

# 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.



# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 1. WHAT ARE YOUR IELTS LISTENING PROBLEMS?

Do you regularly get high scores in your IELTS listening tests? If not, there is clearly room for improvement! In order to make these improvements, it is necessary to find out why you are losing points in the first place, and it's not so hard to do. There are three basic possibilities:

- a) you have test skill problems,
- b) you have language problems, or
- c) you have test skill problems and language problems.

How can you find out which of these categories you fall into? The first step is to complete a full IELTS listening test, taking care to keep to the proper time limits. After you have finished, calculate your score. Having done this, analyze your performance. While looking at your test skills, consider the following points.

Were you able to underline keywords in the questions quickly enough?

Were you able to follow when the listening moved to the next topic?

Were you able to write down the answers quickly enough?

Were you able to spell words quickly and accurately?

If you find yourself replying “no” to any of these questions, you need to improve your skills in the relevant area. Please see the other posts in the IELTS listening category for tips about how you can do this.

Next, look at your listening comprehension and language ability. Begin by trying the test again, but this time give yourself as much time as you want. Does your score suddenly shoot up? If so, this suggests your problem is that you can't use your IELTS listening skills quickly enough.

If you don't notice much difference, try reading the transcript instead of listening (without using a dictionary or grammar book to help you, of course). If your score is markedly better this time, it is likely that your biggest problem is listening comprehension rather than language weakness. You understand the grammar and vocabulary, but are simply not catching information accurately enough, or again not quickly enough.

If after all this your score still remains largely unchanged, it suggests that your problems are language-based. In other words, you need to improve your level of general

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

English. This is of course just the starting point but it's helpful to go through this process. Having done so, you can make better use of the other posts here (in the IELTS listening category) which provide advice about the steps you can take to help you to improve in the areas you need to.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 2. HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE IELTS LISTENING TEST?

Finding your way around an airplane is not very difficult. It is basically a tube with some doors running along the side. Who could ever get lost? And yet, if there is a hostage situation, the soldiers who may have to retake the plane, rehearse and rehearse and rehearse again, making sure they know the exact number of rows, the position of every toilet, the location of every storage space. They make this level of effort because they know that under stress, even the simplest task can become difficult. What is worse, they only get to try it once – and any mistake could be fatal.

Luckily, your IELTS experience is unlikely to involve fighting your way onto a hijacked airplane.

On the other hand, the two situations are not entirely dissimilar.

For one thing, although the structure of the test is not difficult, you will have to face it when you are under pressure.

Another similarity is that you will only get one chance to get things right. Listening passages are not repeated, so if you miss something, it's gone. Under such conditions, getting even momentarily lost could result in missed information and unanswered questions. If you are unlucky, this could be enough to push your final listening score down into a lower band.

Of course, nobody likes to lose points for any reason, but there is something particularly tragic about them slipping through your fingers not because of any language issue, but simply because you got slightly confused about where you were in the test.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## THE IELTS LISTENING TEST

### **Section 1**

Read questions for Part 1 (20 seconds)

Listen to and answer questions 1-5

Read questions for Part 2 (20 seconds)

Listen to and answer questions 6-10

Check your answers (30 seconds)

### **Section 2**

Read questions for Part 1 (20 seconds)

Listen to and answer questions 11-15

Read questions for Part 2 (20 seconds)

Listen to and answer questions 16-20

Check your answers (30 seconds)

### **Section 3**

Read questions for Part 1 (20 seconds)

Listen to and answer questions 21-25

Read questions for Part 2 (20 seconds)

Listen to and answer questions 26-30

Check your answers (30 seconds)

### **Section 4**

Read questions for Parts 1+2 (40 seconds)

Listen to and answer questions 31-35

Listen to and answer questions 36-40

Transfer your answers (10 minutes)

Total test time: 40 minutes

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## SELF-STUDY

Look at the diagram on this page showing the basic structure of the listening test. With this as a reference, go over a practice test paper and identify the various sections. Next, do the same thing with the transcript.

You are likely to need to do this only once in order to fix in your mind a clear image of the structure of the test you will have to face.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Make sure you understand the test format very thoroughly so that there is no danger of you getting lost, even for a moment.



# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 3. WHAT IS YOUR IELTS LISTENING SYSTEM?

Simple mazes, that is, a mazes in which all the walls are connected, are not that hard to escape from. More accurately, they are not that hard to escape from if you have a system. Turning left at every junction will eventually lead you to the exit.

Without this systematic approach, however, even simple mazes are not so simple. If you act randomly, sometimes turning left and sometimes turning right, you may end up being lost for a very long time.

You should have a systematic approach to the IELTS test too.

On this page, we will outline a simple but effective four-step system that you can use to help you squeeze as many points as possible from the questions. The steps of the system are:

### Step One

Make the best use of the time before and between listening sections to find keywords in the questions. These are words that relate to the main point being asked. Identifying these can help you clarify exactly what kind of information it is that you require.

### Step Two

Listen for signposting language such as transition markers to help you keep track of what is happening in a conversation. Speakers don't shout out sentences at random. Instead, they use expressions to link what they are talking about to what has already been said or to what they are about to say.

