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UDK 378

INSIDE IELTS: GUIDELINES AND KEYS TO SUCCESS

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**Аңдатпа**

Мақалада IELTS сынағынан өтудегі мәселер мен қиындықтар талқыланады және талданады. Бұл мәселер мен қиындықтар IELTS – ке сәтті дайындалуға арналған курстарда, онлайн – пікірталас топтары арқылы, сондай – ақ тиісті көздерді талдау барысында анықталды. Басылымның авторы әр мәселе бойынша қысқаша әдістемелік нұсқаулар береді, сондай – ақ сынақты табысты өту кілттерін жарықтандырады. Бұл ақпарат танысу мақсаттарға арналған және IELTS – ке дайындалғандарға және оны қазірдің өзінде тапсырғандарға пайдалы, бірақ соңғы баллдарға қанағаттанбайтын адамдар үшін пайдалы болады.

**Түйінді сөздер:** IELTS – ке сәтті дайындалу, әдістемелік нұсқаулар, оқу түрлері, тыңдау түрлері, академиялық жазу.

**Аннотация**

В статье рассматриваются и анализируются проблемы и трудности при прохождении теста IELTS. Данные проблемы и трудности были выявлены в ходе прохождения курсов, посвященных успешной подготовке к IELTS, через дискуссионные группы онлайн курса, а так же при анализе соответствующих источников. Автор публикации дает краткие методические рекомендации по каждой проблеме, а так же освещает ключи к успешной сдаче теста. Информация носит ознакомительный характер и будет полезна как для тех, кто только начинает подготовку к IELTS, так и тем, кто уже сдавал его, но не доволен итоговыми баллами.

**Ключевые слова:** IELTS, успешная подготовка к IELTS, методические рекомендации, виды чтения, виды аудирования, академическое письмо.

**Annotation**

The article reviews and analyzes the problems and difficulties in taking the IELTS test. These problems and difficulties were identified during the courses devoted to the successful preparation for IELTS, through online discussion groups, as well as through the analysis of relevant sources. The author of the publication gives short methodical recommendations on each problem, and also illuminates the keys to the successful passing of the test. The information is for informational purposes only and will be useful both for those who are just beginning to prepare for IELTS, and for those who have already handed over it, but are not satisfied with the final scores.

**Key words:** IELTS, IELTS successful preparation, methodical recommendations, types of reading, types of listening, academic writing.

**Introduction**

IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, is considered to be the high – stakes English test for study, migration or work. The test measures the language proficiency of those, who want to study, work where the English Language is used as a language of communication. The examination uses a nine – band scale to distinctly identify levels of the English Language proficiency (band scale, definition and description are shown in the Table 1).

Table 1 Band scale, description and definition

Description	Band scale	Definition
Expert user	9.0	Proficiency
Very good user	8.5	
	Good user	8.0
7.5		
Competent user	7.0	Upper Intermediate
	6.5	
Modest user	6.0	Intermediate
	5.5	
Limited user	5.0	Lower Intermediate
	4.5	
Extremely limited user	4.0	Elementary
	3.5	
Intermittent user	3.0	Beginner
	2.5	
Non user	2.0	Starter
	1.0	

IELTS is available in two test versions:

Academic – for people applying for higher education or professional registration;

General Training for those migrating to Australia, Canada and the UK, or applying for secondary education, training programmes and work experience in an English – speaking environment.

Both versions provide a valid and accurate assessment of the four language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking [1].

The test is considered to be fair to all and widely available. It means that IELTS treats all participants with the complete fairness, respect and strongly avoid all possible cultural bias. The examination accepts all standard varieties of native–speaker English, taking into account North American, British, Australian and New Zealand English. The test is available at more than 10,000 locations worldwide, including more than 50 locations in the USA, and there are 48 test dates a year [1].

It is widely known that the test consists of 4 sections:

1. Listening. It takes 30 minutes, has 4 sections and 40 items;
2. Reading. It takes 30 minutes, has 3 sections and 40 items;
3. Writing. It takes 60 minutes and has 2 tasks;
4. Speaking. It takes from 11 to 14 minutes and has 3 parts.

This article is aimed at providing some pieces of advice to those who want to take the test but still have some fears.

