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IELTS JOURNAL



Tips for IELTS Listening

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First Published in 2016

 IELTSJOURNAL

www.ZandiEnglish.ir

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The **instagram** page contains lessons that show how to use the ideas from this book. You can keep in touch with the author there and ask your questions.

What's in the IELTS Listening paper?

The paper has four sections, with ten questions in each section. The questions are in the same order as the information in the recording, so the answer to the first question will be before the answer to the second question, and so on.

Sections 1 and 2 deal with **everyday, social situations**. There is a conversation between two speakers in Section 1 (for example, a conversation about travel arrangements). Only one person speaks in Section 2 (for example, a speech about local facilities).

Sections 3 and 4 deal with **educational and training situations**. In Section 3 there is a conversation between two main speakers (for example, two university students in discussion, perhaps guided by a tutor). In Section 4 only one person speaks on an academic subject.

You will hear the recordings once only. Different accents, including British, Australian, New Zealand and North American, are used.

You will need to transfer your answers to an answer sheet. You will have 10 minutes at the end of the test to do this. You should **be careful when writing your answers on the answer sheet** because you will lose marks for incorrect spelling and grammar.

Summary

Time allowed:	Approximately 30 minutes (plus 10 minutes to transfer your answers to an answer sheet)
Number of sections:	4
Number of questions:	40
Marking:	Each correct answer receives 1 mark. Your final score is given as a band score in whole or half bands, e.g. 5.5 or 7.0.

DOs and DON'Ts

DOs:

- Listen carefully to the introduction to each section. This will give you useful information about the situation and the speakers.
- Use the time at the beginning of each section (and in the middle of Sections 1 – 3) to look through the questions and think about the topic.
- Read the instructions for each task carefully. Remember to check the maximum number of words allowed.
- Write all your answers as you listen – remember you won't hear the recording a second time.
- Check that what you write makes sense in the context.
- Answer all the questions even if you don't feel sure about an answer – you may have understood more than you think.
- Wait until the end of the test to transfer your answers. You have ten minutes for this which is plenty of time.
- Write clearly when you transfer your answers. If an answer isn't clear on your answer sheet, you will lose the mark.
- Check your spelling (and grammar where necessary).

DON'Ts:

- Don't worry if you have to cross out or change an answer.
- Don't panic if you miss one question. Look ahead and concentrate on the next one.
- Don't try to rephrase what you hear. Write down the words you hear which fit the question.
- Don't write more than the maximum number of words or letters allowed for each answer.
- Don't copy any words that were printed on the Question Paper when you transfer your answers to the Answer Sheet.

General Tips for the Listening Test

The Listening Test is probably the one people get most scared of. To help yourself overcome that fear, start watching TV programs in English. It is better than radio or audio books, because you also see images that help you understand the words you hear.

Listening is a skill, not a gift!

From my experience, in many cases Listening is the least developed skill. So if you feel especially weak in that area - pay attention to the following tips, that will help you improve your Listening ability. Remember – nobody is born with it, it's just a skill and you learn it. If you think your Listening needs no improvements – skip the “Teach yourself the words” part, move forward to the next tips.

Teach yourself the words

The only way to improve your Listening ability is to train your “ears” to separate and understand the words you hear in the flow of sentence. Often what you hear is a “Blablablablaba”, which you can't break into words, and for that reason it makes no sense to you. When training, take a recording of the news, lecture, television program movie or an actual IELTS Listening test and work with it. I suggest using MP3 player.

You can easily record English from the radio or any other source to it. It is also easy to repeat (re-play) sentences you didn't understand. MP3 player is small and light, so you can use it in any spare moment that you have – riding the bus or tram, walking the dog, taking a walk yourself, etc.

First, listen, remember what you heard and stop the recording after each phrase. Even if you didn't understand the phrase, play it in your head a couple of times, like a broken record – “Tonight we have a special guest”, “Tonight we have a special guest”, “Tonight we have a special guest”.

Then say it out loud. If you understood that phrase at first, this exercise will improve your pronunciation. If you didn't understand the phrase for the first time, this repetition will give you more time to hear it better, break it into words and make sense out of them. And if it is still difficult, you can always rewind and hear the phrase again.

There is a big difference between **seeing** a word printed on paper while reading and **hearing** it. If you saw a word, it doesn't mean you will recognize it when you hear it. **So every word you have seen, you must hear at list once.**

Following the instructions will keep you safe

Every task in IELTS Listening test has its instructions. It may sound stupid, but you really need to read them carefully. Why? Because they will tell you exactly what to do with the information: how many words you can use to answer, is there a table you must fill, is there a list to choose words from, how many items you must name, etc.