### Step Three

Listen for trigger words. These are words or expressions that signal to you that the kind of information you need is about to appear. For example, if you are listening for the price of something and you hear someone say, "as for the cost", you should immediately focus in since a price may very well be the next thing mentioned.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## Step Four

Listen for synonyms of key words. When an answer appears, it is very often wrapped up in a wording slightly different from that of the original question. For example, a question may ask you for “the biggest problem” with something, but the answer may be introduced by the phrase, “the greatest disadvantage”.

On the pages that follow, we will look over each of the steps in more detail. Reading about these and practicing the hints for self-study that accompany them will help you prepare more effectively for the challenges you will face in the test.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 4. HAVE YOU WORKED OUT YOUR IELTS LISTENING STRATEGY?

Why do all major sports clubs have managers? After all, the players already have the talent they need and a thorough knowledge of the rules of the game. Why can't they just turn up, do their best, and then go home?

The reason teams go to the trouble and expense of hiring managers is simple: to provide strategy. In other words, it is not enough to have ability; you have to be able to use that ability as efficiently and effectively as possible if you are to get the best results.

The same thing applies to your performance in IELTS. Thinking carefully about your approach to the test can help you to make the most of the English skills you have available.

Treating all sections of the test equally, for example, is likely to prove a poor strategy.

Teachers may be reluctant to say this to students directly, but the truth is that the fourth section of the listening test is very difficult and virtually everyone will lose points on it.

Now, points have the same value whether they are scored near the beginning or near the end of the test. On the other hand, they are much harder to get from the end. The clear lesson, therefore, is that you must try to score very high in the earlier sections.

Thinking about strategy has its limits. It won't turn a band 2 into a band 9, for example. For massive improvements, there is no alternative to many, many hours of careful study and practice. However, using the tips that follow can help you to make small improvements here and there and possibly raise your score into the next highest band. In many cases, this may make all the difference in the world.

The targets you should aim for in the listening section will of course depend on your own individual circumstances and requirements, but as a rough guide, you may find the following numbers of interest:

Section 1: 10 correct answers

Section 2: 8 correct answers

Section 3: 7 correct answers

Section 4: 5 correct answers

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

A score like this will give you a total of 30 points, which is enough for a band 7 score. For many candidates, this would be enough for success.

## 5. ARE YOU FAMILIAR ENOUGH WITH THE IELTS LISTENING QUESTION TYPES?

There is a common expression in English: “Your other left!” For example, if a doctor asks you to raise your left arm during a medical examination and you accidentally raise your right, the doctor may laugh and say, “Your other left, please.”

Telling our right from our left is not difficult, but most of us have at some point in our life made a mistake when doing it. In the same way, following the question instructions in an IELTS exam is not especially difficult. There are only around six (depending on how you group them) types of question, and only three things that you will be asked to do: match something, choose something, or complete something.

On the other hand, there is a great deal of time pressure and you will probably feel somewhat stressed. Even momentary confusion can cause wasted seconds and possibly missed answers, so it makes a lot of sense to try to become as familiar as possible with the types of question that you are likely to see. Let’s look at some examples of common question types. (The activity type – matching, choosing or completing – is given in brackets.)

### MULTIPLE CHOICE (CHOOSING)

This kind of question involves choosing something from a number of options, but it can take several different forms. Most of us are familiar with ordinary multiple-choice questions in which one answer has to be chosen from the small number of possibilities presented. This form of question exists in the IELTS test, of course, but there are also more complex types that require candidates to make multiple selections. In other words, sometimes two or more of the options are correct. Here are some examples.

It is wise to take particular care with the instructions in questions like this because it may not be immediately obvious how many of the options you are supposed to choose.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 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

## 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 established farmers
  - F.** reduce competition between established farmers
  - G.** take several years to have any real impact
- 15.**      **16.**      **17.**

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 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

15. \_\_\_\_\_ 16. \_\_\_\_\_

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## CATEGORIZING (MATCHING)

In this type of activity, the candidate has to choose which items from a list apply to a series of questions or statements. In some cases, the list items may have to be used more than once. The example shown on this page contains five statements about theatres, but only three items on the list. Clearly some of the items will have to be used more than once.

**A.** Before 1950

**B.** Between 1952 and 1984

**C.** After 1984

26. Plays mainly of interest to men were performed

27. Entrance tickets reached an all-time high

28. Theatres started to target younger audiences

29. Numbers of theatre-goers fell sharply

30. Theatre fashion became more relaxed

This rather complicated format makes it impossible to guess the answer to questions merely by a process of elimination.



# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## DIAGRAM LABELLING (COMPLETING)

A number of different types of visual information may appear in questions of this kind, such as maps of towns, store directories, or diagrams relating to equipment.

