teaching awards, including IELTS. You can download issues free of charge at www.IELTS.org/researchers

External research

An external IELTS research scheme, funded by IDP: IELTS Australia and the British Council, ensures an ongoing relationship with the broader linguistics and language testing community and demonstrates the partners' commitment to continuous improvement of the test. Since 1995, over 100 external studies by over 140 unique researchers from a wide cross-section of countries have received grants under this jointly-funded scheme. Such research has become a key component in securing external validation of IELTS.

The majority of IELTS-funded research is published in the *IELTS Research Reports* series. Volumes can be ordered online through www.IELTS.org/researchers/research_reports

IELTS Research Reports include:

Title	Author/Organiser	Volume and date of publication
An impact study into the use of IELTS by professional associations and registration entities in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Canada	Glenys Merrifield, GBM & Associates, Australia	Volume 11, 2011
Investigating IELTS exit score gains in higher education	Kieran O'Loughlin, Sophie Arkoudis, The University of Melbourne, Australia	Volume 10, 2009
Investigating stakeholders' perceptions of IELTS as an entry requirement for higher education in the UK	David Hyatt, Greg Brooks, The University of Sheffield, UK	Volume 10, 2009
An impact study into the use of IELTS as an entry criterion for professional associations in Australia, New Zealand and the USA	Glenys Merrifield, GBM & Associates, Australia	Volume 8, 2008
Does the computer make a difference? The reaction of candidates to a computer-based versus traditional hand-written form for the IELTS Writing component: effects and impact	Cyril Weir, The University of Bedfordshire, UK; Barry O'Sullivan, The University of Reading, UK; Jin Yan, Jiao Tong University, China; Steven Bax, Canterbury University, Christchurch, UK	Volume 7, 2007
IELTS as a predictor of academic language performance, Part 1	David Ingram, Amanda Bayliss; Melbourne University Private, Australia	Volume 7, 2007
Investigating the relationship between intensive English language study and band score gain on IELTS	Catherine Elder, The University of Auckland and Kieran O'Loughlin, The University of Melbourne, Australia	Volume 4, 2003
Exploring difficulty in Speaking tasks An intra-task perspective	Barry O'Sullivan, Roehampton University, UK; Cyril Weir, The University of Bedfordshire, UK; Tomoko Horai, Roehampton University, UK	Volume 6, 2006

IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

Band Score	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fluent with only very occasional repetition or self-correction. Any hesitation that occurs is used only to prepare the content of the next utterance and not to find words or grammar. Speech is situationally appropriate and cohesive features are fully acceptable. Topic development is fully coherent and appropriately extended. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total flexibility and precise use in all contexts. Sustained use of accurate and idiomatic language.
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fluent with only very occasional repetition or self-correction. Hesitation may occasionally be used to find words or grammar, but most will be content related. Topic development is coherent, appropriate and relevant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wide resource, readily and flexibly used to discuss all topics and convey precise meaning. Skilful use of less common and idiomatic items despite occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation. Effective use of paraphrase as required.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to keep going and readily produce long turns without noticeable effort. Some hesitation, repetition and/or self-correction may occur, often mid-sentence and indicate problems with accessing appropriate language. However, these will not affect coherence. Flexible use of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource flexibly used to discuss a variety of topics. Some ability to use less common and idiomatic items and an awareness of style and collocation is evident though inaccuracies occur. Effective use of paraphrase as required.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to keep going and demonstrates a willingness to produce long turns. Coherence may be lost at times as a result of hesitation, repetition and/or self correction. Uses a range of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features though not always appropriately. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource sufficient to discuss topics at length. Vocabulary use may be inappropriate but meaning is clear. Generally able to paraphrase successfully.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Usually able to keep going, but relies on repetition and self-correction to do so and/or on slow speech. Hesitations are often associated with mid-sentence searches for fairly basic lexis and grammar. Overuse of certain discourse markers, connectives and other cohesive features. More complex speech usually causes disfluency but simpler language may be produced fluently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource sufficient to discuss familiar and unfamiliar topics but there is limited flexibility. Attempts paraphrase but not always with success.

IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Structures are precise and accurate at all times, apart from 'mistakes' characteristic of native speaker speech. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses a full range of phonological features to convey precise and/or subtle meaning. ▪ Flexible use of features of connected speech is sustained throughout. ▪ Can be effortlessly understood throughout. ▪ Accent has no effect on intelligibility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wide range of structures, flexibly used. ▪ The majority of sentences are error free. ▪ Occasional inappropriacies and non-systematic errors occur. A few basic errors may persist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses a wide range of phonological features to convey precise and/or subtle meaning. ▪ Can sustain appropriate rhythm. Flexible use of stress and intonation across long utterances, despite occasional lapses. ▪ Can be easily understood throughout. ▪ Accent has minimal effect on intelligibility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A range of structures flexibly used. Error-free sentences are frequent. ▪ Both simple and complex sentences are used effectively despite some errors. A few basic errors persist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Displays all the positive features of band 6, and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 8.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Produces a mix of short and complex sentence forms and a variety of structures with limited flexibility. ▪ Though errors frequently occur in complex structures, these rarely impede communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uses a range of phonological features, but control is variable. ▪ Chunking is generally appropriate, but rhythm may be affected by a lack of stress timing and/or a rapid speech rate. ▪ Some effective use of intonation and stress, but this is not sustained. ▪ Individual words or phonemes may be mispronounced but this causes only occasional lack of clarity. ▪ Can generally be understood throughout without much effort.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Basic sentence forms are fairly well controlled for accuracy. ▪ Complex structures are attempted but these are limited in range, nearly always contain errors and may lead to the need for reformulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Displays all the positive features of band 4, and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 6.

IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

Band Score	Fluency and coherence	Lexical resource
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unable to keep going without noticeable pauses. Speech may be slow with frequent repetition. Often self-corrects. Can link simple sentences but often with repetitious use of connectives. Some breakdowns in coherence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource sufficient for familiar topics but only basic meaning can be conveyed on unfamiliar topics. Frequent inappropriacies and errors in word choice. Rarely attempts paraphrase.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequent, sometimes long, pauses occur while candidate searches for words. Limited ability to link simple sentences and go beyond simple responses to questions. Frequently unable to convey basic message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource limited to simple vocabulary used primarily to convey personal information. Vocabulary inadequate for unfamiliar topics.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lengthy pauses before nearly every word. Isolated words may be recognisable but speech is of virtually no communicative significance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very limited resource. Utterances consist of isolated words or memorised utterances. Little communication possible without the support of mime or gesture.
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essentially none. Speech is totally incoherent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No resource bar a few isolated words. No communication possible.
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not attend 	

Notes: (i) A candidate must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular
(ii) A candidate will be rated on their average performance across all parts of the test.

IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

Grammatical range and accuracy	Pronunciation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can produce basic sentence forms and some short utterances are error-free. Subordinate clauses are rare and, overall, turns are short, structures are repetitive and errors are frequent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses some acceptable phonological features, but the range is limited. Produces some acceptable chunking, but there are frequent lapses in overall rhythm. Attempts to use intonation and stress, but control is limited. Individual words or phonemes are frequently mispronounced, causing lack of clarity. Understanding requires some effort and there may be patches of speech that cannot be understood.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic sentence forms are attempted but grammatical errors are numerous except in apparently memorised utterances. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays some features of band 2, and some, but not all, of the positive features of band 4.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No evidence of basic sentence forms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses few acceptable phonological features (possibly because sample is insufficient). Overall problems with delivery impair attempts at connected speech. Individual words and phonemes are mainly mispronounced and little meaning is conveyed. Often unintelligible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No rateable language unless memorised. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can produce occasional individual words and phonemes that are recognisable, but no overall meaning is conveyed. Unintelligible.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not attend 	

Notes: (i) A candidate must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular
(ii) A candidate will be rated on their average performance across all parts of the test.

