



香港城市大學  
City University  
of Hong Kong

# How to prepare for IELTS

# Speaking



English Language Centre

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

Booklet compiled for the SAC by  
**Fiona Williams (2002-03)**  
Revised in Sept, 2009 by Roxanne Wong

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

## Contents

	Page
Details of the speaking test	2
Part 1	4
Part 2	6
Part 3	10
General tips for speaking	14

Make sure you have a copy of the **How to prepare for IELTS – FAQs booklet** in addition to this booklet.

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

## Details of the Speaking Test

### Test Format

There are **three parts** which take the form of a one-to-one interview lasting between 11 & 14 minutes:

- Part 1 Introduction & Interview (4-5 minutes)
- Part 2 Individual long turn (3-4 minutes)
- Part 3 Two-way discussion (4-5 minutes)

The interview tests your **ability** to perform the **following functions** in English:

- provide personal and non-personal information
- express & justify opinions
- make suggestions
- speculate
- express a preference
- make comparisons & discuss contrasts
- summarise
- relate personal experiences
- analyse
- repair conversation & paraphrase

### Test Procedure

The test is conducted by **one examiner**. He or she asks all the questions and assesses you. The test is recorded. You will be taken to the examiner's room where you will be asked to sit either opposite the examiner. The examiner will then begin recording the interview and start the test.

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

## Assessment Criteria

### Fluency & Coherence

Being able to keep going, to talk at a natural speed without unnatural pauses and hesitations.

Being able to link ideas and language together clearly.

### Lexical Resource

Having sufficient vocabulary to express yourself on both familiar and unfamiliar topics.

Being able to deal with unknown or difficult vocabulary.

### Grammatical Range & Accuracy

Being able to use a variety of grammatical structures appropriately.

Making as few grammatical mistakes as possible.

Being understood despite grammatical mistakes.

### Pronunciation

Being able to use English pronunciation features like stress and intonation naturally.

Not causing the examiner any problems in understanding what you are saying.

## Scoring

You will receive a score between 1 and 9 for each of the above criteria. These scores will be converted into one final score between 1 and 9.

**\*IELTS Scores Explained is a resource available in the Self Access Centre (SAC) in the IELTS section. The speaking materials are on pink paper in a black binder. A DVD accompanies this material.**

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

## Part 1: Introduction & Interview (4-5 minutes)

The examiner will **introduce** themselves and **confirm your identity**. They will then ask you a number of **general questions** about yourself to try and make you feel relaxed. You may be asked about your **home or studies**. Then you will be asked **one or two more sets of questions** on **familiar topics** such as your interests, your country, your family, food, clothes, holidays etc. The questions come from an **examiner ‘frame’** (pre-determined questions) so the examiner will not necessarily follow-up with questions based on what you say. You **do not have to express an opinion or justify** it in this part.

Some **typical questions** might be:

- ❖ Where do you come from?
- ❖ What is your home like?
- ❖ Tell me about your family.
- ❖ Tell me about your job/studies.
- ❖ Is there anything you dislike about your job/studies?
- ❖ What type of transport do you use most?
- ❖ Do you like reading?
- ❖ What kind of television programmes do you watch?
- ❖ Tell me about a film you have seen recently.
- ❖ Do you have a pet?
- ❖ What kind of food do you like?
- ❖ How often do you go shopping?
- ❖ What’s your favourite festival? Why?
- ❖ How do people celebrate this festival?

## How to do Part 1

- **Listen** to the questions **carefully**.
- **Give full answers** to the questions if possible but don’t anticipate related questions. For example, if you are asked where you live a suitable answer would be *‘I live in the new territories – in a village just outside Sai Kung, called Pak Tam.’*

**NOT** *‘I live in Sai Kung. It’s a really nice town with quite a large population and lots of seafood restaurants. It’s a lovely place to live as it’s in the countryside. I have lived there for ten years.’* This sounds like

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

a prepared answer and the examiner's next question might be 'What's Sai Kung like?'