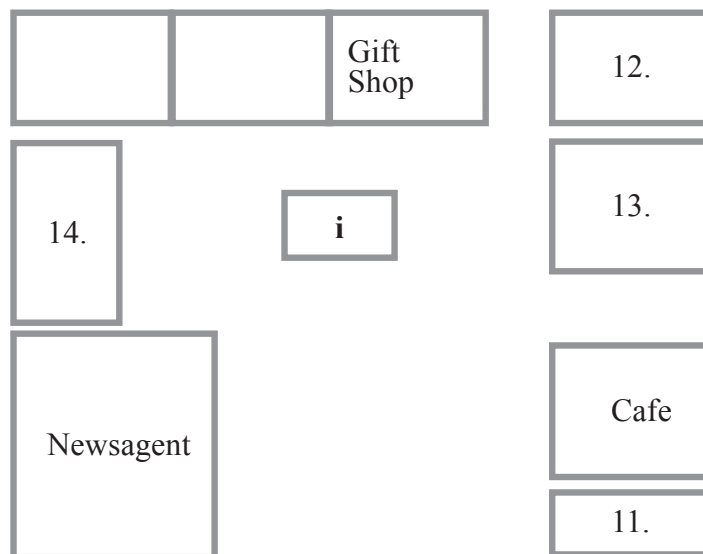
**C** Chemist

**CE** Currency Exchange

**T** Toilets

**R** Restaurant

### The Train Station



# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

The arrangement of information in this kind of question can be a source of confusion. Because English involves writing from left to right and from top to bottom, we may unconsciously expect diagrams and charts to follow this order too.

This means the arrangement of information can sometimes appear to be out of sequence. For example, in the train station map shown here, it would seem more natural for 11 to be in the box marked 12, 12 to be in the box marked 14 and 14 to be in the box marked 11. Take care not to become confused by this.

## COMPLETING FORMS ETC. (COMPLETING)

Although this type of question may appear in many different forms, such as a table or a flow chart, the information given is basically a summary of a listening passage with some of the details missing. It is these details that the candidates have to add. As with diagram questions, the answers may sometimes have to be written in places that seem out of sequence.

AGENT'S DETAILS	
Area covered: 1.	_____
Types of property:	<i>purchase only</i>
Price range: 2.	_____
Viewing: By 3.	_____ <i>only</i>
Fee: 4.	_____
...	

Another important point is that word limits are usually clearly stated for this type of question (e.g. answer in no more than three words). These limits must be followed or candidates will lose points.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## SENTENCE COMPLETION (COMPLETING)

This is similar to the previous category except that the things to be completed in this case are full sentences rather than a series of notes.

A bus carrying a group of **14.** \_\_\_\_\_ had to stop suddenly.

Bad weather conditions had created **15.** \_\_\_\_\_ .

None of those aboard were **16.** \_\_\_\_\_ .

Medical crews were at the scene within **17.**  
\_\_\_\_\_

The bus driver later said that the **18.** \_\_\_\_\_ on the bus were in excellent condition.

This is another type of question in which strict word limits usually apply.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (COMPLETING)

Candidates are asked a series of questions and have to answer using information from the listening passage. Once again, word limits are given, so the answers should consist of words or phrases rather than complete sentences.

6. What is the title of the magazine?  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. How much does the magazine cost?  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. How often is the magazine published?  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Where is the magazine published?  
\_\_\_\_\_

## FINAL NOTE

Although any question you have to deal with in the listening section of the test will almost certainly fall into one of the categories shown on this page, this may not be obvious when you first see it. This is because the way the question has been presented may make it look like something you have never encountered before.

Take the example about health shown below. Your first thought on seeing it might be that it is something completely original. A closer look reveals, however, that despite the table format, it is actually nothing more than a straightforward multiple-choice question.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

	Strongly Recommended	Sometimes Recommended	Not Recommended
37. Light exercise before you start	A	B	C
38. Wearing ankle weights	A	B	C
39. Eating a light meal	A	B	C

Because you will be under intense time pressure during the test, even a few moments of confusion while you work out what you are supposed to do could be enough to cause problems. It is well worth spending the time necessary to become familiar with the various question types that appear in the test so that you can spot them without problems even when they are presented in a somewhat unconventional way.

## SELF-STUDY

Look over the examples of the various question types again. Read them carefully and make sure you understand what you are being asked to do in each case. Next, look over the listening section of a test. Work through the questions as quickly as you can and decide what you are being asked to do in each case: match, choose or complete. Don't worry about actually answering the question. The point of this activity is simply to help you recognize question types.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 6. WHAT DO YOU DO BEFORE THE IELTS LISTENING TEST STARTS?

**Teacher:** You have to look for keywords in the questions.

**Student:** Which words are they?

**Teacher:** The important ones, of course!

Keywords are much misunderstood things. Many IELTS candidates are confused about the whole concept. When asked to underline them in sentences, they often come up with something like the example. shown here.

### About Languages

11. It is spoken by more children than adults
12. It has become more widely spoken in recent decades
13. It is a compulsory subject at school
14. It disappeared as a result of an epidemic
15. It is spoken by a fifth of the local population

Unfortunately, despite all of this enthusiastic underlining, the finished result is likely to be of no use whatsoever in the test. The problem is easy to see. There are eight words in the first sentence, and five of them are underlined. There are nine words in the second sentence and five of them are underlined too. The whole point of searching for keywords is to help the listener target his or her attention. Spending precious time in an exam trying to work out what to listen for is very unhelpful if the eventual answer turns out to be, um... everything.

The reason for the confusion is often that the meaning of “important” in the context of keywords is not clearly explained. Keywords are not important in a grammatical sense. They are also not the words that are most representative of the overall theme being discussed.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

Indeed, they are almost precisely the opposite in that they point to what is unique about the sentence.