And if the answer must be in 3 words – write EXACTLY 3 WORDS, because writing four or two words will get you 0 score.

To make my point crystal clear, let's take the following scenario for example:

The speaker on a tape says:

“Well, if you are dieting, try to avoid fruits with lots of fructose like watermelon, mango, peaches or grapes.”

The question in the booklet is:

“Name 2 fruits a person on a diet should not eat”.

The answer may be “watermelon, mango” or “mango, peaches” or any combination of **two** items, but **never three or four!!!** Anyone who writes “just in case” – watermelon, mango, peaches, grapes – receives 0 score for that question.

Note: when counting words – “a” or “the” counts as a word.

Divide and conquer!

The recording divides questions into **groups**, so every time you are instructed to answer a group of 4-5 questions. There are 20-30 seconds of silence before each group. First thing you should do when the tape starts playing, is understand which group of questions you need to answer.

For example the tape says: “Look at questions one to four”. It means that you have about 20 seconds to look at those questions. Go over questions, read them and underline keywords. Keywords are words that contain the main idea of the question. They will help you guess what you will hear – numbers, opening hours, names, locations, etc.

Draw a line under question four, so you won't look further before it's time.

Then you will hear a piece of passage and answer the questions one to four **as you listen**. It means that you should be able to write one answer and listen to another.

After that, the tape will say the numbers of questions in the next group.

Repeat the same process, including drawing the line. This dividing technique is very efficient because every time you concentrate on **limited** number of questions, so it makes you more focused and in control.

What are distractions?

Don't get confused by all the different voices you are going to hear. The recording uses several different voices – of younger and older people, men and women. You may also hear different accents - Australian, British, American, Japanese, etc. The background noise is also varies. It can be of airport, cafe-shop, street, University lecture hall, you name it. Be ready for it and don't let it distract you – because that is exactly what they want. Ignore the noises and listen for the answers.

Listening for specific information

When you are listening, look for descriptions and details, such as dates, places, telephone numbers, opening hours, years (1995), transportation (car, bike, train) If you hear them, but don't know where to place them yet – write them on margins of the Listening booklet. Later you will have some time to check your answers. Going over the questions that you couldn't answer during the Listening passage, you might see that what you've written on the margins fits.

Answer as you listen

The reason you have to “answer as you listen” is that you immediately forget the sentences after you have heard them – because of stress, foreign language, constant flow of information, etc. After hearing the third sentence you won't be able to repeat the first. It means that when any part of Listening is over – you won't be able to remember any of the answers. So write them as you hear them, leave nothing for later.

Keep moving forward!

A worst case scenario is you “losing the sequence of answers” – so you miss one answer and then you miss another one and so on. To prevent that from happening, always look one or two questions ahead. It sounds confusing, but after a little practice becomes very natural and helps a lot. Even if you have missed the answer to a question – **admit it** and move to the next one, otherwise you will lose it too.

Knowing your clues

The answer is usually pronounced **louder and clearer**, it is easier to hear and understand. If you can't hear something clear (because the speaker swallows

words or whispers), then probably the answer is not there. With some practice you will be able to tell the difference.

A good clue to answer is when you hear a repetition of a word, a word being **spelled out** (G A R F U N K E L) or a number **dictated**.

Spelling tasks

As simple as it sounds, the spelling task is not so easy. You should practice a little to be prepared for it. Just ask someone to spell the names of cities from the following list for you. If you study alone, you could record yourself spell those names and numbers, and then play it. The same goes for the list of telephone numbers I include here. It is a good practice and will only add to your confidence. Note: in numbers "00" sometimes is read as "double o" instead of "zero-zero".

Cities	Numbers
Antananarivo	423-5207-0074
Brazzaville	628-2087-2311
Conakry	5167-832-0155
Gaborone	8746-221-0302
Johannesburg	5337-298-0132
Kinshasa	5900-231-7621
Libreville	4348-663-980
Lilongwe	11-267-55410
Mogadiscio	101-9020-7624
Ouagadougou	413-2567-9011
Windhoek	782-6721-0412
Islamabad	479-2001-6792
Rangoon	821-6283-1382
Ascension	492-5241-8921
Vancouver	941-2042-9142
Al Minuya	871-5466-0098
Qandahar	917-5422-3333
Jharkhand	244-1449-2100

Typical Listening Task Types

Remember my promise – no surprises in IELTS? The following shows you every type of task you may see in the Listening test booklet. Different task types come with different instructions, so if you see and remember them now, it will save you time later.

Of course, you won't get every type I show here in your test and the table looks a bit boring. Anyway, my advice is to get to know them **now**. Don't let them catch you off-guard!

Task Types:

1. Form Completion
2. Multiple Choice
3. Short-answer questions
4. Sentence Completion
5. Matching & Classification

1 Form Completion (Track 01)

What's involved?

