

SELF-PREP READING



A WARM WELCOME

PLEASE NOTE: We provide these pages in the hope that they will help you to get the IELTS test band you need. The tips, techniques and skills presented here are not going to take you from a Band 2 to a Band 9, of course! For large gains, there is no alternative to hours of careful study and hours of practice. However, the suggestions can help you to make small improvements here and there and possibly improve your score by 0.5, 1.0 or very occasionally 1.5 points and that can make all the difference in the world – the difference between your IELTS success or failure.

We wish the best of luck with your IELTS test.

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HOW TO GET STARTED WITH YOUR IELTS PREPARATION

In some ways, IELTS sounds like something we all dreamed of as school children: a test that there is no way of failing!

Of course, in the real world, things are not that simple. True, there is no such thing as a failing grade and instead all candidates who actually take the test are placed somewhere on a scale ranging from band 1 (non-user) to band 9 (expert user). On the other hand, a “passing” grade of band 1 is unlikely to impress many people!

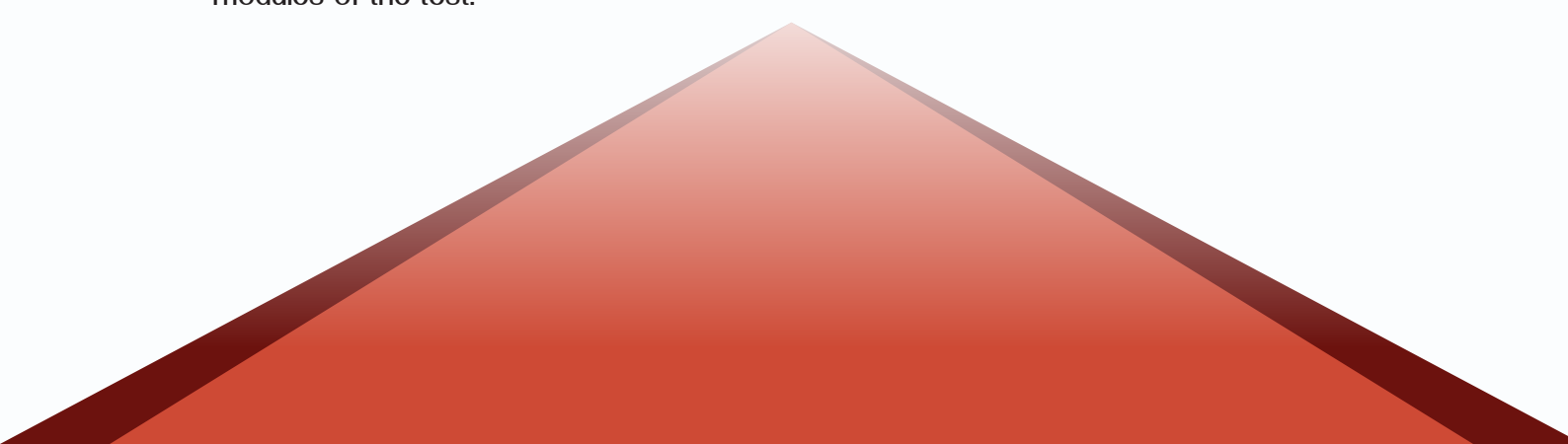
There will be someone somewhere who enjoys doing IELTS tests purely for the fun of it. The vast majority of people, however, take the test as a necessary step towards doing something else, such as being accepted for a place at a university or being offered a job. You probably fall into this latter category too. If so, it is essential to find out the minimum acceptable band for you to continue with your plans. Although there is no pass mark as such in IELTS, achieving this band is what counts as success for you.

Unfortunately, even this can be a little complicated. While organizations will usually set a minimum overall band score, many also set minimum band scores for particular sections, such as listening or reading.

Once you know what your overall target is, you can then think about the sub-targets you should set for yourself for each section of the test. To do this, you must take into account your own personal balance of abilities so that you can use your strengths in one area to make up for your weaknesses in another. This knowledge will allow you to make calculations about what you need to get in each part of the test.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Find out what band (or combination of bands) is the minimum acceptable for you to continue with your plans. Use this as the basis for setting your targets in the various modules of the test.



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1. WHAT ARE YOUR IELTS READING PROBLEMS?

“There’s always room for improvement”. It’s a well-known phrase in English, but is it true? In the case of the IELTS reading exam, almost certainly yes. Even native speakers tend not to get 100% when they sit this module of the test, so it is extremely likely that there will be areas where you struggle too. The value of pre-test preparation is that it allows you to identify those areas beforehand and start working on them.

Whatever the reason why you are losing points, it is clear that it must either be because of

problems with IELTS reading test skills,
problems with language, or
problems with both.

The way to find out which of these possibilities applies to you is to try the reading section of a practice test under various conditions and take careful note of any differences in outcome.

Begin by doing an IELTS reading module while keeping to the exact timing of the actual test and then calculating your score. Next, try another IELTS reading test without using a dictionary or any language aids, but giving yourself no time limit. If you find that your score suddenly shoots up, it is clear that your language skills are not the thing that is holding you back. You should work on your test skills and try to build up your speed.

If, on the other hand, you find that you could struggle with the test until the end of time and still not significantly improve your score, the problem is obviously lack of adequate language skills. In this case, there is little alternative but to work hard on such things as expanding your vocabulary, deepening your grammar knowledge, and so on.

One additional factor that you must take into account when thinking about your score is that in the real test, you will begin the reading section having just completed a 40 minutes listening test. Usually you will have no break between the two.

Faced with such challenges, you are likely to need a little help. The posts here, in the IELTS reading category, will give you hints about how to squeeze as many points as possible from the English that you know and give the best possible performance of which you are capable. It is an effort worth making. After all, getting even a few extra points could in some circumstances be enough to put you up a whole band.

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2. HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE IELTS READING TEST?

It is an obvious point, but the better you know the typical layout and arrangement of a test, the less likely you are to become lost or disorientated while you are taking it. This is why it is in your interests to make sure that you are completely familiar with the structure of the IELTS reading test.

THE IELTS READING TEST

SECTION 1 - PASSAGE 1

Between 800 ~ 1000 words
All Question Types Possible
The easiest of the 3 sections

SECTION 2 - PASSAGE 2

Between 800 ~ 1000 words
All Question Types Possible
More difficult than Section 1

SECTION 3 - PASSAGE 3

Between 800 ~ 1000 words
All Question Types Possible
The most difficult Section

NO EXTRA TIME to transfer
answers to answer sheet

It is also very important to make sure that you practice with materials appropriate to the form of IELTS examination that you have decided to sit. Although all IELTS candidates take the same listening and speaking tests, the reading and writing tests come in two forms: academic and general. If you have decided to sit the academic test but have been using practice materials designed for the general test, an unpleasant shock awaits you!