The idea becomes clearer with examples. Look at the expressions a more experienced test taker might underline.

## About Languages

- 11. It is spoken by more children than adults
- 12. It has become more widely spoken in recent decades
- 13. It is a compulsory subject at school
- 14. It disappeared as a result of an epidemic
- 15. It is spoken by a fifth of the local population

In question 11, “spoken” has been avoided. Why? Because if this word or a synonym of it is heard in the listening, it could just as easily refer to questions 12, 13 or 14. If the word “children” or a synonym appear in the listening, however, there is a high possibility that it will be in a section relating to question 11 alone.

Similarly, the unique idea in sentence 12 is not contained in the word “become” since question 13 mentions disappearing and this too is a kind of becoming (i.e. becoming extinct). The phrase “widely spoken” would make a terrible keyword since this concept is likely to appear in numerous places in a passage about language. On the other hand, “decade” or a similar word seems likely to be used only when the topic of the sentence is related to question 12. This is therefore the best keyword.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## SELF-STUDY

Go through some IELTS listening practice questions and simply try to spot the keywords. You don't actually need to listen or answer the questions. When you feel confident about your keywords check with the transcript to see if the words you chose would have helped you. Continue to practice and you should get much quicker at spotting keywords.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

To identify keywords in a particular sentence, ask yourself, "Which word (or its synonym) would I need to hear in order to be confident that the speaker was talking about this topic?"



# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 7. HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR IELTS LISTENING? (USE SIGNPOSTS)

Conversations can go anywhere.

It is perfectly possible for one to start with your recent holiday in Greece, travel backwards in time to your early childhood, take a quick detour to a distant planet, and end up back on Earth with someone cleaning your sink next Tuesday.

But despite all of the jumping about from topic to topic, native speakers seldom get completely lost in the middle of conversations? Why? Because they make use of “signposts” along the way.

For example, if someone is about to change the topic, they usually signal this in some way. Sometimes the signpost is a hundred metres high and painted in bright red letters – “Well then, let’s change the subject.” At other times, it is done much more subtly, such as by using “anyway” or by giving a long pause.

Being aware of signposting expressions and techniques can make it easier for you to follow listening passages more easily and can give you hints about where answers are likely to appear. For example, imagine you have been asked to listen to a conversation between two friends who are discussing going to a restaurant. The question is, “What time will the man and woman meet?” After a bit of discussion about their plans on various days, you hear:

Woman: *“Okay, 2 o’clock next Tuesday it is, then.”*

You are confident you have heard the answer and so are feeling rather happy with yourself. But just then the woman adds, “Oh, hang on...!” This is a clear signal that she has just remembered something that will affect her plans. In other words, whatever time the friends do eventually decide to meet, you can be sure it won’t be 2 o’clock next Tuesday!

Expressions like “mind you” and “having said that” can be particularly tricky since they can signal abrupt changes to or contradictions of what has gone before. They are only one of a vast range of signposting expressions, however. These can be used to link ideas, provide examples, show changes in topic, and so on. They can also hint at the attitude of the speakers.

Mother:	I hope Tom has been behaving himself in class recently.
Teacher	Actually ...

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

Even without listening to the conversation any further, we already have a fair idea of where it is probably heading. The teacher most likely is having problems with the lady's son and is using her comment as a way of raising the issue.

## SELF-STUDY

Read through the transcripts of some IELTS listening tests and try to spot the signposting language. Don't be afraid to draw lines or arrows in the text to clarify the structure.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Listen for the use of signposting language and use it to help you understand the structure of listening passages.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 8. HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR IELTS LISTENING? (USE TRIGGER WORDS)

Trigger words and keywords are both very important in listening tests, but they are not the same thing.

As we have already seen, keywords appear in printed questions and refer to the main point that the question is asking about. Trigger words and expressions, on the other hand, appear in the listening passage itself and alert you that the information you need is likely to appear soon. Any word or expression that can give you this hint is a trigger. They do not have to have the same meaning as the keywords (although sometimes they may do).

Let's look at a short excerpt of a listening passage about crows and noise. The first step is to go over the questions and highlight some keywords. This gives us the main points of information we need in order to answer each question.

31. Between what times is the noise from crows lightest?

32. How much might it cost to deal with the situation?

The keyword chosen for question 31 is “lightest” referring to noise. During the listening passage, we have plenty of warning that this answer is on the way long before it arrives, as can be seen from the transcript.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## Transcript

... the noise from the crows is not constant throughout the day and night. Indeed, it is hardly noticeable between 9.00pm and 5am, but it can be deafening at other times.

Unfortunately, improving things might not come cheap. For example, changes to the roof area of apartment buildings might cost in the region of \$15,000 for each apartment in a building consisting of 10 floors with 3 apartments per floor.

The sentence about noise not being constant is already a fair hint that the passages is going to turn to a discussion of differing noise levels. By the time we get to “hardly noticeable”, it is beyond doubt that the answer is about to appear.

The key word for question 32 is cost, so we know that we are probably going to hear an amount of money of some kind. The words “come cheap” should be enough to trigger greater concentration since they make it very likely that an amount of money will soon be mentioned.