IELTS Writing Task 1 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

Band Score	Task achievement	Coherence and cohesion
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the requirements of the task are fully and appropriately satisfied. There may be extremely rare lapses in content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The message can be followed effortlessly. Cohesion is used in such a way that it very rarely attracts attention. Any lapses in coherence or cohesion are minimal. Paragraphing is skilfully managed.
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response covers all the requirements of the task appropriately, relevantly and sufficiently. (Academic) Key features are skilfully selected, and clearly presented, highlighted and illustrated. (General Training) All bullet points are clearly presented, and appropriately illustrated or extended. There may be occasional omissions or lapses in content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The message can be followed with ease. Information and ideas are logically sequenced, and cohesion is well managed. Occasional lapses in coherence or cohesion may occur. Paragraphing is used sufficiently and appropriately.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response covers the requirements of the task. The content is relevant and accurate – there may be a few omissions or lapses. The format is appropriate. (Academic) Key features which are selected are covered and clearly highlighted but could be more fully or more appropriately illustrated or extended. (Academic) It presents a clear overview, the data are appropriately categorised, and main trends or differences are identified. (General Training) All bullet points are covered and clearly highlighted but could be more fully or more appropriately illustrated or extended. It presents a clear purpose. The tone is consistent and appropriate to the task. Any lapses are minimal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and ideas are logically organised and there is a clear progression throughout the response. A few lapses may occur. A range of cohesive devices including reference and substitution is used flexibly but with some inaccuracies or some over/under use.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response focuses on the requirements of the task and an appropriate format is used. (Academic) Key features which are selected are covered and adequately highlighted. A relevant overview is attempted. Information is appropriately selected and supported using figures/data. (General Training) All bullet points are covered and adequately highlighted. The purpose is generally clear. There may be minor inconsistencies in tone. Some irrelevant, inappropriate or inaccurate information may occur in areas of detail or when illustrating or extending the main points. Some details may be missing (or excessive) and further extension or illustration may be needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and ideas are generally arranged coherently and there is a clear overall progression. Cohesive devices are used to some good effect but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical due to misuse, overuse or omission. The use of reference and substitution may lack flexibility or clarity and result in some repetition or error.

IELTS Writing Task 1 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full flexibility and precise use are evident within the scope of the task. ▪ A wide range of vocabulary is used accurately and appropriately with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features. ▪ Minor errors in spelling and word formation are extremely rare and have minimal impact on communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A wide range of structures within the scope of the task is used with full flexibility and control. ▪ Punctuation and grammar are used appropriately throughout. ▪ Minor errors are extremely rare and have minimal impact on communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A wide resource is fluently and flexibly used to convey precise meanings within the scope of the task. ▪ There is skilful use of uncommon and/or idiomatic items when appropriate, despite occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation. ▪ Occasional errors in spelling and/or word formation may occur, but have minimal impact on communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A wide range of structures within the scope of the task is flexibly and accurately used. ▪ The majority of sentences are error-free, and punctuation is well managed. ▪ Occasional, non-systematic errors and inappropriacies occur, but have minimal impact on communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The resource is sufficient to allow some flexibility and precision. ▪ There is some ability to use less common and/or idiomatic items. ▪ An awareness of style and collocation is evident, though inappropriacies occur. ▪ There are only a few errors in spelling and/or word formation, and they do not detract from overall clarity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A variety of complex structures is used with some flexibility and accuracy. ▪ Grammar and punctuation are generally well controlled, and error-free sentences are frequent. ▪ A few errors in grammar may persist, but these do not impede communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The resource is generally adequate and appropriate for the task. ▪ The meaning is generally clear in spite of a rather restricted range or a lack of precision in word choice. ▪ If the writer is a risk-taker, there will be a wider range of vocabulary used but higher degrees of inaccuracy or inappropriacy. ▪ There are some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but these do not impede communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A mix of simple and complex sentence forms is used but flexibility is limited. ▪ Examples of more complex structures are not marked by the same level of accuracy as in simple structures. ▪ Errors in grammar and punctuation occur, but rarely impede communication.