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The two versions of the reading test differ in both structure and content. It is no secret that the academic version of the test is tougher. It contains three long reading passages with a combined text length of up to about 2,750 words.

The texts selected will be on general interest academic topics taken from magazines such as National Geographic, New Scientist and The Economist. The articles are sometimes accompanied by charts, diagrams and illustrations.

The General Reading test also comprises three sections. The first can contain two, three or a number of short texts (e.g. leaflets, notices, etc.), usually on the same theme, which will be something relevant to general life in an English-speaking country. The second section contains two texts related to organizational topics, such as training materials or job advertisements. The third section is a single long passage on a topic of general interest taken from a newspaper, magazine or book.

SELF-STUDY

Go over an IELTS reading test. Do not worry about trying to answer the questions, but instead, merely identify the different sections and subsections that you are looking at. Repeat this exercise with several different reading tests until you feel completely confident about the arrangement and layout of the test.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Make sure you are thoroughly familiar with the structure of the version of IELTS reading test that you will be taking.

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3. WHAT KIND OF SYSTEM SHOULD YOU USE IN THE IELTS READING TEST?

Imagine a mountaineer's plan for tackling Everest was:

1. Go to the Himalayas.
2. Start climbing
3. Hope for the best.

How would you rate his or her chances of success? Attempting the IELTS reading test without having put any thought into it beforehand is really not very different. It has, after all, been specifically designed to check several different reading skills. Using a system that incorporates these skills is therefore likely to be a more successful approach than simply jumping in blindly. We will present such a system in outline here, and then go into more detail on subsequent pages about each of the skills involved.

Step One – Skimming

Try to get a reasonably clear understanding of the overall contents as quickly as possible by skimming. This does not mean, as is sometimes thought, running your eye over a page at random. Instead, approach long texts by reading the opening paragraph, the first sentence of each of the following paragraphs (which tend to be topic sentences and thus contain the main point of the paragraph), and the closing paragraph. This should give you a good idea of the overall structure of the article. With shorter texts, it may not even be necessary to read the entire opening and closing paragraphs. Just a sentence or two of each may be sufficient.

Step Two – Scanning

Once you have a rough overview of a text, you can scan the most likely paragraphs for the answers to questions. In the same way that you would not have to read an entire timetable in order to find the time of the next train, it is often not necessary to read an entire paragraph to find the answer to certain questions. Specific facts such as dates, numbers and names are often particularly easy to pull out of paragraphs simply by scanning.

Step Three – Intensive Reading

Most questions will of course require a bit more understanding than you can realistically expect to get from scanning alone. For these questions, having located the relevant section of the article by scanning you will then usually need to read carefully through the two or three sentences before, containing, and after the answer in order

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to get as clear an understanding of the meaning as possible.

SELF-STUDY

We will talk more on some of the following pages about ways to practice each of these three skills.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Use a three-skill system – skimming, scanning, intensive reading – to help you get through the reading section of the test as quickly and accurately as possible.

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4. WHAT SYSTEM PITFALLS SHOULD YOU AVOID IN THE IELTS READING TEST?

It is important that you practice with your system and learn to trust it. If you don't, there is a danger that the time pressure of the exam will force you into one of the following errors.

Mistake 1: Trying to read everything

There are nearly 3,000 words in the reading section of an IELTS exam and the contents of articles are often complex and detailed. Unless you are an extremely fast reader, you will not have enough time to get through everything from start to finish.

You may find it an instructive exercise to look again at the questions in the reading section of an IELTS practice test that you have just completed. Highlight the sentences in the article that had to be read in order to answer the questions. It is often something of a surprise to discover how few of these sentences there actually are.

Mistake 2: Jumping straight in without skimming

When people are lost in a forest, they instinctively try to find higher ground from which they can get an overview of where they are. Without doing this, it is very easy for them to become overwhelmed by their surroundings.

You may face a similar danger when reading a difficult article, particularly if you are under time pressure. Without getting a basic understanding of the main themes being discussed, the key ideas in each paragraph, and the overall development of the argument, you may quickly find yourself getting hopelessly lost.

Having an overview allows you to know roughly where to look to find particular details. Without this, your only two choices when trying to locate information will be reading through everything from start to finish or jumping from paragraph to paragraph more or less at random.

Mistake 3: Trying to complete the easy questions first

The oft-given advice that you should answer easier questions first can only be followed to a rather limited extent. With some question types, particularly those that ask a candidate to identify paragraphs, it may make sense to try this approach. (See the later page on this type of question.) There may also sometimes be questions that ask for highly specific information such as names, dates or percentages, and on occasion it may make sense to get some of these out of the way first.

Doing anything much more than this is not advisable, however. Often, there is no clear

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way of knowing how difficult a question will be to answer without actually trying to answer it. Also, the order of questions generally mirrors the order in which information appears in the text. It is therefore sensible to try answering the questions as they are given since this will help to make it clearer which part of the article is likely to contain the answer. Finally, answering in order can also make the logical connections between some of the details easier to follow.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Stick with the three-skill system (skimming, scanning, and intensive reading) when tackling texts. Ignoring the system and jumping straight into a text, trying to read an entire text, or trying to tackle questions in presumed order of difficulty, are all strategies with poor chances of success.

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5. ARE YOU FAMILIAR ENOUGH WITH ALL THE IELTS READING QUESTION TYPES?

The first time you sit down and try the reading module of an IELTS practice test, it may seem that you are being hit on every side by a terrifyingly random and unpredictable sequence of questions, but with a little practice, the main question types should soon become very familiar. At the time of writing, there are, depending on how you count them, about eleven different kinds of test question. Even this small number can be further grouped under three main headings: questions that ask you to match something, to choose something, or to complete something.

Let's look at some examples of the various question types. (The type of activity is shown in brackets.)

MULTIPLE-CHOICE (CHOOSING)

Multiple-choice involves choosing an answer from a range of options. Most people are familiar with ordinary multiple-choice questions in which one answer is selected from a number of possibilities. The IELTS reading test also has a couple of variations which involve choosing more than one answer.

Example 1

15. The new international agreement will probably

- A.** make aquaculture practices safer
- B.** endanger sea life
- C.** give farmers more flexibility in their practices
- D.** have very little effect

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Example 2

The new international agreement will probably

- A. make aquaculture practices safer
- B. endanger sea life
- C. give farmers more flexibility in their practices
- D. have very little effect
- E. increase competition between farmers

15. _____ 16. _____

Example 3

The new international agreement will probably

- A. make aquaculture practices safer
- B. endanger sea life
- C. give farmers more flexibility in their practices
- D. have very little effect
- E. increase competition between established farmers
- F. reduce competition between established farmers
- G. take several years to have any real impact

15. _____ 16. _____ 17. _____

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As you can see, the three possible formats, and the corresponding instructions are:

4 options from which you choose 1	Choose the appropriate letters A-D
5 options from which you choose 2	Choose the appropriate letters A-E
7 options from which you choose 3	Choose the appropriate letters A-G

IDENTIFYING INFORMATION (CHOOSING)

Questions of this type give three options: true / false / not given. The statements refer to the factual content of the article rather than to the writer's point of view.