In this type of question, you have to fill in gaps in an outline of part or all of the recording. The outline will focus on the main ideas/facts in the recording and may be a form: often used for facts, such as names and dates.

You should select words from the recording which fit into gaps on the question paper. In this case, you will need to keep to the word limit given in the instructions. You do not have to change the words in the recording in any way.

You should read the instructions very carefully as the number of words or numbers you may use to fill the gaps can change. A word limit is given, for example, 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER'. You will lose the mark for writing more than the word limit. Contracted words such as 'they're' will not be tested. Hyphenated words such as 'check-in' count as single words.

This type of question focuses on the main points the person listening would naturally write down.

Example (Track 01):

SECTION 1

Questions 1 – 8

Complete the form below.

Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

PACKHAM'S SHIPPING AGENCY – customer quotation form

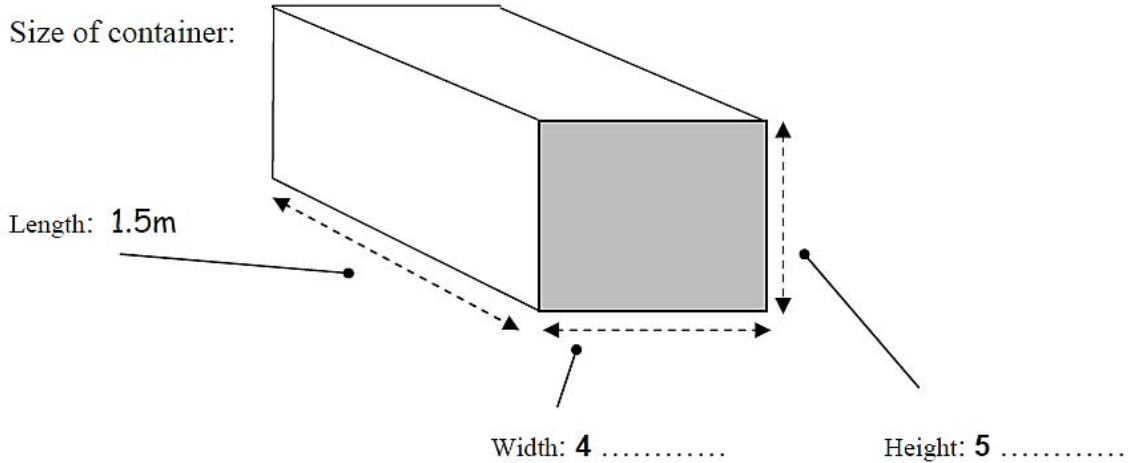
Example Country of destination: **Kenya**

Name: Jacob **1**

Address to be collected from: **2** College, Downlands Rd

Town: Bristol

Postcode: **3**



Contents: clothes

6

7

Total estimated value: **8** £.....

Answers:

1 Mkere

2 Westall

3 BS8 9PU

4 0.75 m/metre(s)/meter(s) (wide) / three(-)quarter(s) (of) (a) metre/meter (wide) / $\frac{3}{4}$ m (wide) / 75 cm(s) (wide)

5 0.5 m/metre(s)/meter(s) (high/deep) / (a) half (a) metre/meter (high/deep) / $\frac{1}{2}$ m (high/deep) / 50 cm(s) (high/deep)

6 & 7 in either order

(some) books

(some) toys

8 1,700

Words in brackets are optional - they are correct, but not necessary. Alternative answers are separated by a slash (/).

Tapescrpt for IELTS Listening Track 01

You will hear a telephone conversation between a customer and an agent at a company which ships large boxes overseas.

- A** Good morning Packham's Shipping Agents. Can I help you?
B Oh yes, I'm ringing to make enquiries about sending a large box, a container, back home to Kenya from the UK.
A Yes, of course. Would you like me to try and find some quotations for you?
B Yes, that'd be great. Thank you.
A Well first of all, I need a few details from you.
B Fine.
A Can I take your name?
B It's Jacob Mkere.
A Can you spell your surname, please?
B Yes, it's M-K-E-R-E.
A Is that 'M' for mother?
B Yes.
A Thank you, and you say that you will be sending the box to Kenya?
B That's right.
A And where would you like the box picked up from?
B From college, if possible.