- **Don't give one or two word answers.** This is your chance to show off your English ability. Don't be shy.
- Make sure you relate what you say to what the examiner asks. For example,

**Examiner:** *Do you like reading?*

**You:** *Yes, I **do** but I don't get much time to **read** these days.*

## How to prepare for Part 1

- Make a **list of possible topics** you could be interviewed on e.g.
  - ❖ your home
  - ❖ your country
  - ❖ your job
  - ❖ your interests
  - ❖ your school
  - ❖ your family
  - ❖ food
  - ❖ festivals
  - ❖ clothes
  - ❖ books
  - ❖ films
  - ❖ transport etc.
- **Write questions** for each of your topics and get a family member or friend to ask you the questions or put them on an audio cassette and **test yourself** responding to them.
- **Record yourself** answering the questions and listen to see how you can improve your responses.
- Make sure you **know all the vocabulary necessary** to talk about these topics. Practice the pronunciation of any new vocabulary.
- **Think about the language** that will be **useful** e.g.
  - ❖ ways of expressing likes & dislikes
  - ❖ linkers like 'even though' and 'unless'
  - ❖ tenses to talk about the past and present and your experiences e.g. 'I've never been to Europe.' or 'I went to London for a holiday in 1998.'

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

## Independent Practice for Part 1

### Materials in the Self Access Centre (SAC)

#### Focus on IELTS:

p.30-31 (your city/town)

p.56 (music/language to express likes and dislikes)

p.96 (school)

p.147 (holidays)

#### Insight into IELTS:

p.100 (linkers)

p.101 (possible topics)

#### Focusing on IELTS:

p.56-58 (possible topics & questions)

p.70 (answering questions correctly)

#### IELTS Tutor:

p.2-4 (sample topics & sample answers)

#### Cambridge IELTS 1-7

#### IELTS to Success:

p.36 (sample questions)

#### Instant IELTS:

p.118-119

#### IELTS Preparation and Practice (S&L):

pp.55-7

#### IELTS Foundation:

pp.54-55

#### IELTS Strategies for Success:

pp.120-29

#### IELTS Test Builders:

pp. 36-37, p.68, p.98

#### Action Plan for IELTS:

pp.80-83

#### Ielts to Success:

pp.35-37

## Part 2: Individual Long Turn (3-4 minutes)

The examiner will ask you to **speak for 1-2 minutes** on a topic, which they will **give you on a card**. The card will give you an outline of what you need to talk about. You will be given **one minute to prepare** and **make notes**. The examiner will give you a piece of paper and a pen.



# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

They will invite you to start speaking when your preparation time is up. The examiner will not say anything while you are speaking but will stop you if you talk for more than two minutes. Then you **might be asked one or two short follow-up questions**.

The **topics** are **general in nature**. You will be asked to describe things such as a restaurant you enjoy eating in, a book you have read recently or something you cannot live without. You will also be asked to relate what you are talking about, to yourself – e.g. ‘*say why you choose to eat in this restaurant*’ or ‘*say what you enjoyed about the book*’.

*For example:*

**Describe a restaurant you enjoy eating in.**

**You should say:**

**where this restaurant is  
what kind of menu it has  
what other features it has  
and explain why you choose to eat there.**

Part 2 gives you the opportunity to show that you can **speak at length without hesitation**. It is also important to show that you **can organize** your ideas coherently.

## How to do Part 2

- **Read** the topic **card carefully**.
- Use the preparation time wisely. Make sure you have understood what you need to talk about. **Jot down a few points/key words**. Don't waste time writing sentences.
- **Don't write on the topic card**.
- Make sure you **cover all parts of the topic card** – description and explanation.
- Organise your talk by **following the order on the card**.
- Make your talk as **interesting** and as **lively** as possible.
- **Refer to your notes** as you speak, developing each point you have.

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

- Make sure you **use examples from your own life**. It's much easier to talk more fluently about your own experiences.
- Try to **expand your sentences** using linking words like *'however'* and *'although'*. Don't use words like *'moreover'* and *'thus'* which are normally used for writing.
- **Don't hesitate for too long**. Talk about anything related to the question rather than nothing at all.
- **Try to relax** and enjoy sharing your ideas.
- **Don't worry about the time**. The examiner will stop you when time is up.
- Also, **don't worry if the examiner stops you** before you have finished. You will not be penalized for not concluding your talk.

## How to prepare for Part 2

- **Using the topics** you have thought about **for Part 1** take them one at a time and time yourself **preparing for one minute** and **talking about them for one to two minutes**.
- **Record yourself speaking** on these topics. Play the recordings back to see how easy you are to understand and how you could improve. **Use the checklist** below to assess your performance:

- ✓ Did I cover all the points?
- ✓ Did I elaborate the points?
- ✓ Did I vary my vocabulary?
- ✓ Did I organize my ideas logically?
- ✓ Would an examiner have understood me?
- ✓ Was my pronunciation clear?
- ✓ Were my notes useful?
- ✓ How long did I talk for?