TRUE *if the statement is true according to the passage*
FALSE *if the statement is false according to the passage*
NOT GIVEN *if the information is not given in the passage*

37. Further investment should be directed at alternative forms of energy rather than at the oil industry.

38. The energy demands from consumers in the future will include how environmentally clean the production process is.

IDENTIFYING A WRITER'S VIEWS OR CLAIMS (CHOOSING)

This type of question is very similar to the previous category except that now the three options are yes / no / not given and the statements are not about facts but about the writer's beliefs.

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YES *if the statement reflects the views of the writer*
NO *if the statement contradicts the views of the writer*
NOT GIVEN *if it is impossible to know what the writer thinks about this*

31. It is a good idea to invest in non-traditional energy sources.

32. It is only right that consumers should demand clean fuel.

MATCHING INFORMATION (MATCHING)

With this type of question, candidates match the paragraphs in a text with statements about the type of information they contain. It is frequently the case that not all of the paragraphs in the text are used. It is also not unusual for a particular paragraph to be used more than once.

Read each statement and then write the appropriate letter to show which paragraph contains this information.

1. Car sharing has great potential.
2. A city that employs a car number plate system.
3. Certain roads will be expensive for drivers than others.
4. Bicycle parking is making the local council richer.

MATCHING HEADINGS (MATCHING)

In questions of this type, the test taker is required to decide which items from a list make the most appropriate subheadings for particular paragraphs in a text. Although

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the activity sounds straightforward, the wording and length of the headings can make it rather tricky, as can the fact that sometimes none of the headings seem to fit very well. In this kind of question, headings are never used more than once, but there may be some headings that are not used at all.

- i. Aquaculture and sea bed erosion.
- ii. Governments and management of the sea life
- iii. The effects of government policy in developing countries
- iv. Aquaculture and food output
- v. The likely effects of the new international agreement
- vi. The environmental impact of recent trends in aquaculture

MATCHING FEATURES (MATCHING)

In this type of activity, the candidates must use their understanding of a text to help them choose the items from a list that match a series of questions or statements. It is possible that some options may be used more than once and some may not be used at all.

A. Alfred Ash

B. Jane Eastham

C. John Eccles

7. employees should be consulted about their choice of work clothes

8. the growing importance of uniforms at work

9. uniforms and poor performance

10. self-esteem and uniforms

11. the relationship between work clothes and team work

MATCH SENTENCE ENDINGS (MATCHING)

Questions of this type give the first half of a number of sentences. Test takers have to choose the best ending for each sentence from a range of options. There are always some sentence endings that are not used.

19. “Heavy” drinking ...
 20. Compared with people who do not drink, a “heavy” drinker ...
 21. The Swiss Medical Association ...
-
- A. publishes considerable research on the topic.
 - B. is less likely to contract certain forms of cancer.
 - C. is one of the most preventable causes of death.
 - D. is just as harmful as heavy smoking
 - E. is more likely to contract, throat cancer
 - F. calls for stronger action against happy hours.

SENTENCE COMPLETION (COMPLETING)

In this type of question, it is necessary to use words from a text to complete a series of sentences accurately. There will always be a word limit of some kind.

29. The morning meeting aims to ...
30. The role of the head teacher should be ...
31. Students usually appreciate the time spent on ...
32. The parents often question the idea of ...
33. The end of term ceremony is a ...
34. The school plans very few future ...

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SUMMARY, NOTE, TABLE OR FLOW-CHART COMPLETION (COMPLETING)

Test takers are asked to complete a summary of part of a text. They will either have to choose the best words from the text for themselves, in which case there will be a word limit (Example 1), or choose from a list of words or expressions already provided (Example 2).

Example 1

In order to coat cotton threads with carbon nanotubes, nanotubes are **33.** _____ into a **34.** _____ liquid consisting of Nafion, a synthetic polymer and ethanol. The strands are **35.** _____ in the liquid several times and allowed to dry between **36.** _____. This process helped the nanotubes to **37.** _____ to the strands and also helped to increase the thread's conductivity because of the way the nanotubes became **38.** _____ on the cotton. Additional tests on the **39.** _____ of the threads showed them to respond to varying levels of albumin, and therefore able to **40.** _____ blood.

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Example 2

In order to coat cotton threads with carbon nanotubes, nanotubes are **33.** _____ into a **34.** _____ liquid consisting of Nafion, a synthetic polymer and ethanol. The strands are **35.** _____ in the liquid several times and allowed to dry between **36.** _____. This process helped the nanotubes to **37.** _____ to the strands and also helped to increase the thread's conductivity because of the way the nanotubes became **38.** _____ on the cotton. Additional tests on the **39.** _____ of the threads showed them to respond to varying levels of albumin, and therefore able to **40.** _____ blood.

aligned	submerged	each
spread	weak	stick
strong	identify	mixed
open	repeat	stirred
strength	identified	conductivity
stuck	solutions	conduct

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (COMPLETING)

In this type of question it is necessary to use words or expressions from the text to provide short answers to a series of questions. There will always be some kind of word limit.

14. How often are the ASC meetings?
15. Where are the ASC meetings held?
16. How do you inform the organizer that you would like to join?
17. What is the main purpose of the first 5 minutes of each meeting?

SELF-STUDY

With such a small number of question types to worry about, it is well within your capability to become familiar with all of them. Go through several practice tests without worrying about answering the questions. Focus instead on recognizing the question types and the kind of information you are being asked to provide.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Become familiar with all of the question types used in the reading section of the test so that you feel completely comfortable with them. Your aim should be to ensure that there is no danger of confusion regarding the instructions costing you valuable time during the actual test.

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6. HOW CAN YOU GET A GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF AN IELTS READING TEXT QUICKLY?

We have already talked about the reasons why it is important to get an overview of a text before you attempt to answer any questions on it. With an overall understanding of the contents and structure of an article, the questions will be clearer and easier to answer, locating the correct information will be quicker, and any guesses will be more likely to be correct.

Skimming does not mean reading sentences at random. Instead, read the opening paragraph, the first sentence of the middle paragraphs, and the closing paragraph (or if the text is short, just the first line of each paragraph). You should also look at the title of the article, if there is one, any headings, and also any captions that accompany illustrations, photographs or diagrams.

Having a rough idea of the structure of the text you are reading makes it much more likely that you will be able to locate answers quickly because you will have a better idea where to look.

Without this overview, you will have little choice but to make wild guesses about the location of the information you need.