### Experimental

The following methods were used in the experimental part of the article:

1. Method of scientific literature analysis;
2. Method of social survey;
3. Data analysis;

At the first stage a wide range of different scientific resources were studied, such as articles in magazines, websites, and brochures; the free online course “Inside IELTS” were taken at futurelearn.com [2]. This course helped to learn about the skills one needed for

IELTS Academic. Also, the discussion groups, held during the course, were useful for conducting a social survey for identifying problems and fears among IELTS future takers. The below mentioned problem questions were revealed during the analysis:

1. What do you need to do in the Writing\Reading\Speaking\Listening sections of the test?
2. What are examiners looking and waiting for?
3. How are the Writing\Reading\Speaking\Listening sections assessed?
4. What different reading and listening skills do you need for Reading\Listening sections?

Moreover, there are five more things about IELTS that people are most afraid of which were given on the official website [3]:

1. to miss the answers in the Listening module;
2. not to have enough time;
3. to have nothing to write about;
4. to say the wrong thing;
5. to have nothing to say;

Summarizing S. Braverman`s pieces of advice it is essential to mention that:

1. There is only one solution for the Listening fear – practice. Practice enlarges confidence and teaches how to recover missed information. It gives an idea how to move on and get the entire test done well. Practice reveals weaknesses and difficulties, shows where the points are usually lost. Taking in respect these facts you will save points and improve the overall band score.

2. The most common fear for the Reading\Writing sections is to not finish on time. The key point is to take control of the time and manage it carefully. There are several passages in the Reading section under no circumstances should you let one passage eat up all the time. At this step you may use one of the time management techniques which is called “Divide and Conquer”. In the very beginning of the test divide the time and write down when you will start working on each passage. Strictly stick to this rule. Even if there are some unanswered questions, move on to the next passage.

3. This is another fear where practice is the only one solution, but in this case you need to read a lot of essays on different topics and to absorb other people`s ideas. The truth is that the examiners do not care about the source of the information; it is the way an essay is written that matters.

4. Do not be afraid to express an “inappropriate idea”, because there is no right or wrong idea. As long as the student is speaking on topic and expressing their thoughts in a logical way and coherent way, no idea can harm the score.

5. One the most common fears for almost every examinee is the interaction with the examiner. The Speaking section sometimes makes people feel uncomfortable because there is not enough time to think (just 1 – 2 minutes). First of all you need to practice at least a couple of weeks before the examination: make a list of topics and speak to yourself. Some students get nervous about being recorded. Surprisingly the reason for this procedure is to evaluate the examiner, not the examinee. There are cases when students are not happy with their score and demand re – assessment, which can only be done if there is a recording of the exam [3].

### **Results and discussion**

As it was mentioned before there are 4 sections in the test: Writing, Speaking, Reading and Listening. Let us have a closer look at what and how you need to do in the Writing section.

The academic writing section lasts for an hour, and there are two separate tasks. The first task is a summary of some visual information. There could be a chart or a graph or a

diagram or a set of maps to compare. The task is to summarize the information. Part 1 requires at least 150 words and it should be spent only 20 minutes. The second task is a formal essay, and you have 40 minutes to spend on that and produce at least 250 words [2].

There are four criteria for the Writing section. For the first writing task the task achievement criterion is the most important one, it means that there should be up to 150 words and fully answered task question. For the second writing task the task response is an essential criterion, i.e. the answer should cover all points in the question, well-balanced arguments, and strong support of ideas with evidence and examples are to be given. Of course, the answer should contain 250 words [2]. For both tasks three next criteria are crucial: coherence and cohesion (essays should be easily understood, well organized and clearly linked), lexical resource (essays should consist of a wide range of accurate and effective vocabulary), grammatical range and accuracy (essays should consist of a wide range of accurate and effective grammatical structures). The writing task 1 is worth more scores than the task 2. The examiner combines scores and calculates the final score.

The Speaking section takes for 11 to 14 minutes and consists of an oral interview between the examiner and the examinee. As it was mentioned before, all answers in speaking sections are recorded. In the first part a candidate answers some general questions about homes, families, jobs, studies, interests, hobbies and a range of familiar topic areas. This part takes between four and five minutes. In the second part a candidate is given a verbal prompt on a card and is asked to talk on a particular topic for between one to two minutes. The examiner then may ask several rounding – off questions. In the third part the examiner and a candidate are engaged in a discussion of more abstract issues and concepts which are thematically linked to the topic prompt in the second part. The discussion lasts between four and five minutes [4].

Such criteria as fluency and coherence (if the language is fluent, easy to understand and if the ideas are linked together clearly), lexical resource (accurate and effective use of a wide range of an ordinary and a high – level vocabulary), grammatical range and accuracy (accurate and effective use of a wide range of non – repeated and non–basic grammatical structures without mistakes), pronunciation (the spoken language is clear and easily understood, the stress and intonation is used to add extra meaning, in individual words the stress is used correctly) are assessed during the Speaking section.

