

SPEAKING TIPS: IELTS

Study Skills – Exam Preparation

One of the most challenging skills to master is speaking due to many internal and external factors such as nervousness, lack of confidence, misunderstanding of the format or relying too much on other people's experiences. This document will help you understand how the exam works and what is required for you to have a good performance in this section of the exam.

The IELTS speaking exam consists of an oral interview between the test taker and an examiner; the candidate is asked to answer a series of questions, each part fulfils a specific function in terms of interaction pattern, task input and test takers output.

All the speaking tests are recorded to ensure the fairness of the test in every single stage of it; from the moment the candidate enters the room until the exam is over. Some UKVI and Life Skills exams will require video recording as well to validate the identity of the candidate.

Each part of the exam has its own characteristics and the examiner is required to give very specific answers.

Part 1 – Introduction and interview on familiar topic

Task type and format	In this part, the examiner introduces him/herself and checks the test takers' identity. They then ask the test takers general questions on some familiar topics such as home, family, work, studies and interests. To ensure consistency, questions are taken from a script.
Timing	4-5 minutes
Type of questions	<p>The type of questions you can find in this session:</p> <p>Simple present What do you do?</p> <p>Simple past Did you learn to swim when you were a child?</p> <p>Simple future What will you do when you finish your studies?</p> <p>Preference Do you prefer to go to the movies alone or with other people?</p>
Task focus	This part of the test focuses on the ability to communicate opinions and information on everyday topics and common experiences or situations by answering a range of questions.

No. of questions	11 divided into three sets of questions.
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Part 2 – Long turn

Task type and format	<p>Part 2 is the individual long turn. The examiner gives the test takers a task card which asks the test takers to talk about a particular topic, includes points to cover in their talk and instructs the test takers to explain one aspect of the topic. Test takers are given one minute to prepare their talk, and are given a pencil and paper to make notes. The examiner asks the test takers to talk for 1 to 2 minutes, stops the test takers after 2 minutes, and asks one or two questions on the same topic.</p> <p>Using the points on the task card effectively, and making notes during the preparation time, will help the test takers think of appropriate things to say, structure their talk, and keep talking for 2 minutes.</p>
Timing	3-4 minutes, including 1 minute to prepare.
Type of questions	The candidate will be given a prompt that requires a detailed description of a situation, people, building, animal, object or place.
Task focus	This part of the test focuses on the ability to speak at length on a given topic (without further prompts from the examiner), using appropriate language and organising ideas coherently. It is likely that the test takers will need to draw on their own experience to complete the long turn.
No. of questions	A prompt and 4 sub questions (wh- type of questions)

Part 3 – Discussion

Task type and format	In Part 3, the examiner and the test takers discuss issues related to the topic in Part 2 in a more general and abstract way and, where appropriate, in greater depth.
Timing	4-5 minutes
Task focus	This part of the test focuses on the ability to express and justify opinions and to analyse, discuss and speculate about issues.

Type of question	This type of question will focus on three main aspects: generalization, paraphrasing and categorizing
No. of questions	4-6 questions

**Adapted from <https://www.ielts.org/>*

Tips part 1

Part 1 has straightforward questions and are always followed by **why**, which sometimes may be difficult as the questions are very limiting. It is the candidate's ability the one that determines the success of this first part. The most common topics in this part are: colors, shoes, free time activities,

Remember always to provide two reasons to support your answer, for instance if the question is: "**what is your favorite color?**" you should mention two supporting details such as blue is the colour of the sky which reminds me every time of how hard I need to work to reach my greatest goals. It encourages me because I know what I am capable of when I'm fully committed to it. In addition, blue is the colour of the water, which reminds me of how I have to make myself flexible and mold according to the situations occurring in life. So yes, indeed, blue is my favourite colour because it teaches me somehow to aim for the sky but still remain grounded to my roots.

A strong candidate can be recognized from the very first answers, so if you want to excel in the exam you should start using both simple and complex grammar tenses. Even if the questions are posted using simple tenses, it is important to display a variety of grammar structures throughout the exam. For example, if the questions is "What types of programs did you watch when you were a child? you should use not only past simple **when I was a child**, you can also use would or used to describe past routines.

Tips Part 2

To create an impact on your listener, it is better to tell a story that describes the prompt you are given in the exam, so your speech will be naturally organized in a chronological order and a better organization in general terms.

Let's say the prompt is to **describe the best gift you have received**, you can start like this: The most memorable present I **have received** is a teddy bear. I **remember** that Christmas very much because my parents **had told** me they were short of money so I **was not expecting** to receive any gift, however I **wrote** the letter and ask Santa for a brownish teddy bear I had seen on a store near my home, it was adorable.... This story type format gives you the opportunity to be much more specific on the ideas development as well as to use more grammar tenses.

Other important feature to consider is the adjectives use, as this task requires a detailed description of a situation, people, building, animal, object or place, you need

to use more than the common basic adjectives we usually use such as beautiful, nice, easy. Try to improve your vocabulary using complex adjectives such as fascinating, cordial or uncomplicated.

Tips part 3

This is the most challenging part of the exam as it requires a higher sense of ideas development, candidates are expected to categorize and paraphrase during the last five minutes of the exam.

Categorization in a general sense is the process in which ideas and objects are recognized, differentiated, and understood. Categorization implies that objects are grouped into categories, usually for some specific purpose. Ideally, a category illuminates a relationship between the subjects and objects of knowledge. For IELTS, the candidates should be able to group ideas into superior categories to avoid being too specific and miss the opportunity to provide deeper answers.

An example of categorization is commonly found in questions that start with what type or what kind of, as they require you to talk about more general categories. For the question: what kind of music do young people listen to in your country? The candidate needs to analyse that listing (reggaeton, pop, rock) is not the best answer as you are not demonstrating a display of grammar structure or organization. A better answer could be: Considering the different influences Colombian adolescents may have in terms of music I can describe two main aspects to take into account. First of all, **background**, depending on the region a person is born so do their taste in music change, people who come from the coast tend to listen to more **tropical music** as they have a vast influence on African rhythms. Instead people from the inner parts of Colombia may listen to more **alternative types of melodies** such as punk, hard rock. The second aspect is **technology**; most teenagers have smart phones with streaming services including spotify, pandora or shazam which increase the number of genres exposure they have through their lives. A broader range of music influences the types of music people listen to in Colombia. However, I believe pop music is one of teenagers preference as it aims for this type of target.

Paraphrasing means to re-write a phrase or sentence with the same meaning but using different words. You can paraphrase changing the vocabulary, changing the grammar or the order of words. Let's see this example about paraphrasing:

1. "It can be difficult to **choose** a **suitable** place to study English."
2. "It is often a challenge to **pick up (x)** a **relevant (x)** school to learn English."
3. "It is sometimes hard to select an appropriate place to learn English."



The second example sounds unnatural and these sentences are likely to reduce your score more than small mistakes because the listener may not understand what you are trying to say. The third example is correct because all of the words have the same meaning.

If you want to see more examples of paraphrasing, one of the best ideas is to compare two news articles about a current event in two different newspapers. The stories will contain most of the same details, but the sentences will be different. By comparing the sentences and paragraphs you will get more ideas about how to paraphrase and see some real examples.