PRACTICE

Practice with the following simple text about museums. Scan it quickly and try to predict the likely content and structure of the rest of the article. Next, match each paragraph with one of the headings given beneath the text (There is one extra heading.) You can check your answers at the bottom of this page. *Don't read the text in full at this stage, however, since the article will be referred to again on the next page.*

Match each paragraph with a heading:

- I. Problems museums have
- II. Tomorrow's museums
- III. What museums are
- IV. People who visit museums
- V. The design of museums

A. Museums can be quite difficult to define. Most people, if asked to define a museum, would probably say that it is a building with a lot of objects. However, a museum does not have to be a building: it could be a room, or in fact any area where objects are kept. Likewise, a museum is not just a collection of objects. These objects must have some value, interest or importance of some kind. A more accurate definition then might be, a space where objects of interest are kept.

B. Museums are organised in many different ways. Most museums however use the main category system and a date system. Clearly some systems are easier to maintain than others hence the system employed will vary depending on the nature of the objects themselves.

C. Today many museums face many threats. The biggest challenge, as always, is finance. The cost of space, systems and personnel is increasing despite advances in technology. There are also difficulties involved in the recruitment of skilled professionals.

D. It is not easy to see how the future will develop for museums. Our basic idea of museums will certainly change from thinking of them as places to visit in person to one of being able to access them remotely. Further than that it is difficult to say what other major changes lie ahead.

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7. HOW CAN YOU IDENTIFY THE MAIN POINT OF IELTS READING QUESTIONS QUICKLY?

Not all words in a question are equally important.

For example, which half of this question do you find easier to understand, the beginning, “What is...?” or the end, “... your name?” Sometimes we can use certain “key-words” in a question to help point us toward the kind of information that we should be looking for in order to find an answer.

Unfortunately, the concept of keywords can confuse many people.

For example, look at the following list of questions that accompanied an article about the game manufacturing company Milton Bradley (also known as MB Games). Many people, if asked to highlight the keywords in the questions, come up with something like this:

*Which **game company** was established in 1858?*

*Who did Milton Bradley produce **games** for?*

*What **production techniques** were dropped?*

*What **game pieces** were regarded as extremely immoral?*

This selection is close to useless. The problem stems from a deep misunderstanding of what keywords are. Many people automatically look for those expressions that are the most representative of the theme of the article. Sadly, this is precisely the opposite of what is needed.

The trick with keywords is to look for things that are unique to the particular point being asked.

In an article about a game production company, words like “game”, “production” and “company” are going to feature everywhere. Far from helping us to locate answers quickly, keywords like this will do little but send us racing around the text from one irrelevant sentence to another.

Here is a better selection of keywords, focusing on information that is likely to appear only once in the article.

*Which game company was established in **1858**?*

***Who** did Milton Bradley produce games for?*

*What production techniques were **dropped**?*

*What game pieces were regarded as extremely **immoral**?*

It is important to note that the keyword themselves may not actually feature in the

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text. Very often there will be another expression with the same meaning (e.g. “discontinued” instead of “dropped”).

Alternatively, there may be a whole phrase or several pieces of information that relate to the same thing as the keyword. For example, in answer to question 1, the article might not say, “In 1858, company X was established.” Instead, there might be a couple of sentences that say something like, “In 1848, he entered high school... Just ten years later, company X was established.”

SELF STUDY

Look through questions from the reading section of an IELTS test. Don’t set yourself a time limit or worry about trying to find the answers. Instead, practice trying to identify the keywords in the sentence. When you have finished, check the answers. Use them to decide how well chosen your keywords were. Repeat the process and time yourself. Keep practising and gradually you should get quicker and quicker.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Look for keywords in questions to help you quickly and accurately identify the point you are being asked about.

8. HOW CAN YOU LOCATE ANSWERS QUICKLY IN THE IELTS READING TEST?

One advantage of skimming an article is that when you are asked to find specific details, you know roughly in which part of the text to concentrate your search.

This is where the second reading technique, scanning, becomes useful. Calling it reading is perhaps being a little generous. In fact, it is more accurate to think of it as looking quickly. It isn't necessary to understand long and complex sentences when scanning. Instead, you are searching for anything relevant – a word, a phrase – to help anchor your eye to the place where the correct answer can be found.

Some types of information, such as names, dates and numbers, are particularly helpful when it comes to scanning. Synonyms for keywords can also be used as potential “hooks” for your attention. Keep your mind firmly focused on what you are looking for and then let your eye run over two or three lines of text at a time. Once you find something that looks relevant, you can focus in on it and see if it provides the answers that you need.

Practice

Try scanning using the simple text about museums introduced on the previous page. Skim it again to refresh your memory and then read the questions shown beneath it. Take a note of the paragraphs where you expect the relevant information to be found. Finally, answer the questions. (The correct answers are listed at the bottom of the page.)

Say if the following sentences are T/F/NG.

Museums do not have enough money.

There is only one system of organising museums

Our ideas about museums will not change.

A museum is basically a home for valueless objects.

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A. Museums can be quite difficult to define. Most people, if asked to define a museum, would probably say that it is a building with a lot of objects. However, a museum does not have to be a building: it could be a room, or in fact any area where objects are kept. Likewise, a museum is not just a collection of objects. These objects must have some value, interest or importance of some kind. A more accurate definition then might be, a space where objects of interest are kept.

B. Museums are organised in many different ways. Most museums however use the main category system and a date system. Clearly some systems are easier to maintain than others hence the system employed will vary depending on the nature of the objects themselves.

C. Today many museums face many threats. The biggest challenge, as always, is finance. The cost of space, systems and personnel is increasing despite advances in technology. There are also difficulties involved in the recruitment of skilled professionals.

D. It is not easy to see how the future will develop for museums. Our basic idea of museums will certainly change from thinking of them as places to visit in person to one of being able to access them remotely. Further than that it is difficult to say what other major changes lie ahead.

SELF-STUDY

Another way to improve your scanning technique is to have a friend call out numbers, dates, and unusual expressions from a text and see how quickly you can detect them. If you are studying alone, it is possible to make a list of suitable items from a text yourself. Put it in a drawer for a few days and then, when you are sure you will not be able to recall the position of the words simply from memory, go through the list again and try to find each item as quickly as you can.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Use scanning to help you locate answers quickly.

ANSWERS: 1 (C) / NG 2 (B) / F 3 (D) / F 4 (A) / F

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9. HOW QUICKLY SHOULD YOU WORK THROUGH THE IELTS READING QUESTIONS?

Nobody could claim that the IELTS listening test is easy on candidates. There is one way, however, in which it could be said to be more straightforward than the IELTS reading test: the speed at which you must work is decided for you by the listening passages.

The reading test, on the other hand, requires you to be your own timekeeper.