- A** Yes, of course. I'll take down the address now.
- B** It's Westall College.
- A** Is that W-E-S-T-A-L-L?
- B** Yes, ... college.
- A** Westall College. And where's that?
- B** It's Downlands Road, in Bristol.
- A** Oh yes, I know it. And the postcode?
- B** It's BS8 9PU.
- A** Right ... and I need to know the size.
- B** Yes, I've measured it carefully and it's 1.5m long ...
- A** Right.
- B** 0.75m wide ...
- A** OK.
- B** And it's 0.5m high or deep.
- A** Great. So I'll calculate the volume in a moment and get some quotes for that. But first can you tell me, you know, very generally, what will be in the box?
- B** Yes there's mostly clothes.
- A** OK. [writing down]
- B** And there's some books.
- A** OK. Good. Um ... Anything else?
- B** Yes, there's also some toys.
- A** OK and what is the total value, do you think, of the contents?
- B** Well the main costs are the clothes and the books – they'll be about £1500 but then the toys are about another two hundred – so I'd put down £1700.

2 Multiple Choice (Track 02)

What's involved?

This type of question may be a question with three possible answers or the first half of a sentence with three possible sentence endings. You have to choose one correct answer, A, B or C, then write the correct letter on the answer sheet.

Sometimes you are given a longer list of possible answers and you have to choose more than one answer. You should read the question carefully to check how many answers you need to choose.

This type of question tests many listening skills, e.g. a detailed understanding of specific points, or general understanding of the main points of the recording.

Example (Track 02)

SECTION 1

Questions 9 and 10

Choose the correct letter, A, B or C.

9 Type of insurance chosen

A Economy

B Standard

C Premium

10 Customer wants goods delivered to

A port

B home

C depot

Answers:

9 C

10 A

Tapescript for IELTS Listening Track 02

(A customer has been arranging with a shipping agent to send a large box overseas. This is the last part of the conversation.)

- A** OK right. Now obviously insurance is an important thing to consider and our companies are able to offer very good rates in a number of different all-inclusive packages.
- B** Sorry, could you explain a bit more?
- A** Yes, sorry, um. There's really three rates according to quality of insurance cover – there's the highest comprehensive cover which is Premium rate, then there's standard rate and then there's economy rate. That one will only cover the cost of the contents second hand.
- B** Oh I've been stung before with economy insurance so I'll go for the highest.
- A** Mh'hm and can I just check would you want home delivery or to a local depot or would you want to pick it up at the nearest port?
- B** The port'd be fine – I've got transport that end.
- A** Fine and will you be paying by credit card?
- B** Can I pay by cheque?

3 Short-answer Questions (Track 03)

What's involved?

In this type of question, you have to read a question and write a short answer using information from the recording.

You should read the instructions very carefully as the number of words or numbers you may use to fill the gaps can change. A word limit is given, for example, 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER'. You will lose the mark for writing more than the word limit. Contracted words such as 'they're' will not be tested. Hyphenated words such as 'check-in' count as single words. Write your answer on the answer sheet.

Sometimes you are given a question which asks you to write two or three different answers. This type of question focuses on your ability to listen for facts, such as places, prices or times, heard in the recording.

Example (Track 03):

SECTION 2

Questions 11 – 16

Answer the questions below.

Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

What **TWO** factors can make social contact in a foreign country difficult?

- 11
- 12

Which types of community group does the speaker give examples of?

- theatre
- 13
- 14

In which **TWO** places can information about community activities be found?

- 15
- 16

Answers:

11 & 12 in either order

language

customs

13 & 14 in either order

music (groups)

local history (groups)

15 & 16 in either order

(the) (public) library/libraries

(the) town hall

Words in brackets are optional - they are correct, but not necessary. Alternative answers are separated by a slash (/).

Tapescript Track 03

You will hear an extract from a talk given to a group who are going to stay in the UK.

Good evening, and welcome to the British Council. My name is John Parker and I've been asked to talk to you briefly about certain aspects of life in the UK before you actually go there. So I'm going to talk first about the best ways of making social contacts there. Now you might be wondering why it should be necessary. After all, we meet people all the time. But when you're living in a foreign country it can be more difficult, not just because of the language, but because customs may be different.

If you're going to work in the UK you will probably be living in private accommodation, so it won't be quite so easy to meet people. But there are still things that you can do to help yourself. First of all, you can get involved in activities in your local community, join a group of some kind. For example, you'll probably find that there are theatre groups who might be looking for actors, set designers and so on, or if you play an instrument you could join music groups in your area. Or if you like the idea of finding out about local history there'll be a group for that too. These are just examples. And the best places to get information about things like this are either the town hall or the public library. Libraries in the UK perform quite a broad range of functions nowadays – they're not just confined to lending books, although that's their main role of course.

4 Sentence Completion (Track 04)

What's involved?

In this type of question, you have to read sentences that summarise important information from either all of the listening text or from one part of it. You have to fill in a gap in each sentence using information from the recording.