IELTS Writing Task 1 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

Band Score	Task achievement	Coherence and cohesion
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response generally addresses the requirements of the task. The format may be inappropriate in places. (Academic) Key features which are selected are not adequately covered. The recounting of detail is mainly mechanical. There may be no data to support the description. (General Training) All bullet points are presented but one or more may not be adequately covered. The purpose may be unclear at times. The tone may be variable and sometimes inappropriate. There may be a tendency to focus on details (without referring to the bigger picture). The inclusion of irrelevant, inappropriate or inaccurate material in key areas detracts from the task achievement. There is limited detail when extending and illustrating the main points. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation is evident but is not wholly logical and there may be a lack of overall progression. Nevertheless, there is a sense of underlying coherence to the response. The relationship of ideas can be followed but the sentences are not fluently linked to each other. There may be limited/overuse of cohesive devices with some inaccuracy. The writing may be repetitive due to inadequate and/or inaccurate use of reference and substitution.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response is an attempt to address the task. (Academic) Few key features have been selected. (General Training) Not all bullet points are presented. (General Training) The purpose of the letter is not clearly explained and may be confused. The tone may be inappropriate. The format may be inappropriate. Key features/bullet points which are presented may be irrelevant, repetitive, inaccurate or inappropriate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and ideas are evident but not arranged coherently, and there is no clear progression within the response. Relationships between ideas can be unclear and/or inadequately marked. There is some use of basic cohesive devices, which may be inaccurate or repetitive. There is inaccurate use or a lack of substitution or referencing.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The response does not address the requirements of the task (possibly because of misunderstanding of the data/diagram/situation). Key features/bullet points which are presented may be largely irrelevant. Limited information is presented, and this may be used repetitively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no apparent logical organisation. Ideas are discernible but difficult to relate to each other. Minimal use of sequencers or cohesive devices. Those used do not necessarily indicate a logical relationship between ideas. There is difficulty in identifying referencing.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The content barely relates to the task. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is little relevant message, or the entire response may be off topic. There is little evidence of control of organisational features.
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. The content is wholly unrelated to the task. Any copied rubric must be discounted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. The writing fails to communicate any message and appears to be by a virtual non-writer.
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should only be used where a candidate did not attend or attempt the question in any way, used a language other than English throughout, or where there is proof that a candidate's answer has been totally memorised. 	

IELTS Writing Task 1 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is limited but minimally adequate for the task. Simple vocabulary may be used accurately but the range does not permit much variation in expression. There may be frequent lapses in the appropriacy of word choice, and a lack of flexibility is apparent in frequent simplifications and/or repetitions. Errors in spelling and/or word formation may be noticeable and may cause some difficulty for the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The range of structures is limited and rather repetitive. Although complex sentences are attempted, they tend to be faulty, and the greatest accuracy is achieved on simple sentences. Grammatical errors may be frequent and cause some difficulty for the reader. Punctuation may be faulty.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is limited and inadequate for or unrelated to the task. Vocabulary is basic and may be used repetitively. There may be inappropriate use of lexical chunks (e.g. memorised phrases, formulaic language and/or language from the input material). Inappropriate word choice and/or errors in word formation and/or in spelling may impede meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A very limited range of structures is used. Subordinate clauses are rare and simple sentences predominate. Some structures are produced accurately but grammatical errors are frequent and may impede meaning. Punctuation is often faulty or inadequate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is inadequate (which may be due to the response being significantly underlength) Possible over-dependence on input material or memorised language. Control of word choice and/or spelling is very limited, and errors predominate. These errors may severely impede meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence forms are attempted, but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate (except in memorised phrases or those taken from the input material). This prevents most meaning from coming through. Length may be insufficient to provide evidence of control of sentence forms.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is extremely limited with few recognisable strings, apart from memorised phrases. There is no apparent control of word formation and/or spelling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is little or no evidence of sentence forms (except in memorised phrases).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. No resource is apparent, except for a few isolated words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. No rateable language is evident.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should only be used where a candidate did not attend or attempt the question in any way, used a language other than English throughout, or where there is proof that a candidate's answer has been totally memorised. 	