Being alert to trigger words and phrases can help you focus your attention in the correct places and give you a few extra moments to prepare yourself for the answer. The difference is small but it is real and on occasion it can mean the difference between getting or not getting an answer correct. Remember, a single extra point might be enough to let you get into a higher band and succeed in your goals.

## SELF-STUDY

Check the answers to a listening test and then underline the relevant parts of the transcript. Next, look to earlier parts of the sentence. What trigger words and phrases can you find there? With a bit of practice, you will begin to notice how such expressions strongly hint that the answer is about to appear.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Use trigger words and expressions in listening passages to alert you to upcoming answers.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 9. HOW MUCH CAN YOU GUESS ABOUT THE IELTS LISTENING QUESTIONS?

When Fido saw the stick I was holding, he barked excitedly. I threw it as far as I could. "Go get it! Go get it, boy!" I shouted.

Even without being told directly, there is a lot you could guess about the situation above. For example, you probably wouldn't expect Fido to be a penguin or a kangaroo. In the same way, you may be able to use logic and common sense to your advantage during the listening test.

Remember, an important part of your strategy is to get a perfect score in section 1 of the test and a near-perfect score in section 2. In order to do this, it is important to squeeze every little bit of information you can from the wording of each question.

Sometimes it is possible to apply a little logic to help prepare yourself for what you may hear. The example shown here makes the point. Question 1 asks about a job available in a ski centre. Right away we can start making assumptions about what is likely. The answer probably isn't an airline pilot or a concert pianist, for example.

### Job - Ski Centre

1. What job is available?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the main responsibility?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the maximum hourly pay?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What must you take with you to the interview?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Similar reasoning applies in question four. There are simply not very many things that people tend to be asked to take with them to job interviews. Realistic possibilities include certificates and qualifications, a CV, a driving license, an ID card, perhaps

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

a passport – but not, say, a shotgun or a trombone. This lack of options gives us a chance to anticipate the probable answer.

The “teamwork” example is similar. The range of answers that are theoretically possible is very wide, but the number that are realistically likely to appear is much smaller. What possible answers do you think is realistically likely?

## Team work

A. Individuals bring different

- a) 21. \_\_\_\_\_
- b) skills

B. People work differently because of

- a) their training
- b) 22. \_\_\_\_\_

C. One advantage of these differences is the wide range of ideas often generated.

D. One disadvantage is the time needed to  
23. \_\_\_\_\_

The answers are probably something like: 21) ideas or experiences, 22) their background or their beliefs, and 23) getting things done or reaching an agreement. Before listening to a question, ask yourself what is probable and make some educated guesses.

One final point is that if for any reason you miss the answer to a question when listening, you can use logic to help you make a reasonable guess about the answer. It is always worth trying. You should never leave any question unanswered.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## SELF-STUDY

Go through some IELTS listening practice questions and see if you can use a little logic to guess the answers. Then simply check the answers to see how close you were. Even if you don't guess right this can give you more of an insight into how the test questions are designed.

## BOTTOM LINE

Use logic and common sense to help direct you towards likely answers.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 10. HOW SHOULD YOU TACKLE SPELLING AND NUMBER QUESTIONS IN THE IELTS LISTENING TEST?

Somewhere in the early stages of the listening test – most probably in section 1 – there are very likely to be questions that require you to accurately take note of such things as the names, addresses, dates and telephone numbers.

Questions of this type are straightforward and can usually be replied upon to help you build up your score.

However, errors can arise through momentary inattention or having poor examination technique.

Any such failures will be disastrous for your overall strategy, so it is important that you approach these questions with seriousness and don't simply assume that you will do well in them.

You should be particularly careful about how you write the numbers and names down. Make sure to leave gaps between each individual letter in the word or individual numeral in a number. For example, if the name you hear is "Smith", write it out in front of you as:

S   m   i   t   h

Why? Because such information is usually repeated later in the listening. If you have made a mistake, spacing out the words will make it easier to make corrections or insert any additional information that is required.

S   m   y   t   h   e

Some students have the habit of erasing an entire word and rewriting it from the beginning whenever they notice a spelling mistake. This may make handwriting look a bit neater, but it is a very bad idea in the test and will make errors much more likely.



# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## SELF-STUDY

Have a friend dictate a list of words and numbers to you. Try to ensure that the numbers are of different types (e.g. prices, passport numbers, and so on). It may be useful to have your friend make a deliberate mistake with some of the information the first time and then repeat it correctly the second time, thus giving you an opportunity to practice correcting errors.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Write out spellings and numbers with plenty of space between the individual letters or numerals. This will help you to correct mistakes more easily and more accurately.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 11. HOW SHOULD YOU APPROACH MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS IN THE IELTS LISTENING TEST?

Throughout the entire listening section of the IELTS test, you are likely to feel under constant time pressure.

In such a difficult situation, what could possibly be worse than having to read a long, complicated sentence in order to answer a question?

How about having to read several of them in order to answer the question.

Multiple-choice questions in the listening section are usually shorter than those in the reading section, but even so, they still involve extra work. This means you may not always have enough time to go over and fully understand the various options you are faced with. Given this situation, it is important that you make the best possible use of any hints given in the question stem. Look at it carefully for any keywords that tell you what kind of information is required. Such words should also give you a better understanding of how the listening will be organized.