You should read the instructions very carefully as the number of words or numbers you may use to fill the gaps can change. A word limit is given, for example, 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER'. You will lose the mark for writing more than the word limit. Contracted words such as 'they're' will not be tested. Hyphenated words such as 'check-in' count as single words. Write the words that fit into the gap on the answer sheet.

This type of question focuses on your ability to identify the important information in a recording. You may also need to understand relationships between ideas/facts/events, such as cause and effect.

Example (Track 04):

SECTION 3

Questions 27 – 30

Complete the sentences below.

Write **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** for each answer.

Studying with the Open University demanded a great deal of **27**

Studying and working at the same time improved Rachel's **28**
skills.

It was helpful that the course was structured in **29**

She enjoyed meeting other students at **30**

Answers:

- 27 motivation
- 28 time(-)management
- 29 modules
- 30 summer school(s)

Tapescript for IELTS Listening Recording Track 04

Two friends, Rachel and Paul, are discussing studying with the Open University. Rachel has already done a course at the university, but Paul has not. The extract relating to these questions comes from the last part of the recording.

Paul The other thing I wanted to ask you was, did you find it hard, studying with the Open University?

Rachel You mean, because you're studying on your own, most of the time?

Paul Mm.

Rachel Well it took me a while to get used to it. I found I needed to maintain a high level of motivation, because it's so different from school. There's no-one saying, 'Why haven't you written your assignment yet?' and that sort of thing.

Paul Oh dear.

Rachel You'll learn it, Paul. Another thing was that I got very good at time-management because I had to fit time for studying round a full-time job.

Paul Well I'm hoping to change to working part-time, so that'll help.

Rachel What makes it easier is that the degree is made up of modules, so you can take time off between them if you need to. It isn't like a traditional three-or four-year course, where you've got to do the whole thing of it in one go.

Paul That's good, because I'd like to spend six months travelling next year.

Rachel Huh, it's all right for some. Then even though you're mostly studying at home, remember you've got tutors to help you, and from time to time there are summer schools. They usually last a week. They're great, because you meet all the other people struggling with the same things as you. I've made some really good friends that way.

Paul Sounds good. So how do I apply?

5 Matching & Classification, Example 1 (Track 05)

What's involved?

In this type of question, you have to match a list of items from the recording to a list of options on the question paper, then write the correct letter on the answer sheet.

This type of question tests your ability to:

- listen for detailed information. For example, whether you can understand information about the type of hotel or guest house accommodation in an everyday conversation
- follow a conversation between two people
- recognise how facts in the recording are connected to each other.

Example 1 (Track 05):

SECTION 3

Questions 21 - 25

What does Jack tell his tutor about each of the following course options?

- A He'll definitely do it.
- B He may or may not do it.
- C He won't do it.

Write the correct letter, A, B or C next to questions 21- 25.

You may choose any letter more than once.

21 Media Studies

22 Women and Power

23 Culture and Society

24 Identity and Popular Culture

25 Introduction to Cultural Theory

Answers:

21 C

22 A

23 B

24 B

25 C

Tapescript (Track 05)

You will hear a Communication Studies student talking to his tutor about optional courses for the next semester.

- Dr Ray** Come in. Oh hello Alan. Have a seat. Right ... you said you wanted to see me to talk about your options next semester?
- Jack** That's right. We have to decide by the end of next week. Really, I'd like to do all five options but we have to choose two, don't we.
- Dr Ray** Yes, but the choice depends on your major to some extent. You're majoring in Communication Studies, aren't you?
- Jack** That's right.
- Dr Ray** So for example the Media Studies Option will cover quite a lot of the same area you did in the core module on mass communications this semester - the development of the media through the last two centuries, in relation to political and social issues.
- Jack** Mmm. Well that was interesting, but I've decided I'd rather do something completely new. There's a Women's Studies option, isn't there?
- Dr Ray** Yes, 'Women and Power' – again it has a historical focus, it aims to contextualise women's studies by looking at the legal and social situation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ...
- Jack** So it would be useful if I intended to specialise in women's studies ... but I'm not sure I do actually.
- Dr Ray** Well, it might still be useful to give you an idea of the issues involved. It's taught by Dr Steed.
- Jack** Oh, really? I'll sign up for that, then. What about the option on Culture and Society?

Dr Ray That addresses the historical debate on the place of culture since the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

Jack So a historical focus again ...

Dr Ray Do I get the message you're not so keen on history?

Jack Well, it's just we seem to have done quite a lot this semester ... anyway I'll think about that one.

Dr Ray If you're interested in a course focusing on current issues there's the option on Identity and Popular Culture – that approaches the subject through things like contemporary film, adverts, soap operas and so on.

Jack Oh? That sounds interesting. Can you tell me who runs it?