The Reading section takes 60 minutes, it consists of 40 questions based on 3 reading passages with 2,000 – 2,750 words. There is no extra time for transferring answers on an answer sheet. Texts are supposed to be for non – specialists and taken from journals, newspapers and magazines.

There are various types of tasks in the Reading Section and some notes how to complete them:

1. Note completion, matching headings and identifying writer's views/claims (yes/no/not given) are considered to be one of the easiest tasks;

2. Multiple choice tasks:

- 2.1 A four – option multiple – choice task in which you choose your answer from options A to D. You need to read the question and the options as well as the relevant part of the text carefully [5].

- 2.2 A multiple – choice task in which you choose more than one answer (either selecting two answers from five options or three answers from seven options). This task focuses on locating information in the text, so it is important to look quickly through the text to find the right part before deciding on your answers [5].

3. Identifying information task (true/false/not given). This task focuses on actual information, not identifying author's views or claims. To complete this task you need to quickly locate the relevant part of the text and then to read it carefully.

4. Matching tasks:

4.1 Matching information task. A text is divided into sections or paragraphs, for each question, you need to decide which section or paragraph a statement appears in. (The wording in the text won't be the same as the statements in the task.) The focus of the task is reading through a text quickly to locate information [5].

4.2 Matching features task. The "feature" can vary. It may, for example, involve matching statements with a list of people or a list of dates [5].

4.3 Matching sentence endings task in which you have to match the first half of a sentence with a list of possible endings [5].

5. Completion tasks:

5.1 Sentence completion. You need to use words from the text to complete sentences, taking care to make sure that the complete sentence makes sense and is grammatically as well as factually correct [5].

5.2 Summary, note, table or flow – chart completion. You have already seen an example of a note – completion task. You can use the keywords provided in the summary, notes, table, or flow chart to help you find the part of the text that you need to read carefully.

5.3 Diagram label completion. You need to complete labels on a diagram using a description of something in the text. To complete this type of task, you first need to quickly find the part of the text that contains the description that relates to the diagram, read this description carefully.

6. Short answer questions. The questions will be in the same order as the information in the text. Although there is no table, diagram, flow chart, or notes to guide you, the best approach is still to read quickly to locate the information you need, and then to read the relevant part more carefully [5].

The Listening section lasts about 30 minutes and has 40 questions with 4 sections. The audio record is played only once. Of course, examiners are given some time to read the questions, write answers and check them during the listening. After the listening, there are 10 minutes to transfer answers to the answering sheet. The first two parts of the Listening section are about social needs, it can be a conversation or a monologue. The final two parts are about education or training context. A conversation is usually between up to 4 people, a wide range of accents are used in the listening.

Here are some other common kinds of listening tasks:

1. Labeling a plan or map. You listen to someone describing a plan of a building or a map of an area. You have the plan or map, and you have a list of things on it. You have to match the things in the list to the places the speaker describes. This task tests your ability to follow directions and understand descriptions of where things are located [6].

2. Labeling a diagram. You listen to two people talking about an object, such as a machine. You have a diagram (a picture) and a list of different parts of the thing in the picture. Again, you have to match the things in your list to different parts of the diagram. These questions test your understanding of descriptions of what things look like, such as their shape and position [6].

3. Completing a flow chart. You listen to the speaker (s) explaining a process, in other words a large task that has several shorter stages. You see a written summary of these stages. This is called a flow chart. Some information is missing, and you have a list of options (A, B, C, D). You choose the correct option to complete the missing information. This tests your ability to understand step – by – step instructions, and to listen for the main ideas or facts [6].

### Conclusion

To sum all pieces of advice and tips concerning different IELTS sections and tasks it is important to highlight the following:

1. For the Writing section – strictly stick to the task and criteria of assessment, have more practice on the writing itself, follow simple rules of writing general academic and official essays;

2. For the Speaking section – practice is the main key to success;

3. For Reading section – read the instructions carefully (they will tell you how many words / numbers you can use in your answers), mind spelling, look at the picture (if you have one in the test) and the title to give you a general idea of the topic, and then look at the questions, practice with different types of reading:

3.1 reading quickly to get the general idea of a text;

3.2 reading quickly to locate information, for instance to locate the relevant part of a text to complete a task;

3.3 reading relevant parts of the text more carefully.

4. For the Listening section – practice is of a great importance, try to single out (or underline) keywords in questions, try to answer all question even if you are not sure, mind spelling.

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