IELTS Writing Task 2 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

Band Score	Task achievement	Coherence and cohesion
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prompt is appropriately addressed and explored in depth. A clear and fully developed position is presented which directly answers the question/s. Ideas are relevant, fully extended and well supported. Any lapses in content or support are extremely rare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The message can be followed effortlessly. Cohesion is used in such a way that it very rarely attracts attention. Any lapses in coherence or cohesion are minimal. Paragraphing is skilfully managed.
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prompt is appropriately and sufficiently addressed. A clear and well-developed position is presented in response to the question/s. Ideas are relevant, well extended and supported. There may be occasional omissions or lapses in content. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The message can be followed with ease. Information and ideas are logically sequenced, and cohesion is well managed. Occasional lapses in coherence and cohesion may occur. Paragraphing is used sufficiently and appropriately.
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main parts of the prompt are appropriately addressed. A clear and developed position is presented. Main ideas are extended and supported but there may be a tendency to over generalise or there may be a lack of focus and precision in supporting ideas/material. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and ideas are logically organised, and there is a clear progression throughout the response. (A few lapses may occur, but these are minor.) A range of cohesive devices including reference and substitution is used flexibly but with some inaccuracies or some over/under use. Paragraphing is generally used effectively to support overall coherence, and the sequencing of ideas within a paragraph is generally logical.
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main parts of the prompt are addressed (though some may be more fully covered than others). An appropriate format is used. A position is presented that is directly relevant to the prompt, although the conclusions drawn may be unclear, unjustified or repetitive. Main ideas are relevant, but some may be insufficiently developed or may lack clarity, while some supporting arguments and evidence may be less relevant or inadequate. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and ideas are generally arranged coherently and there is a clear overall progression. Cohesive devices are used to some good effect but cohesion within and/or between sentences may be faulty or mechanical due to misuse, overuse or omission. The use of reference and substitution may lack flexibility or clarity and result in some repetition or error. Paragraphing may not always be logical and/or the central topic may not always be clear.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main parts of the prompt are incompletely addressed. The format may be inappropriate in places. The writer expresses a position, but the development is not always clear. Some main ideas are put forward, but they are limited and are not sufficiently developed and/or there may be irrelevant detail. There may be some repetition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation is evident but is not wholly logical and there may be a lack of overall progression. Nevertheless, there is a sense of underlying coherence to the response. The relationship of ideas can be followed but the sentences are not fluently linked to each other. There may be limited/overuse of cohesive devices with some inaccuracy. The writing may be repetitive due to inadequate and/or inaccurate use of reference and substitution. Paragraphing may be inadequate or missing.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The main parts of the prompt are incompletely addressed. The format may be inappropriate in places. The writer expresses a position, but the development is not always clear. Some main ideas are put forward, but they are limited and are not sufficiently developed and/or there may be irrelevant detail. There may be some repetition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation is evident but is not wholly logical and there may be a lack of overall progression. Nevertheless, there is a sense of underlying coherence to the response. The relationship of ideas can be followed but the sentences are not fluently linked to each other. There may be limited/overuse of cohesive devices with some inaccuracy. The writing may be repetitive due to inadequate and/or inaccurate use of reference and substitution. Paragraphing may be inadequate or missing.

IELTS Writing Task 2 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full flexibility and precise use are widely evident. A wide range of vocabulary is used accurately and appropriately with very natural and sophisticated control of lexical features. Minor errors in spelling and word formation are extremely rare and have minimal impact on communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide range of structures is used with full flexibility and control. Punctuation and grammar are used appropriately throughout. Minor errors are extremely rare and have minimal impact on communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide resource is fluently and flexibly used to convey precise meanings. There is skilful use of uncommon and/or idiomatic items when appropriate, despite occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation. Occasional errors in spelling and/or word formation may occur, but have minimal impact on communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A wide range of structures is flexibly and accurately used. The majority of sentences are error-free, and punctuation is well managed. Occasional, non-systematic errors and inappropriacies occur, but have minimal impact on communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is sufficient to allow some flexibility and precision. There is some ability to use less common and/or idiomatic items. An awareness of style and collocation is evident, though inappropriacies occur. There are only a few errors in spelling and/or word formation and they do not detract from overall clarity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A variety of complex structures is used with some flexibility and accuracy. Grammar and punctuation are generally well controlled, and error free sentences are frequent. A few errors in grammar may persist, but these do not impede communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is generally adequate and appropriate for the task. The meaning is generally clear in spite of a rather restricted range or a lack of precision in word choice. If the writer is a risk-taker, there will be a wider range of vocabulary used but higher degrees of inaccuracy or inappropriacy. There are some errors in spelling and/or word formation, but these do not impede communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mix of simple and complex sentence forms is used but flexibility is limited. Examples of more complex structures are not marked by the same level of accuracy as in simple structures. Errors in grammar and punctuation occur, but rarely impede communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is limited but minimally adequate for the task. Simple vocabulary may be used accurately but the range does not permit much variation in expression. There may be frequent lapses in the appropriacy of word choice and a lack of flexibility is apparent in frequent simplifications and/or repetitions. Errors in spelling and/or word formation may be noticeable and may cause some difficulty for the reader. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The range of structures is limited and rather repetitive. Although complex sentences are attempted, they tend to be faulty, and the greatest accuracy is achieved on simple sentences. Grammatical errors may be frequent and cause some difficulty for the reader. Punctuation may be faulty.