It is good idea to take the first five minutes of the test to look over the questions and orientate yourself. If you do this, you will be left with about fifteen minutes per section. Since each section usually has around 13 or 14 questions, a good guideline is to spend no more than about one minute per question, no matter whether you are doing the academic or the general version of the reading test.

If you find that you are taking much longer than this on any particular problem, you should move on. Taking, say, four minutes and eventually getting the correct answer is not worth it because you will have cut into the time you need for the next three questions. Gaining a point at the cost of losing three other points is not much of a bargain. If after a minute you find you are still not sure about an answer, take your best guess and move on.

SELF-STUDY

The first step in working out how to pace yourself is to find out how long you usually take per question at the moment. Try a complete reading test, but instead of keeping to the official time limit, simply take note of how long it takes you to complete each question. Once you have finished, it is time for you to analyze your performance. Think about the following points:

How long do you take per question on average?

Are there any patterns regarding the types of question that take longest to complete?

You are almost certain to have to work on speeding up the rate at which you answer questions. As in most things in life, constant practice is the key here. Use the information you get about your ability with different question formats to help guide you toward the type or types of question where you need to try hardest to improve.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

THE BOTTOM LINE

Practice answering questions – particularly those types that you find difficult – until you find you can get through them at a pace of no more than about one minute each.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

10. HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION TYPES? (MATCHING HEADINGS)

This is a common type of question in IELTS and involves looking at some numbered paragraphs from an article and choosing the most appropriate subheading for them from a list provided. Not all of the paragraphs of a text need be used, and sometimes more than one subheading applies to the same paragraph.

Answering this kind of question can be very demanding since it generally involves looking over a large amount of densely-written and difficult English in a short time and coming to a decision about its overall meaning.

On an earlier page, we mentioned how using keywords, ignoring adverbs and adjectives, looking at linking devices, reading a little further on, and looking at the context can all help with comprehension. Let's try the first two of these techniques here. Read the following passage quickly and try to decide whether any of the sub-headings that follow apply to it.

E. In his book "The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America" (1964), Daniel Boorstin undertook one of the earliest investigations of modern tourism. In it, he contended that American tourists do not have much authentic contact with the places they visit and instead are presented with a series of fabricated and superficial pseudo-events -- experiences that are gullibly enjoyed by them as an eascape from bitterly disheartening everyday reality. He further argued that over time these manufactured, mythical versions of various tourist sites have become the basis on which would-be tourists make decisions about where to visit. Eventually, there has emerged a fully-enclosed system in which American tourists experience travel destinations isolated within a comfortingly familiar bubble that keeps them separated from any authentic interaction with the threatening foreignness of the world around them.

- i. The environmental cost of tourism
- ii. The artificiality of modern tourism
- iii. Justifying the study of tourism
- iv. The difference between a tourist and a traveller.
- v. Tourism in the past
- vi. Tourism versus leisure
- vii. The expense of tourism
- viii. How tourist destinations have been destroyed by tourism
- ix. American tourists compared to those of other nationalities

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

Some of these options, such as the first one, we can probably eliminate immediately since even a very superficial scan reveals nothing in the paragraph to even hint at a connection. The second option looks more promising, though. We can use “artificiality” as a keyword since “modern tourism” will be mentioned everywhere in an article of this kind.

Next, we have to scan the paragraph for synonyms or near synonyms of “artificiality”. Sure enough, we find the expressions “not... authentic” and “fabricated”. This suggests that we may be on the right track, but the language around these expressions is very difficult.

Now we can try another technique, cutting through dense language to get to the essential meaning by cutting out unnecessary adjectives and adverbs. When we do this, we are left with a sentence that, although not easy, is at least more or less understandable.

American tourists do not have contact with the places they visit and instead are presented with a series of pseudo-events –experiences enjoyed by them as an escape from reality.

Looking in more detail at other parts of the paragraph could provide additional evidence, but it is not really necessary. We have done enough to show that the second option must apply to this paragraph. We now have to do the whole thing again with the other options to see which, if any, might also apply.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Use comprehension techniques on difficult paragraphs to make them more manageable.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

11. HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION TYPES? (IDENTIFYING PARAGRAPHS)

In this kind of question, candidates are given various pieces of information, topics, interpretations or whatever, and asked to identify the paragraphs from which they came or which relate to them.

Although attempting to answer easy questions first tends not to be a successful strategy in most of the IELTS test, this activity is an exception.

Since anything related to numbers, names, dates or uncommon words tends to be relatively easy to identify quickly, it often makes sense to get these out of the way first before trying to find the answers to the more difficult questions. Let's look at a concrete example. In what order should we tackle the following topics?

14. The drawbacks of some of the newer recruitment procedures
15. What Sears believes to be the biggest hurdle for women
16. The problem with the Employment Act of 1964
17. How men and women approach the recruitment process
18. Reasons why women are still struggling in certain industries

Straight away, it should be clear that since topic 16 contains a date, it makes a lot of sense to look for this one first. With any luck, the year 1964 will be used directly. It is possible, though, that it may be referred to in some slightly less obvious way, such as, "the Employment Act of the previous year" or something similar.

The expression, "the biggest hurdle for women" used in topic 15 is also of interest. "Hurdle" is an uncommon word, and in addition it probably refers to a single discrete thing, not a long explanation stretched out over many sentences, so it may be relatively easy to spot. As a bonus, it is likely to be expressed in a sentence containing a superlative, such as the biggest, the greatest, or the most serious. This might be a good second choice to go for.

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It may be best to then tackle the remaining topics in the order that they are given. Topic 14 has the word “drawbacks”, which is a fairly uncommon and gives us a good starting point. Topics 17 and 18, on the other hand, look rather general. The word “women” appears in both of them, so it is not likely to be very helpful when it comes to identifying the relevant paragraph. In addition, it is likely that the paragraphs being referred to contain lengthy explanations rather than short, more concrete answers.

SELF STUDY

Look over one or two examples of this type of question from an IELTS practice test. Don't worry about finding the answers. Focus instead on trying to correctly identify the paragraphs in which the answer can be found.

THE BOTTOM LINE

When tackling questions that ask you to identify paragraphs, begin with the easiest topics before moving on to the more difficult ones.

12. HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION TYPES? (MULTIPLE CHOICE)

When it comes to multiple-choice questions in the reading section, time is very much your enemy since, in addition to having to read a chunk of text, you now have to get through a number of (possibly lengthy) multiple-choice options too.

Unsurprisingly, you will probably not have time to read the entire text in detail, so use the skimming technique discussed on earlier pages to help give yourself an overview of the contents. Before you begin, however, you may find it useful to go over the question stems and highlight any keywords that you find. This may give you a hint about what kind of information you should be on the lookout for as you skim your way through the article.

Remember that the order of this type of question mirrors the order in which information appears in the text. Once you have found the section containing the answer to the first question, the section with the answer to the second question will be somewhere underneath, and possibly fairly close by.