- Spend some time **thinking about** how you will make **notes**. Mindmaps are quick and useful for this kind of activity.
- **Think about the language:**
  - ❖ to introduce your topic
  - ❖ to describe objects, people, events or places

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

- ❖ to describe a sequence of events
  - ❖ to talk about experiences
  - ❖ to talk about how you feel or felt about something in the past
  - ❖ to talk about personal goals
- **Practice short answer questions** for the follow-up questions.

## **Independent Practice for Part 2**

### **Materials in the SAC**

#### Focus on IELTS:

- p.51 (mindmap notes in the context of interests)
- p.63 (describing objects)
- p.64 (experiences in the context of cultural events)
- p.70 (describing an event)
- p.86 (describing a sequence of events)
- p.94 (personal memories)
- p.96 (practice in the context of education)
- p.118 (practice in the context of books and letters)
- p.133 (practice/talking about future goals)
- p.148 (practice in the context of tourist attractions)
- p.158 (practice in the context of dress & performers)

#### Insight into IELTS:

- p.103 (introducing the topic)
- p.103 (describing how you feel/felt)
- p.104 (practice in the context of jobs)
- p.105 (answering follow-up questions)

#### Focusing on IELTS:

- p.58-62 (linking words, sample talk, possible topics)

#### IELTS Tutor:

- p.5-7 (sample questions & a sample talk)

#### Cambridge IELTS 1-7

#### Instant IELTS:

- p.119-120

#### Action Plan for IELTS:

- pp.84-87

#### IELTS to Success:

- pp.37-38

#### IELTS preparation and Practice (L&S) 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.:

- p.58, p.61, p.65, p.66

#### Focus on IELTS Practice Tests:

- p.97

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

IELTS Foundation:

p.56

IELTS Strategies for Success:

p.129, 133

IELTS Test Builder:

p.36, p.37, p.68,p.69, p.98, p.99, p.126, p.127

## **Part 3: Two-way discussion (4-5 minutes)**

The examiner will invite you to participate in a **discussion of more abstract issues** linked to the topic in Part 2.

You could for example be asked to talk about people's eating habits, diets, fast food or genetically modified food as a thematic link to your talk on a restaurant in Part 2. The **examiner could start the discussion in several ways** e.g. *'Tell me what you think about ...'*; *'What in your opinion is ...'* or *'How would you compare...'* etc.

You **may be asked to relate** the topic to **your own country/culture**.

You will be expected to be able to **express your opinions** and **give reasons**. It is an opportunity to demonstrate your fluency as well as the range of your vocabulary and grammar.

You will also be expected to use language to **clarify your meaning** and **repair any breakdowns** in communication.

The **questions will increase in difficulty** slightly as this part of the test progresses. The examiner may begin by asking you to describe something and then move on to ask you to compare, evaluate or speculate.

## **How to do Part 3**

- Remember, there is **no wrong answer**. Don't be afraid to say what you think about a topic.
- Try to **give interesting responses** to the examiner's prompts.
- **Show your ability to express abstract ideas** and support your opinions.

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

- Demonstrate a willingness to **give extended responses**. Don't give one-word answers.
- Try to **repair any breakdowns in communication** by getting around a word you can't think of or don't know by using other words to express your meaning.
- **Give yourself time to think** by using expressions like *'I've not really thought about this before but ...'*. See *Helpful Hints for IELTS*, p.77.

## How to prepare for Part 3

- **Think about abstract issues** related to the topics you have for Part 1 & 2. For example - school/teachers – qualities of a good teacher; learning styles; qualifications versus experience; classroom learning versus on-line learning etc.
- **Read English language newspapers & magazines**
- **Stay up to date** on current issues.
- **Listen to or watch current affairs programmes** e.g. *Pearl Watch*.
- **Think about language** that will be useful e.g.
  - ❖ language of comparison and contrast
  - ❖ language to express opinions and give reasons
  - ❖ language to speculate about the future
  - ❖ language to discuss the hypothetical e.g. conditional sentences
- **Think about a current issue and list vocabulary** you would need to talk about it. Think about your opinion on the issue and think about opposing views.
- **Find someone else doing the test** and practice discussing current affairs, especially in relation to Hong Kong.