IELTS Writing Task 2 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

Band Score	Task achievement	Coherence and cohesion
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The prompt is tackled in a minimal way, or the answer is tangential, possibly due to some misunderstanding of the prompt. The format may be inappropriate. A position is discernible, but the reader has to read carefully to find it. Main ideas are difficult to identify and such ideas that are identifiable may lack relevance, clarity and/or support. Large parts of the response may be repetitive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information and ideas are evident but not arranged coherently and there is no clear progression within the response. Relationships between ideas can be unclear and/or inadequately marked. There is some use of basic cohesive devices, which may be inaccurate or repetitive. There is inaccurate use or a lack of substitution or referencing. There may be no paragraphing and/or no clear main topic within paragraphs.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No part of the prompt is adequately addressed, or the prompt has been misunderstood. No relevant position can be identified, and/or there is little direct response to the question/s. There are few ideas, and these may be irrelevant or insufficiently developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no apparent logical organisation. Ideas are discernible but difficult to relate to each other. There is minimal use of sequencers or cohesive devices. Those used do not necessarily indicate a logical relationship between ideas. There is difficulty in identifying referencing. Any attempts at paragraphing are unhelpful.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The content is barely related to the prompt. No position can be identified. There may be glimpses of one or two ideas without development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is little relevant message, or the entire response may be off topic. There is little evidence of control of organisational features.
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. The content is wholly unrelated to the prompt. Any copied rubric must be discounted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. The writing fails to communicate any message and appears to be by a virtual non-writer.
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should only be used where a candidate did not attend or attempt the question in any way, used a language other than English throughout, or where there is proof that a candidate's answer has been totally memorised. 	

IELTS Writing Task 2 Band Descriptors

Scoring criteria for Academic and General Training tests

A script must fully fit the positive features of the descriptor at a particular level. **Bolded text** indicates negative features that will limit a rating.

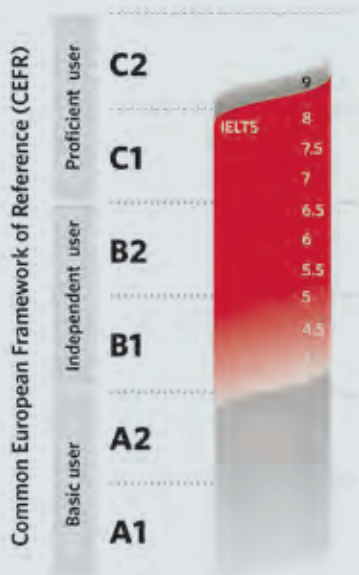
Lexical resource	Grammatical range and accuracy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is limited and inadequate for or unrelated to the task. Vocabulary is basic and may be used repetitively. There may be inappropriate use of lexical chunks (e.g. memorised phrases, formulaic language and/or language from the input material). Inappropriate word choice and/or errors in word formation and/or in spelling may impede meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A very limited range of structures is used. Subordinate clauses are rare and simple sentences predominate. Some structures are produced accurately but grammatical errors are frequent and may impede meaning. Punctuation is often faulty or inadequate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is inadequate (which may be due to the response being significantly underlength). Possible over dependence on input material or memorised language. Control of word choice and/or spelling is very limited, and errors predominate. These errors may severely impede meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sentence forms are attempted, but errors in grammar and punctuation predominate (except in memorised phrases or those taken from the input material). This prevents most meaning from coming through. Length may be insufficient to provide evidence of control of sentence forms.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The resource is extremely limited with few recognisable strings, apart from memorised phrases. There is no apparent control of word formation and/or spelling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is little or no evidence of sentence forms (except in memorised phrases).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. No resource is apparent, except for a few isolated words. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responses of 20 words or fewer are rated at Band 1. No rateable language is evident.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Should only be used where a candidate did not attend or attempt the question in any way, used a language other than English throughout, or where there is proof that a candidate's answer has been totally memorised. 	

How IELTS Maps to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

How should the CEFR be used by recognising institutions wishing to set language ability requirements?

In fulfilling its purpose as a common reference tool, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages was not designed to provide the basis for precise equating, nor was it intended to be a prescriptive tool to impose standardised solutions. Rather it was designed as a common framework of reference, primarily intended as 'a tool for reflection, communications and empowerment', as described by John Trim, its coordinating author, (Saville, N (2005)). The IELTS partners recommend that all test result users should look at the IELTS bandscore descriptors and use the *IELTS Scores Explained DVD* to establish the appropriate level of language ability required for their particular institution or course.