Sometimes when considering the options, you will be lucky and immediately have a clear idea about which is the correct one. At other times, you may have to do detailed reading of a particular section in order to try to work out what to choose.

If, after looking at the relevant section of the text, you find that you are still not sure about the answer, don't guess immediately. First, look for options that you are fairly confident are not correct and put a line through them.

Simply by getting these out of the way, you will increase your chances of guessing correctly.

If you do have to guess, there are some points that you can take into account to give yourself the best possible chance of getting the answer correct. The first is that test makers sometimes try to confuse candidates by taking some of the words from the passage and putting them into the incorrect options in a rather obvious way. Can you see any suspiciously attractive examples?

It is also worth considering that any difference between an incorrect option and the information given in the text will probably not be in the noun phrase because this would be rather easy to spot. It is more likely to be hiding somewhere in the verb or in the grammar of the sentence.

SELF STUDY

Look over examples of multiple-choice questions. Practice looking at the question

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stems and trying to identify keywords. Try to gradually become faster and more accurate at spotting them.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Use keywords, scanning, intensive reading and, if necessary, your background knowledge about how tests are constructed, to give yourself the best possible chance of answering this kind of question correctly.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

13. HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND QUESTIONS? (WORD LIMIT)

Did you know that it is possible to lose a point for giving the correct information in an IELTS test? How? By taking four words to express the information when the question asked for no more than three words.

It is very important to pay attention to the word limits given in IELTS questions.

They are strict rules, not friendly pieces of advice!

If you ignore them, you will lose points, even if the information in your answer is completely correct.

It therefore pays to be extremely careful with such questions. Highlight the word limit as soon as you see it to ensure that it does not slip your memory. Next, highlight the word on either side of the gap where you have to write your answer.

When tackling this kind of question, it can be useful to have a quick look at what is written on either side of this gap to help you work out what kind of word or phrase is required. For example, consider the following sentence.

Fine pottery was exported from China to _____ and France.

Even without knowing anything else about the text, we could guess that the missing word or phrase is some kind of noun and is probably the name of a country or region.

Another useful tip is that you should try to give as full an answer as possible. If you have a choice between a longer or a shorter answer, both of which are grammatically acceptable and within the word limit, it is generally better to go with the longer one.

Self-Study

Look over questions of this type in the reading section of a practice test, but instead of looking for the answer to the question, practice instead trying to guess what kind of word or phrase is missing. Make a note of this somewhere. Next, you can try answering the question properly, reading the passage and trying to give the most accurate answers you can without exceeding the word limit. Finally, compare your notes

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to the actual answers. How often did you guess the part of speech correctly? Keep practising until you can guess the word type very quickly.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If a question gives a word limit, always stick to it.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

14. HOW WELL DO YOU UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION TYPES? (TRUE/FALSE/NOT GIVEN)

Learning materials of all kinds contain comprehension questions asking you to say whether something is true or false. The IELTS exam, however, has another category: not given. Questions containing this third option are a demanding test of understanding and can be very time-consuming to complete.

When tackling this kind of question, your initial skimming of the article should give you a rough idea of what information can be found where. Another important clue when looking for answers is the fact that the order of the questions usually reflects the order in which details are given in the text. This means that if, for example, you find the answer to question 1 at the end of the third paragraph, you should look for the answer to question 2 somewhere from the fourth paragraph onwards.

There are different ways to tackle this type of question, but one is to use a process of elimination. You can ask yourself these questions.

STEP ONE – Does the article say anything about the topic of the question?

YES – Go to STEP TWO	NO – The answer is NOT GIVEN
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STEP TWO – Does the information in the question agree with the information in the article?

YES – The answer is TRUE	NO – Got to STEP THREE
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STEP THREE – Does the information in the question contradict the information in the article?

YES – The answer is FALSE	NO – The answer is NOT GIVEN
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Let's look at an example. Based on the following text, are the statements following it true, false or not given? Notice in questions two and three how important the exact phrasing of a statement can be.

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It remains unclear why humans survived into the modern era but Neanderthals became extinct. For a long time, it was commonly assumed that our ancestors were simply smarter. Modern scholarship has made this contention less widely supported. For one thing, it seems that Neanderthals brains were larger on average than those of Homo sapiens.

Another suggestion made by some experts is that the two species lived side by side for a time and suffered from the same diseases, but because the Neanderthal lifestyle involved less mixing between individuals, they had less resistance to infection and so gradually died out.

1. Modern humans had larger brains than Neanderthals.
2. Some scientists say disease may have caused the disappearance of Neanderthals.
3. Neanderthals became extinct because they had less resistance to disease.

We can look at the first statement and go through our three steps in turn.

Step One : Is anything said about the topic? Yes the underlined section of the first paragraph deals with precisely this question.

Step Two : Does the information in the question agree with the wording in the article? No, it doesn't.

Step Three : Does it explicitly disagree? Yes, the article and the statement say precisely opposite things. This statement is clearly UNTRUE.

Next, we can look at statement 2.

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Step One : Is anything said about the topic? Yes, there is something about it in the second paragraph.

Step Two : Does the wording of the statement agree with that of the article? “Some experts” and “some scientists” are close enough in meaning to be considered the same. According to the article, the experts said that having “less resistance to infection” may have been the reason the Neanderthals “died out”. This means much the same as “disease may have caused the disappearance”. Statement 2 is clearly TRUE.

Finally, we can look at statement three.

Step One : Does the article say anything the topic? Yes, in the second paragraph.

Step Two : Is the meaning the same? Initially, it seems to be, but on closer examination we can see that it is not. The statement is basically saying that disease definitely killed the Neanderthals. The article only says that some scientists suggest this possibility.

Step Three : Does the information in the statement contradict that in the article? Well, no. The article does not say that disease did not kill the Neanderthals. It remains a possibility. In this case, the correct answer must be NOT GIVEN.

SELF-STUDY

Find some examples of this type of question in IELTS practice tests and work on them using the three-step process given above.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Use a three-step process of elimination to answer tricky “True / False / Not Given” questions.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

15. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU'RE HAVING PROBLEMS UNDERSTANDING PARTS OF AN IELTS READING TEXT?

The texts in IELTS tests can be a tough read. If you are having difficulty working out what something means, you may find some or all of the following tips helpful.

Tip 1 – Ignore the adverbs and adjectives

Look at the following group of words: *“The... strong... bravely... the dangerous...”* It is not easy to say what, if anything, they are about. This is actually a sentence from which all of the nouns and verbs have been removed. Let's try the same sentence again, but this time we'll keep the nouns and verbs and take away the adjectives and adverbs: *“The... man... attacked the... bear.”*

The second version is clearly the easier to understand. In fact, the main meaning of a sentence is often carried in the nouns and verbs, with the adjectives and adverbs adding detail and colour. Removing the latter can sometimes make the basic meaning of a sentence easier to spot.