32. The speaker says his main topic of interest is
- a. how sulphur has been used throughout history
  - b. how sulphur is used by the human body
  - c. how sulphur is used in industry

The stem of the example question given here, has the key words “main topic”. When you listen to the passage, you should try to catch any trigger words that can help alert you to the fact that the information you need is about to appear.

For example, if during your listening to the passage you hear “blah, blah, blah mostly focuses on...” these last three words should be enough to let you know that the main topic may be about to appear. At this stage, you can glance over the options and try to match them to the points being made by the speaker. In this particular case, what you will have to work out is whether the speaker’s comments seem more connected to history, our bodies, or industry.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## SELF-STUDY

Look over examples of multiple-choice questions. Don't worry at this stage about listening and trying to find answers. Instead, simply read the question stems carefully and highlight what you think are the key words. When you have finished, check with the answer booklet and the transcript to see whether your ideas were correct. Repeat the process and gradually try to build up your speed and accuracy in spotting key words in question stems.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

You will probably not have time to read long multiple-choice questions in their entirety before listening, so work on trying to identify key words in the question stems. Use these to give you clues about what you will hear.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 12. HOW SHOULD YOU APPROACH WORD LIMIT QUESTIONS IN THE IELTS LISTENING TEST?

Imagine you see a big red button with a sign in large letters next to it saying, “Warning! Do not press!” You push the button and a bucketful of water falls on your head. Who can you blame for your misfortune other than yourself? You were warned, after all.

Something similar (minus the water) happens in the listening section of the IELTS test. Candidates are sometimes clearly given a word limit, such as, “Answer in no more than three words.” If you then answer in four words, it won’t matter how incredibly accurate those four words are, you will lose points.

One way to reduce the possibility of accidental error is to highlight the word limit in the instructions and also highlight the words on either side of the gap in the question.

It is easy to become so focused on trying to catch the relevant information that you momentarily forget about word limits.

Getting the correct answer then losing points on a technical error is tragically wasteful.

We request that you 32. \_\_\_\_\_ early to avoid  
disappointment 33. \_\_\_\_\_ must be shown at the  
entrance on arrival.

It is also a good idea to glance at the words on either side of the gap and try to guess as much as you can about what kind of word (e.g. noun, verb, adjective, etc) is required. In the example shown here, the word “early” is clearly being used as an adverb, so whatever comes in front of it must be a verb. The other missing item is the subject of “be shown”, so it must be a noun.

You should try to be as accurate and specific as you can within the word limit stated. Although it is acceptable to use fewer words than the limit, it is often better to use the maximum number of words allowed if you can since this gives you the greatest freedom to make an answer that is both complete and grammatically accurate.

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Imagine, for example, a listening passage containing the words, “The rental includes electricity, water and the cost of gas.” The word limit will affect the answer you can give. If you are told to answer in no more than two words, you might have no choice but to write “gas” as the answer. If instead you are told to answer in no more than three words, this allows you to write, “cost of gas” – a more detailed answer.

## SELF-STUDY

Practice by looking at some examples of this type of question and trying to guess what kind of word or words are missing. Look at the transcript and find the section relating to the question. Try to think of the most accurate way of expressing this information within the word limit. Finally, check the answers. Doing this frequently can give you a better idea of how answers may change depending on the word limit.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

In questions where a word limit is given, take care not to exceed it. Use the information around the gap in the sentence to give you clues about what is missing. Answer the question as fully as you can within the stated word limit.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 13. HOW QUICKLY CAN YOU UNDERSTAND TABLES AND DIAGRAMS IN THE IELTS LISTENING TEST?

When we are dealing with ordinary text, it isn't difficult to work out which sentence we should read first, which we should read second, and so on. Our eyes automatically work through the information in the correct order.

Tables or diagrams are different.

It is not always immediately obvious what we are looking at or in what order items will appear. To make matters worse, during the IELTS exam there is the additional problem of limited time in which to figure everything out.

Look at the relatively simple example given here.

Name of Centre	Number of Helpers	Opening Times	Extra Information
John Fall	13. _____	14. _____	Specialize in rehab for 16. _____ people
North Way	15. _____	9.00 to 18.00	Specialize in treating 17. _____ ill people

Because we read English from left to right, most people would naturally assume that answer 15 would appear in the box to the right of the box containing answer 14. In fact, answer 16 is in this position. Answer 15 is instead found on the next row. This means that after we have dealt with this question, we then have to skip back up to the previous row to give answer 16. Even a momentary confusion while doing this could cause a lapse in concentration, a missed answer and a lost point.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

Don't be misled by the way the information is arranged on the page. Instead, use the question numbers as a guide to the order in which information will appear. You may find it helpful to draw lines or arrows on the page to help you understand the structure of what you are going to hear.

## SELF-STUDY

Look through some questions featuring tables or diagrams and draw lines to help you imagine the likely order and structure of the information in the listening passage. Next, look through the transcript and check how closely your guesses correspond to the actual content.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Don't allow yourself to become confused by the arrangement of tables and diagrams. Use the question numbers rather than position of the gaps on the page to guide you toward the order that information will appear

## 14. WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT 'LATE KEYWORDS' IN THE IELTS LISTENING TEST?

We have already discussed how we can use key words to help us focus on the particular information that we will need to answer a question. However, there is an issue that may sometimes arise, particularly in sections 3 or 4 of the test.

