IELTS Exam
Test Preparation and Strategies

Overview

The IELTS, like most international exams, follows a very strict pattern for each test. It has four main components which are the four main disciplines in any language. Below you will find a description of each section and the order of the test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximately 30 mins.</td>
<td>Approximately 60 mins.</td>
<td>Approximately 60 mins.</td>
<td>Approximately 15 mins.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 listening tasks</td>
<td>3 reading passages</td>
<td>2 writing tasks</td>
<td>3 speaking tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 questions</td>
<td>40 questions</td>
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The entire IELTS test takes approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes to complete, though some people are asked to come back the following day to take the speaking section of the test. The cost of the exam is £160 GBP and is administered 52 weeks per year. The test can be taken as many times as you like and can afford. There are two versions on the IELTS exam, known as the academic test and the general test. For most university related purposes, the academic will be your test of choice, and for most immigration purposes the general.

Tips & Strategies

1. Know the Question Types
The IELTS exam offers a wide variety of question types, including fill-in-the-blank questions that could be in a form, summary or complete sentences; multiple choice; categorizing answers;

Sources:
https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format
diagram labeling; table completion; among others. It is very important that you have seen these question types before so that you know what to expect.

2. **Penmanship**
Everything on this test is done with pen and paper, there is absolutely nothing digital about it. In this case, it is very important that your writing is legible at all times, because if the test grader cannot read what you wrote after making a good attempt, it will be marked wrong. Proper spelling is a graded part of this test, so it is vital that you write neatly and clearly so that both you and the test grader are able to understand what you have written.

3. **It’s All in the Details**
One of the main areas that the test is examining is your ability to extract and provide details. For this reason, it is important that you spend time practicing the reception of detailed information and producing with unique arguments. Find ways to practice that require you to work in detail for extended periods of time. This way, when you are under the pressure of the test situation, you can know that you will not have problems with fatigue. This is called over-training and is a very useful tool in your practice for the IELTS exam.

4. **Check Your Spelling**
The IELTS exam will invariably make you spell difficult names and transcribe numbers. Any incorrect spelling is considered wrong, and the numbers must be exact—you will not get half points for being *almost* correct. The IELTS listening section also plays with language intricacies like letters that sound similar such as B and V, T and D, and A, E, and I. It will also mix numbers that sound similar like 13 and 30 in order to try to trick you. Being aware of these things is essential.

5. **Grammar, Grammar, Grammar**
Another main focus area of this test is your correct and varied use of grammar, as well as your ability to understand grammatical structures in context. For the production sections (speaking and writing) of the exam, spend some time strategizing different contexts where you can employ certain types of grammar, and make sure that you transfer that to the exam. For receptive sections (reading and listening), make sure that you are able to understand not only the grammatical structures but what the context of the structure means for the narrator. Knowing the fine details of the language is something that is pivotal in achieving a higher score.

6. **Be Ready for Accents**
This exam is an international test and thus will present a wide variety of native English accents. Places from all over the English-speaking world will be represented, and do not forget that English is an official language in India, South Africa and New Zealand where students often have more difficulty with the way in which people speak. Finding ways to expose yourself to many accents is very important in your preparation for the exam. Also, be sure to look for unique phrasing or verbiage in a variety of dialects. If you know that you struggle with Irish accents, for instance, try to find a news program or podcast online that can expose you to more of the sound of that accent.

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7. Practice Makes Permanent
The notion the “practice makes perfect” is a very flawed one. How you practice is how you will perform on the test. If you practice inconsistently and don’t have a plan, this will reflect in your test score, but if you look at the details and practice your weaknesses, you will certainly be more successful. Coming up with a plan, and seeking out valuable resources will undoubtedly result in a more ideal score and hopefully save you some time and money in the long run.

8. Take a Preparation Course
If there is one thing that is true about most international exams it is that they are not cheap. Oftentimes making an investment in a preparation course can mean the difference between taking the test once or three times, which can be a sound use of your money in the long run. Because these tests follow a specific formula, studying for the test and mastering test taking skills will often lead to a higher score and more positive outcome for the student.

Sources:
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