Tip 2 – Look at linking devices and markers

Sometimes linking devices and markers can be used to help us make an educated guess about the meaning of an unknown word or expression. For example, imagine we came across the following sentence in a test.

In the 1950s yaws was nearly eradicated. However, the number of cases is now increasing.

Even if we do not know the word “eradicated”, the use of the word “however” after it shows that it probably has a meaning that is the opposite of or nearly the opposite of “increase”.

Tip 3 – Read on a little further

“Many eminent scientists are still perplexed by crop circles...” If we stop our reading at this point and begin to wonder about the meaning of “perplexed”, there is nothing much in the sentence to lead us toward the answer. In such cases, it can often be

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useful to read on a little further and see if anything makes the meaning clear.

Many eminent scientists are still perplexed by crop circles, unable to explain their origin.

Now the words “unable... to explain” make it clear that the meaning must be “confused” or something similar.

Tip 4 – Look at context and use logic

If we are still struggling with the meaning of a sentence, we should apply logic and our background knowledge and ask what makes sense given the context.

It is sad to see the buildings of beautiful cities covered in grime from the pollution from traffic and local industries.

The opposition leader was supported by many when he harangued the Prime Minister about the government's decision to increase taxes.

A background knowledge of what pollution is should be enough to suggest that the word “grime” must refer to dirt of some kind. Similarly, real world knowledge about the typical behaviour of politicians should suggest to us that “harangued” probably means something like “attacked” or “criticized strongly” rather than, say, “showered with flower petals”.

THE BOTTOM LINE

For questions that are not straightforward, use intensive reading of the relevant sentences from the text in order to find the answer.

16. HOW AWARE ARE YOU OF THE NUANCES OF PUNCTUATION?

Punctuation is most successful when you least notice it.

In other words, the function of punctuation is to draw the reader's attention to the meaning of a text, not to draw attention to itself. However, there are times when, if you do not understand how the punctuation in a sentence is being used, you may find yourself confused or misled.

Semicolons (;) are a case in point. These can be used to help simplify long sentences containing many commas. The most important function of this punctuation mark, however, is to take two separate sentences and join them together into a single one.

Although a comma and the word "and" can be used to do the same thing, the semicolon may be preferred when the writer wants to suggest that there is some strong connection between the two sentences. In other words, there is a subtle difference in nuance between the following:

- a) He talked about some of the problems he had faced during the campaign. A TV debate was a disaster. An adviser walked out shortly afterwards.
- b) He talked about some of the problems he had faced during the campaign. A TV debate was a disaster; an adviser walked out shortly afterwards.

In the first example, the poor TV debate and the adviser walking out are both problems that occurred during the campaign, but for all we know, they were unrelated events. The use of the semicolon in the second version, shows a link between the two, which strongly suggests the adviser walked out because of the poor debate performance. With some test questions, understanding this kind of difference in nuance could be important.

Commas are another punctuation mark that can greatly change the meaning of sentences, which is why lawyers pay such close attention to them when drawing up contracts. One area where they can lead to huge differences in meaning is with relative clauses. A relative clause is a clause beginning with a word like which or who.

- a) The people who disapproved of the government's policy demonstrated on the street.
- b) The people, who disapproved of the government's policy, demonstrated on the street.

A relative clause with no comma in front of it is said to be defining. It identifies the

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thing that is being talked about. In sentence a) above, for example, the implication is that there were many people in the country, but the sentence is only talking about those who disapproved. A defining relative clause is like a finger pointing at the person or thing you are referring to.

A relative clause with a comma in front of it (and after it if the sentence continues) is said to be non-defining. It simply gives additional information about whatever is being discussed. Sentence b) is talking about the people of the country as a whole. The most important fact about them is that they were demonstrating on the street. The information about them hating the government's policy is simply an additional fact.

Notice the massive difference in meaning here.

The government of the country might not have been worried at all about the situation described in the first example. Only those people who disapproved of the policy were demonstrating. This could easily mean half a dozen individuals and their dog.

But the second example is vastly different. "The people" in this sentence sounds like more or less the entire population of the country. The situation for the government in this case would have been much more serious, perhaps fatally so.

Obviously, it is very important to understand differences in meaning of this scale. A mistake with the interpretation of a relative clause can easily lead to lost points.

SELF STUDY

Go through an article from a magazine and highlight the punctuation as you go. Pay particular attention to semicolons and the use of commas with relative clauses.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Be aware that the meaning of a sentence can change significantly depending on how it is punctuated. Take this into account when interpreting the meaning of a passage.

17. HOW CAN YOU TRY TO IMPROVE YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF REFERENCES?

The clearest writing is not always the most interesting writing. For example, if we wanted to make several points about the importance of folk dancing, we could express the ideas like this:

Tribal folk dancing is more important than people have sometimes realized. Folk dancing sometimes seems to have little meaning. Folk dancing sometimes seems to be only a chance for communal enjoyment. Folk dancers are an important way of handling down myths, values, traditions, and history. The disappearance of folk dances means the loss of important cultural information. The disappearance of folk dances means the loss of cultural information *forever*.

This is grammatical and clear, but the repetition and lack of variety in the sentence patterns used make it a dull read. It would be very hard to get through an entire essay written like this. Writers virtually always try to put things in a more interesting way, and as part of this they are likely to use many references. That is, instead of repeating the exact thing they are talking about, they will refer to it using different expressions.

Although this makes writing flow better, it can also make it somewhat easier to become confused about just who or what is being discussed.

When you are reading through texts, it is important to understand such references clearly if you are not to become hopelessly lost.

Let's look at this second version of the text about folk dancing. Notice how often references are used to allow the writer to avoid having to explicitly repeat the thing being talked about.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

Tribal folk dancing is a perhaps a more important social phenomenon than has sometimes been appreciated in the past. It can sometimes seem that such dancing has no intrinsic meaning and is little more than an occasion for communal enjoyment. This assessment is far too superficial, however, and shows no understanding of the central role folk dancers play as vehicles for the transmission through the ages of the myths, values, traditions, and even history of a tribe. If it allows them to die out, its members lose not only an opportunity for occasional revelry, but also fundamental parts of their store of long-accumulated wisdom. Once such things are lost, they are lost forever.

Here is a list of some of the references and the ideas they are referring to:

such dancing	folk dancing
this assessment	only for enjoyment
it allows them	the tribe / the folk dancers
its members	the tribe
such things	myths, values, traditions etc.
they	myths, values, traditions etc.

This was a fairly straightforward example simply to illustrate the concept. References can be far less clear than those listed here and may be located many sentences, sometimes even paragraphs, from the thing they refer to. This is something you should prepare yourself to cope with.