Dr Ray Well, it's normally Dr Stevens but he's on sabbatical next semester, so I'm not sure who'll be running it. It should be decided by next week though.

Jack Right, well I might wait until then to decide ... And the last option is Introduction to Cultural Theory, isn't it. I'm quite interested in that too – I was talking to one of the second year students, and she said it was really useful, it made a lot of things fall into place.

Dr Ray Yes, but in fact in your major, you'll have covered a lot of that already in Communications 102, so that might be less useful than some of the others.

Jack Oh, I'll forget about that one, then.

Dr Ray Now while you're here, we could also discuss how you're getting on with your Core Module assignment ...

Matching, Example 2 (Track 06)

Example 2 (Track 06):

SECTION 1

Questions 1 – 4

Which hotel matches each description?

Choose your answers from the box and write the correct letter **A-E** next to questions 1-4.

- A** The Bridge Hotel
- B** Carlton House
- C** The Imperial
- D** The Majestic
- E** The Royal Oak

- 1** is in a rural area
- 2** only opened recently
- 3** offers facilities for business functions
- 4** has an indoor swimming pool

Answers:

- 1 E
- 2 B
- 3 C
- 4 A

Tapescript Track 06

You will hear a man talking to an official at a tourist information office.

Official Can I help you?

Man Yes, I was wanting somewhere to stay for a few days - a four or five star hotel. Can you tell me something about the possibilities?

Official OK, right, well there are five hotels that might interest you. Were you wanting a city centre location, or would you be interested in something a bit further out?

Man Well, I do have a car so I could go for either.

Official Well, there are three central hotels in the range you're looking for – there's Carlton House and The Imperial, they're both near the main square, but if you've got your own transport you might be interested in the Royal Oak – that's out in the country, about ten kilometres away, very peaceful. Then there's the Bridge hotel and the Majestic – they're both in town but not in the centre, they're out on the airport road.

Man Mmm that might be a bit far out actually. OK, now the other two you mentioned, in the city centre. Can you tell me a bit about them?

Official Well, they're both excellent hotels. If you want something with a bit of character, Carlton House is quite unusual – it's a very old building that was originally a large private house, it was bought by the Vannis chain and they completely refurbished it – they took their first guests just a few months ago but it's already got an excellent reputation. That's a five star hotel. Or there's the Imperial, which is a much more modern building. That's also has its own gym and it also has internet connection and meetings rooms – it's used for conferences and corporate events as well as private guests. That's five star as well.

Man Does it have a swimming pool as well as a gym?

Official No – the Royal Oak has an outdoor pool, which is lovely in the summer, but the only hotel with an indoor pool is the Bridge Hotel. It doesn't have a gym though. The Majestic is planning to build a swimming pool and a fitness centre, but it's not finished yet.

Man I see. Well, I think I'll probably go for one of the city centre hotels.

6 Plan/map/diagram labelling (Track 07)

What's involved?

In this type of question, you have to complete labels on a visual which may be:

- a diagram (e.g. a piece of equipment)
- a set of pictures
- a plan (e.g. of a building)
- a map (e.g. of part of a town).

You may have to:

- select your answers from a list on the question paper, then write the correct letter on the answer sheet
- select words from the recording which fit into gaps on the question paper. In this case, you will need to keep to the word limit given in the instructions. You do not have to change the words in the recording in any way.

You should read the instructions very carefully as the number of words or numbers you may use to fill the gaps can change. A word limit is given, for example, 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER'. You will lose the mark for writing more than the word limit. Contracted words such as 'they're' will not be tested. Hyphenated words such as 'check-in' count as single words. Write the words that fit into the gap on the answer sheet.

This type of question tests your ability to understand, for example, a description of a place, and how this description relates to the visual. It may also test your ability to understand explanations of where things are and follow directions (e.g. straight on/through the far door).

Example (Track 07):