However, test users may also find the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages helpful. The Framework, a series of descriptions of abilities at different learning levels, which can be applied to any language, can provide a starting point for interpreting and comparing different language qualifications, and is increasingly used as a way of benchmarking language ability not only within Europe but worldwide. To help test users understand the relationship between IELTS band scores and the six CEFR levels,



Cambridge English Language Assessment has conducted a number of studies to map the IELTS 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.

Figure 1: The mapping of the IELTS scale to the Common European Framework above is derived from the interrelationship between IELTS and the Cambridge English Language Assessment Main Suite qualifications and the mapping of these latter qualifications to the CEFR. Further information on this can be found at www.cambridgeenglish.org/cefr

General information

Making comparisons between scores on different tests is challenging because many of the current range of test products differ in their design, purpose, and format (Taylor, 2004a). Candidates' aptitude and preparation for a particular type of test may also vary and individual candidates or groups of candidates may perform better in certain tests than in others.

Specifying the relationship between a test product and the CEFR is challenging because, in order to function as a framework, the CEFR is deliberately underspecified (Davidson & Fulcher, 2007; Milanovic, 2009; Weir, 2005). Establishing the relationship is also not a one-off activity, but rather involves the accumulation of evidence over time (e.g. it needs to be shown that test quality and standards are maintained).

The relationship of IELTS with the CEFR is complex as IELTS is not a level-based test, but rather designed to span a much broader proficiency continuum. It also utilises a different 9-point band scoring system; thus, there will not be a one-to-one correspondence between IELTS scores and CEFR levels. It is important to bear in mind the differences in test purpose, test format, test populations, and measurement scales when seeking to make comparisons.

With the above in mind, Cambridge English Language Assessment has conducted a number of research projects since the late 1990s to explore how IELTS band scores align with the CEFR levels. A number of these were summarised in Taylor (2004b), while cautioning that, "As we grow in our understanding of the relationship between IELTS and the CEFR levels, so the frame of reference may need to be revised accordingly."

Note that the IELTS band scores referred to in Figure 1 above are the overall band scores, not the individual module band scores for listening, reading, writing and speaking. It is important to recognise that the purpose of this figure is to communicate the relationship between IELTS performances and the CEFR. They should not be interpreted as reflecting strong claims about exact equivalence between assessment products or the scores they generate, for the reasons given in Taylor (2004a).

The current alignment is based upon a growing body of internal and external research, some of which has also appeared in peer-reviewed academic journals, attesting to their quality (e.g. Hawkey & Barker, 2004). This research has been further combined with long established experience of test use within education and society, as well as feedback from a range of stakeholders regarding the uses of test results for particular purposes.

As further work, such as that being undertaken in the English Profile project, enriches our understanding of the CEFR levels, further refinements may be possible.

Further information

Q1. Some IELTS band scores are shown as borderline (e.g. it is not clear whether band 5 is B1 or B2). How should institutions and organisations interpret this?

As IELTS preceded the CEFR, IELTS band score thresholds have never aligned exactly with the CEFR transition points. Previously (Taylor 2004a), we provided

advice as to the score on IELTS that a candidate who was at a given CEFR level might achieve. However, our research shows that a C1 minimum threshold would fall between the 6.5 and 7 thresholds on the IELTS scale. Therefore, whilst many 6.5 candidates would be at C1, a number will be marginally below. The present table makes this clearer. So if an institution requires a high degree of confidence that an applicant is at C1, they may wish to set a requirement of 7, rather than 6.5.

Q2. Does IELTS differentiate at C2 level?

Band scores of 8.5 and higher constitute C2 level performance. Band 8 is borderline.

Q3. If a student has an IELTS score of 6.5 should this be treated as a B2 equivalent score?

6.5 is borderline B2/C1. It is for institutions to decide alignment to a particular level of the CEFR is critical. Otherwise, our general advice remains that an overall IELTS band 7.0 will probably meet the language requirements of most university courses, though 6.5 may be adequate for courses which are less linguistically demanding. Institutions need to consider a range of factors in setting their requirements, including, for example the amount of pre-sessional or in-sessional language-learning support which will be available to prospective students, and whether a minimum standard should also be specified in a particular individual skill.

Q4. How does this compare to the mappings that other language testers have published?

We do not comment on the benchmarking exercises that other language testers have provided.

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