SELF-STUDY

Read through some texts from IELTS practice tests or from magazines. Highlight every reference you find and draw an arrow linking it to the thing it refers to.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Become familiar with the way references are used in texts in order to improve your overall comprehension.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

18. HOW CAN YOU USE AN IELTS READING PRACTICE TEST OTHER THAN FOR TESTING YOURSELF?

There is nothing wrong with getting a practice test paper and doing a practice test in the normal way. That is, after all, what they are for. On the other hand, there are also other ways to use them that can be of help.

For example, it can be instructive, once in a while, to looking at a test backwards.

In other words, begin by finding out what the answers are and then look for them in the text. When you find them, put a box round them to highlight their location.

This can not only give you something of a feeling for the kinds of place where answers often lie hidden, but can also underline very clearly just how much of an article can sometimes be largely irrelevant. You may sometimes be surprised to find that sentence after sentence is not asked about and can be more or less ignored.

Finally, having found the answers, you can now turn to the questions. Look for any expressions in them that could be considered keywords and might have led you to the answer. Highlight any that you find.

By approaching the text in an unconventional way, you can sometimes give yourself a chance to see things from a different angle and make connections that you might ordinarily have missed. This can give you a little more insight into the examiner's thinking when he or she wrote the original questions.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Use the IELTS reading texts imaginatively to help you see the test in a new light.

48. HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF VOCABULARY?

After you have completed a practice test, don't throw it away!

Practice tests are not only useful as a way of getting examination experience, but can also be a valuable language resource that can be used to help you develop your vocabulary.

For one thing, they provide you with an opportunity to gradually compile collections of words and expressions connected by theme. An article about, say, environmental pollution, may conveniently pull together expressions such as greenhouse gas emissions, carbon footprint and carbon offsetting. One about disease may give you outbreak, communicable, pandemic and exposure.

Another point is that because they use expressions in context, practice test papers are a great place to look for collocations. Certain word combinations are common in English, but may be difficult to check in dictionaries. It is not always obvious which collocations are natural and which are not. For example, look at the phrases in the box. Can you tell which of each group of four is not natural in each case? (*The answer is at the bottom of the page.*)

- A
 - 1) play a joke on someone
 - 2) say a joke to someone
 - 3) tell a joke on someone
 - 4) make a joke about someone

- B
 - 1) hold a meeting
 - 2) chair a meeting
 - 3) have a meeting
 - 4) do a meeting

Once you have begun compiling a list of collocations, you can test yourself on them regularly. One easy way to do this is simply to hide one of the words and see whether you can remember the complete expression.

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A final feature of the IELTS exams that has been frequently highlighted on previous pages is the occurrence of keywords in questions and how they often relate to expressions with similar meanings in a text or listening passage. In other words, practice tests can be a good way of building your familiarity with synonyms. Having a good knowledge of this area of vocabulary will be of obvious benefit when it comes to doing future tests.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Instead of throwing away completed test papers, use them to help you build up your vocabulary.

Answer: A2 and B4 are unnatural

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20. HOW CAN GRADED READERS HELP YOU GET A HIGHER IELTS READING SCORE?

Imagine two children, one of whom takes piano lessons, sings in the shower and whistles on the way to school, and another who finds music boring and never listens to it. Which of them do you think is more likely to grow up to become a competent musician?

There is really no great mystery to the fact that if you try to use and enjoy English, you will improve at it and make progress more quickly.

This rule also applies to reading.

You will do better in the reading exam if you make a habit of reading in English. This doesn't mean it has to be a chore. Nowadays, the Internet contains a wealth of information in English on just about every topic there is, so no matter what your interests – politics, sport, science, celebrity gossip – there will be something online that covers it.

Graded readers are another enjoyable resource. As the name suggests, these are books that have been graded for difficulty in terms of their vocabulary and complexity. Nowadays, the range of such books is very wide, covering every conceivable genre of both fiction and non-fiction.

As well as being read simply for pleasure, graded readers are also useful for specific tasks. For example, a reader at a grade a little above your current English level is a good way to develop your vocabulary and to get practice at working out meaning from context. You will encounter new expressions, but not so many that you find yourself having to stop and check every second word in your dictionary.

A reader at a level a little easy for you is a good way to get extensive reading practice – in other words, getting a lot of English input in a short time. This can be good if you are trying to develop an instinctive feeling for that natural flow and construction of English sentences and the spelling of common words.

Graded readers can also be used to help you develop your skills in specific areas. If you struggle with prepositions, for example, you can try photocopying a page of a graded reader, and then with some liquid paper, whiting over most of the prepositions on the page. Take a photocopy of this amended page (because it will be easier to write on) and then stick it in a drawer.

After a week or so, when there is less danger of your being able to complete the task purely from memory, go back to the photocopy and try to write in as many of the prepositions as you can. When you have finished, compare it with the original.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

Certain expressions tend to be followed by particular prepositions, and doing this activity regularly can help you to remember these combinations. You can also use a similar approach to practice other types of expression, such as phrasal verbs, common noun/verb collocations, and so on.

SELF-STUDY

Try some of the techniques mentioned above.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Use graded readers as an enjoyable, practical way of developing both general and specific types of reading skill.

21. WHY CAN READING LONGER TEXTS HELP YOU IN THE IELTS READING TEST?

Using graded readers and short, fun texts online, are both useful things to do, but at some point you should also try to get some practice with the kind of long article that you will encounter in the IELTS exam.

If you intend taking the academic version of IELTS, you should look at magazines such as National Geographic, New Scientist and The Economist since these are the types of publication from which texts for the test are typically taken.

Such materials can be challenging, however. It is important to be aware of this fact and not become frustrated or despondent if you find it very difficult to work your way through them. Also, try not to fill the margins of magazine articles with word-for-word translations of everything on the page. This is extremely time-consuming and not at all necessary.

Instead, use the articles for practicing some of the key skills that you will need for the test – in particular, the skill of skimming large amounts of difficult text in a short time in order to understand gist. The more familiar you are with trying to skim quickly through massive chunks of dense English, the less likely you are to panic during the test when you find yourself faced by several long, difficult articles.

Even if you intend taking the general version of IELTS, articles from the magazines mentioned above or from newspapers will still be useful for practicing for the third section of the test, which always features a long reading passage. The first section will contain materials more closely related to everyday life in an English-speaking country, such as advertisements, notices, timetables, and so on. The second section is more focused on surviving in an organizational setting and will contain two texts related to such things as school or company rules, job descriptions, and staff training materials.

If you do not live in an English-speaking country, these are the kind of thing that might be difficult to find in your community, but luckily a great deal of information of this kind can now be found online if you search a little.

SELF STUDY

Practice the skimming, scanning and intensive reading techniques mentioned on earlier pages with longer materials taken from a suitable magazine or newspaper.

IELTS SELF-PREP READING

THE BOTTOM LINE

To prepare yourself for the test, you should try to get practice with longer, more difficult texts.