Look at an example of a question relating to a listening passage about octopus as a dish.

Since the word "octopus" will appear many times, we use "problem" as the key word.

We should listen for a word with this meaning in the passage.

32. What is the problem with octopus?

Let's now look at the section of the passage containing the answer to this question. We can glance through it to see if there is a word with the same meaning as our chosen keyword. Sure enough, there is: "difficulties". Unfortunately, it won't help us much as it comes after the information we need about octopus being too hard or too soft.

Octopus can sometimes be very soft and sometimes very tough. This can sometimes cause difficulties for people.

Here is another example, this time in a listening passage about New York's famous MOMA art gallery. "Painting" will be of little use as a keyword in this case, but "fire" may be.



37. What example is given of fire destroying a painting?

Once again we can look at the relevant section of the transcript. Is there a word that means “fire”? Indeed, there is. We learn that a painting by Monet was lost in a “blaze”. But in this case too, this useful synonym turns out not to be useful after all because it comes after the information that we need about the name of the painting.

There have been a number of unfortunate events over the years, such as when the eighteen-foot-long “Water Lilies” by Monet was lost in a blaze on the second floor of the building in 1958.

Although there is no perfect way around this problem, there are often still trigger words that can alert us to the fact that an answer is on the way. In the first example, the fact that the speaker begins listing the properties of octopus might be enough of a hint to have us begin to anticipate an upcoming answer. In the second example, the phrase “a number of unfortunate events”, while not directly synonymous with fire, should be enough to trigger a suspicion that the answer might be mentioned soon.

## SELF-STUDY

Look through the questions of a practice test for keywords and then check the transcript for synonyms. In cases in which the synonyms come after the answer, look a little earlier in the sentence and highlight any words or phrases you find that are not synonymous with the keyword, but that nevertheless give you a hint that a suitable answer may be on the way.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Be aware that keywords may sometimes appear in the listening passages after the answer has already been given. Use trigger words to help you to focus in on sentences that may contain the answer

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 15. WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT SECTION 4 OF THE IELTS LISTENING TEST?

Imagine a Wimbledon tennis champion and an Olympic gymnast get into an argument about which one of them is the greater athlete. You would have to build a very challenging obstacle course indeed to be able to test their claims. What would happen if you then used the same course to test the fitness of your uncle Fred?

This is roughly the situation with the IELTS exam. All candidates take the same test whether they are near beginners or United Nations diplomats. It is for this reason that some sections have to be extremely difficult.

If they were not, there would be no way of separating the performances of very, very, very good candidates from those who were merely very, very good.

Nowhere is this clearer than in section 4 of the listening test. To put it bluntly, section 4 is extremely challenging. For one thing, although this section is like all of the others in having two banks of questions, there is no convenient gap between them that you can use to glance briefly over what is coming up next. In addition, this section always comprises a monologue.

This means that the sentences are often longer, more complex, and arguably somewhat duller than in the other sections.

The important point is not to panic or feel overwhelmed by the amount of information facing you. Although you have lost the brief pause within this section, you will still have 30-40 seconds before the listening starts to look over the questions. You will probably not have time to read everything properly, so focus instead on using question stems to give yourself an overview of the basic structure of the listening passage.

### SELF-STUDY

Look over section 4 questions, but begin without a time limit. First, focus on trying to understand the overall structure of reports from the question stems. Next, practice doing this again, but this time with a time limit. Work on trying to become quicker and more accurate at anticipating what is to come in the listening.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

Section 4 is difficult, but you can give yourself the best possible chance of tackling it successfully by using question stems to give you an overview of the likely structure of the monologue.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## 16. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO AFTER YOU'VE FINISHED AN IELTS LISTENING PRACTICE SECTION?

You've completed a test. You've checked your answers. You've calculated your score.

Now what? Just sit back and relax? Sadly, no.

An essential final step after any kind of exam practice is to analyze your performance.

For example, you may find that you are good at catching the gist of listening passages but struggle with numbers. Alternatively, you may be able to handle the most question types, but find that your slow reading holds you back with multiple-choice.

If you are to make improvements, it is important that you can first identify the areas in which you are having problems. To do this, you should look at your answers in detail and ask yourself:

*Which parts of this activity do I consistently do well?*

*Which parts of this activity do I consistently have problems with?*

*Where did I lose points?*

*Why did I make those mistakes?*

*How can I develop that area of my listening to make those mistakes less common in future?*

This is similar to the self-analysis that you undertook at the beginning stage of the study process. (See the section, "What is your listening problem?") This time, however, you are basing this analysis on a greater amount of evidence.

Problems like this can mean that even though you have the listening ability to get ten out of ten, you lose points for entirely preventable reasons. Use your analysis to identify these problem areas, and then spend time working to do better in them. By focusing your efforts where you need to, you can make significant improvements to your overall score.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Always look over the results of practice tests in detail to look for consistent problems and areas of weakness. This will help you to decide where to concentrate your efforts next.

## 17. HOW CAN YOU BUILD YOUR LANGUAGE?

Native speakers must have incredible listening skills.