## Independent Practice for Part 3

### Materials in the SAC

#### Focus on IELTS:

p.15 (comparison & contrast in the context of sports)

p.73 (discussion on water)

p.86 (expressing opinions/giving reasons in the context of natural disasters)

p.99 (discussion on teachers)

p.111 (comparison in the context of communication)

p.113 (discussion in the context of communication)

p.123 (discussion in the context of living in space)

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

p.129 (speculating about the future/discussing in the context of the future of our planet)

p.140-141 (discussion about cars/driving)

p.145 (discussion about tourism)

p.153 (discussion about facial expression & communication)

p.159 (discussions about clothes & performers)

Insight into IELTS:

p.106-108

Focusing on IELTS:

p. 64 (extending answers)

p.65 (clarification strategies and checking meaning)

p.66 (thinking time techniques)

p.68 (using other words to express meaning),

p.72-73 (expressing opinions)

IELTS Tutor:

p.9-10 (language for expressing & justifying opinion, giving suggestions, expressing preferences etc.)

Helpful Hints for IELTS:

p.82 (lots of topics)

Cambridge IELTS 1-7

Instant IELTS:

p.119-121

IELTS to Success:

pp.39-40

IELTS Preparation and Practce (L&S)

p.60

IELTS Foundation:

p.57

IELTS to Success:

pp. 134-147

IELTS Test Builder:

p.36, 68, 69, 98, 126, 128

Action Plan for ITLTS:

pp.88-91

Practical Language Activities (PLAs)

These speaking activities in the ELC provide you with the opportunity to discuss & share your ideas with others.

**Practice for all three parts together  
Materials in the SAC**

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

## Instant IELTS:

p.118-119

## Cambridge IELTS 1-7

## Focus on IELTS:

p.164-165

p.183

## Helpful Hints for IELTS:

p.105-106

p.126-127

## Focus on IELTS Practice Tests:

pp.82-96

## IELTS Foundation:

p.70

## Action Plan for IELTS:

pp.106-107

## Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs

~Road to IELTS

~Essential Academic Skills in English (EASE)

~Study Skills Success

~Connected Speech

~Clear Speech Works

~Pronunciation Power

~Pronunciation & Speech Tutor

## **Online Materials**

[www.cambridgeesol.org](http://www.cambridgeesol.org)

This is the official IELTS website. It offers tips & advice plus practice exercises.

<http://www.writefix.com/ielts/pkg>

This page has sample questions for all parts of the IELTS speaking test.

[http://www.ielts-exam.net/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.ielts-exam.net/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

From the homepage, go to IELTS speaking link. There are many sample test transcripts here.

# How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

<http://www.askynz.com/ielts/preparation.htm> From the homepage, go to speaking. There are some very helpful videos to help you with language usage on the test.

<http://hkcityu.netlanguages.com/> This site provides an excellent introduction to the IELTS exam. There is also information, tips and practice exercises, plus a complete IELTS test can be completed online.

Road to IELTS. Access through the ELC Activities and Self Study Page: [http://www.cityu.edu.hk/elc/study\\_preparation.html](http://www.cityu.edu.hk/elc/study_preparation.html) enter the site with your cityu login information. This page gives you hints and tips on the test based on 12 recurrent themes.

## General tips:

### Before the test

- Try and **talk in English** as much as possible.
- Participate in the Practical Language Activities (PLAs) offered by the ELC.
- Participate in the IELTS Workshops offered by the ELC.
- Participate in the general Workshops based on your area of need which are offered by the ELC.
- Remember the more **familiar** you are with **everyday social English** the more fluent you will sound.
- Make sure you are **familiar with the structure of the test**.
- **Listen** to as much English as you can – **watch English TV**, listen to English radio - RTHK (567AM) & BBC (675 AM), and **watch movies** in or outside the SAC.
- **Talk aloud** and **record yourself**.

### During the test

- Your appearance may have an unconscious effect on the examiner, so **dress neatly**.
- **Arrive early**. Sometimes examiners get ahead of schedule.
- Try to **look confident**. Don't fold your arms. Place your hands on your lap.
- **Make eye contact with the examiner** to appear more natural & confident.



## How to prepare for IELTS – Speaking

- Don't worry if the examiner does not look at you throughout the interview. They must watch the time and prepare for the upcoming parts.
- **Don't worry about being nervous.** Everyone is nervous doing these tests. Don't say to the examiner 'I'm nervous'!
- Speaking '**fluently**', does not mean speaking 'quickly'. **Slow down & breathe.**
- **Don't be afraid to correct** yourself if you make a grammatical mistake. Even native speakers make mistakes.