After all, they can have conversations on noisy dance floors, among the cheering fans at sporting events, and even in the middle of battlefields! At least, that's how it may seem.

But in fact, no one, native speaker or not, is likely to be able to hear every word under circumstances like these. Much of what is said will be lost under the thud of drum machines or the roar of the crowd. So how are such conversations possible?

The trick is not to hear every word, but to be able to imagine what words were missed. But English may have, depending on who you ask, as many as a million words, how can we possibly guess which one of them fits into the gap in the sentence?

Let's work through the process. Take the sentence, "My car was \_\_\_\_\_ damaged in the accident." A native speaker will automatically use grammar to work out that since the missing item amends the adjective "damaged", it must be an adverb. Straight away, this rules out the majority of those million words.

It is at this point that a knowledge of collocations kicks in. "Beautifully", "interestingly" and "cheerfully" are all adverbs, but a native speaker would not expect any of them to be the missing word because none of them form common collocations (that is, common word combination) with "damaged". A knowledge of collocations will lead him or her to expect the missing word to be something like "badly" or "slightly".

At this stage, there is a problem. Both words seem equally possible, but they have entirely opposite meanings. How can we tell which one is more likely? For this, a native speaker will use context. For example, if the next sentence is something like, "It's beyond repair", then "badly" is more likely to have been the missing word. In addition, the pronunciation will also indicate the seriousness of the damage.

The point of this long example is that by building up your vocabulary, you will not only be able to understand more of what you hear, but also massively increase your ability to make educated guesses about the things you didn't hear.

### SELF-STUDY

The transcripts of IELTS tests are a valuable resource when it comes to helping you build your language knowledge. You can use them in a number of different ways

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

including:

*pulling out all of the vocabulary items relating directly to a topic*

*pulling out expressions that seem to be of general use*

*pulling out collocations*

*pulling out typical signposting expressions*

*pulling out synonyms for key words*

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Use the IELTS transcripts as a resource to help you build your stock of vocabulary, synonyms, collocations, and so on

## 18. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU SIMPLY CAN'T HEAR SOME PARTS OF SENTENCES?

How do you learn to juggle?

There are a number of tricks and techniques that can make it easier to develop the skill, but at some point you have to practice. And practice. And practice.

Improving listening is not much different. The tips and techniques we've looked at on some of the previous pages can help you to get the most from the effort you make, but they are not replacements for the effort itself. If you want your listening to improve, you will have to work at it.

However, you are very likely to find times when, no matter how hard you try, you simply cannot make out what someone is saying. This tends to happen most often with clusters of short words rather than with longer words, which are often easier to catch, even if you are unsure of the meaning.

It is important not to let frustration cause you to give up at this point.

The IELTS exam uses a range of different accents, and some of these may be difficult to catch at first if you are unfamiliar with them.

In addition, there are a number of very common sound changes that English undergoes when spoken quickly, such as when the “d + y” combination in a phrase like “would you” turning into a “j” sound.

Don't give up. Listen, listen and listen again. Eventually, your ear will become accustomed to such features of English.

### SELF-STUDY

Not every kind of English is particularly suitable for intensive listening practice. Use listening passages that are as close as possible in style and length to what you will find in the IELTS test. Ideally, these should be passages for which you also have a transcript and which use a range of different accents.

Since you will probably need to go over particularly stubborn phrases many times, you are also likely to need a suitable electronic device – one that allows you to conveniently rewind and replay short sections of listening passages again and again.

Go over the problem areas repeatedly – listening, then listening and reading, then listening again.

# IELTS SELF-PREP LISTENING

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Don't give up if you can't understand things the first couple of times. Keep practicing and eventually your ear will adjust to unfamiliar accents and fast speech.



## 19. HOW CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR SPELLING?

Do you know what the word “kats” means? It means lost points in the IELTS test for a spelling mistake.

This would be a particularly awful error to make, of course, but the markers are no more sympathetic even if the misspelled word is a tricky one.

It is very important to be careful with spelling. Who wants to understand a question properly, catch all of the information needed when listening, and then lose points for using “tt” instead of “t” when writing the answer?

Luckily, the creators of the test are not actively trying to trick anyone when it comes to spelling. Although English is full of extremely rare and difficult to spell words like logorrhea or laodicean, these are not what will appear in the test. Instead there will be some reasonably common words, a few of which might be slightly tricky to spell.

Although good spelling is important for the test, trying to memorize a lot of spelling rules is not advisable.

There are simply too many exceptions to make this an effective use of your time. Work instead at becoming familiar with the spellings of relatively common words.

One additional point to mention is that it does not matter whether you use the English or the American spellings as long as you remain consistent.

## SELF-STUDY

Working with IELTS practice tests will gradually give you a greater awareness of the type of words you are likely to be required to have to spell correctly. Writing such words out over and over again is a traditional but effective way to improve your spelling.

If you have a friend who can help you, try asking him or her to test your spelling using words taken from the transcript. An alternative is to use short sentences from the transcript as dictation. Any vocabulary notes you have made as part of building your language skills can obviously also be used for spelling practice.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Pay attention to the correct forms of common words. Try to ensure that any points you gain for good listening are not immediately thrown away again for poor spelling.