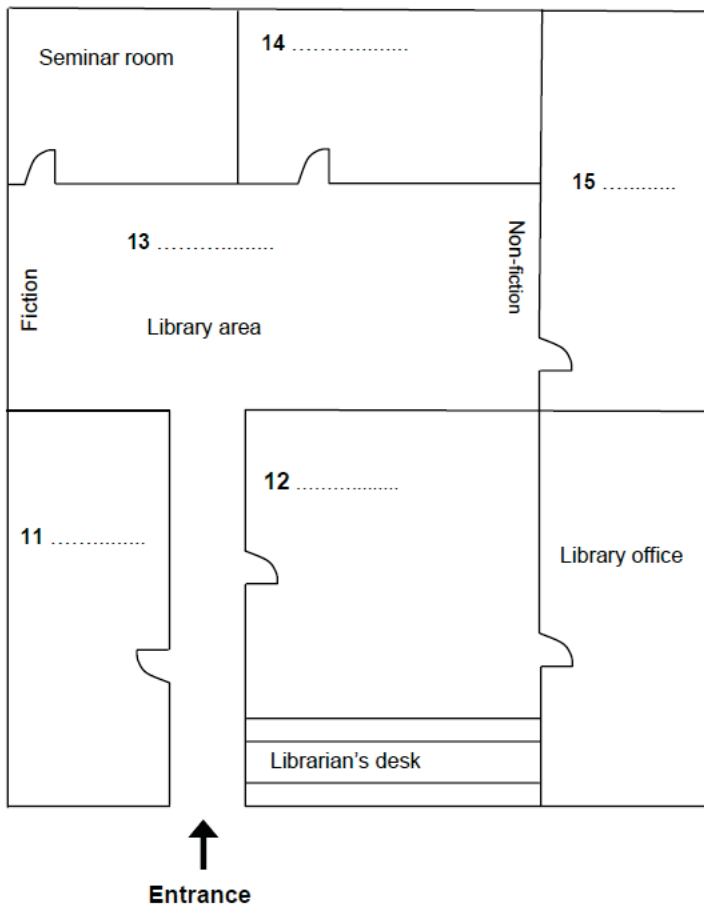
SECTION 2

Questions 11-15

Label the plan below.

Choose **FIVE** answers from the box and write the correct letters **A-I** next to questions 11-15.

Town Library



- A Art collection
- B Children's books
- C Computers
- D Local history collection
- E Meeting room
- F Multimedia
- G Periodicals
- H Reference books
- I Tourist information

Answers:

- 11 H
- 12 G
- 13 D
- 14 B
- 15 F

Tapescript Track 07

You will hear the librarian of a new town library talking to a group of people who are visiting the library.

OK everyone. So here we are at the entrance to the town library. My name is Ann, and I'm the chief librarian here, and you'll usually find me at the desk just by the main entrance here. So I'd like to tell you a bit about the way the library is organised, and what you'll find where ... and you should all have a plan in front of you. Well, as you see my desk is just on your right as you go in, and opposite this the first room on your left has an excellent collection of reference books and is also a place where people can read or study peacefully. Just beyond the librarian's desk on the right is a room where we have up to date periodicals such as newspapers and magazines and this room also has a photocopier in case you want to copy any of the articles. If you carry straight on you'll come into a large room and this is the main library area. There is fiction in the shelves on the left, and non-fiction materials on your right, and on the shelves on the far wall there is an excellent collection of books relating to local history. We're hoping to add a section on local tourist attractions too, later in the year. Through the far door in the library just past the fiction shelves is a seminar room, and that can be booked for meetings or talks, and next door to that is the children's library, which has a good collection of stories and picture books for the under elevens. Then there's a large room to the right of the library area – that's the multimedia collection, where you can borrow videos and DVDs and so on, and we also have CD-Roms you can borrow to use on your computer at home. It was originally the art collection but that's been moved to another building. And that's about it – oh, there's also the Library Office, on the left of the librarian's desk. OK, now does anyone have any questions?

Sample Listening Questions

Sample Listening A: Questions (Track 07)

SECTION 3

Questions 21 – 30

Questions 21 and 22

Complete the notes below.

Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD'S OCEANS

The Robotic Float Project

Float is shaped like a **21**

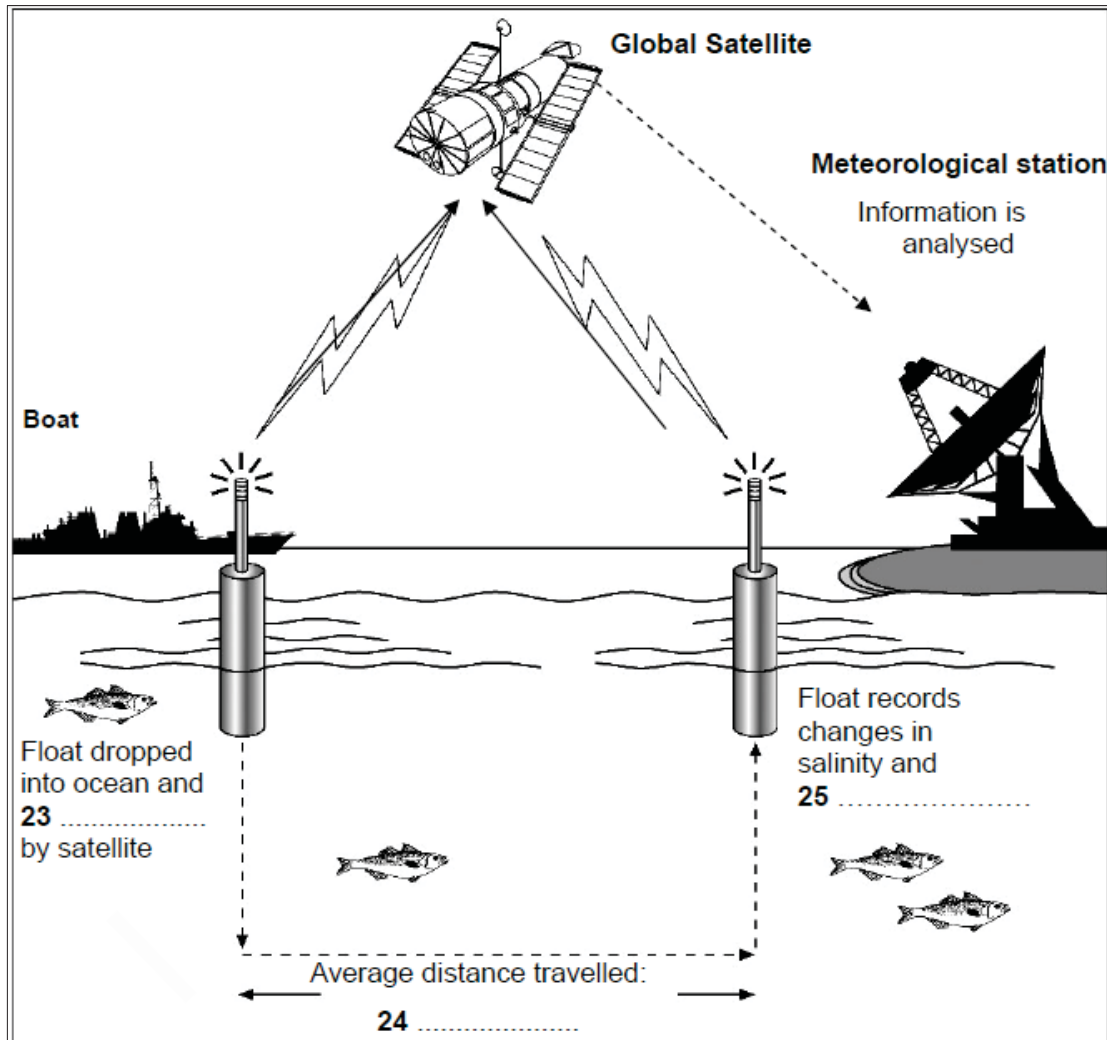
Scientists from **22** have worked on the project so far

Questions 23 – 25

Complete the notes on the diagram below.

Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

THE OPERATIONAL CYCLE



Questions 26 – 30

In what time period can the float projects help with the issues 26-30 below?

- A** At present
- B** In the near future
- C** In the long-term future

Write the correct letter, **A**, **B** or **C**, next to questions 26-30.

26 El Niño

27 Global warming

28 Naval rescues

29 Sustainable fishing practices

30 Crop selection

Sample Listening A: Answer Key (Track 07):

21 cigar

22 13 (different) countries

23 (is) activated

24 (average) (around/about/approximately) 50 kilometres/kilometers

25 (water/ocean/sea) temperature /
change(s) in temperature /
(water/ocean/sea) temperature change(s) /
temperature of water/ocean/sea

26 A

27 C

28 A

29 B

30 C

Sample Listening B: Questions (Track 08)

SECTION 2 Questions 11 – 20

Questions 11 – 16

Complete the notes below.

Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

THE NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE	
Well known for:	11
Complex consists of:	concert rooms
	theatres
	cinemas
	art galleries
	public library
	restaurants
12	
Historical background:	1940 – area destroyed by bombs
	1960s – Centre was 13
	In 14 – opened to public
Managed by:	15
Open:	16 days per year

Questions 17 – 20

Complete the table below.

Write **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** for each answer.

Day	Time	Event	Venue	Ticket price
Monday and Tuesday	7.30 p.m.	'The Magic Flute' (opera by Mozart)	17	from £8.00
Wednesday	8.00 p.m.	18 '.....' (Canadian film)	Cinema 2	19
Saturday and Sunday	11 a.m. to 10 p.m.	20 '.....' (art exhibition)	Gallery 1	free

Sample Listening B: Answer Key (Track 08):

- 11 classical music (concerts) /
(classical) (music) concerts
- 12 (a) bookshop /
(a) bookstore
- 13 planned
- 14 1983 /
(the) 1980s
- 15 (the) City Council
- 16 363
- 17 (the) Garden Hall
- 18 Three Lives
- 19 £4.50
- 20 Faces of China

Eliminate the wrong answers

When you deal with multiple-choice questions, elimination is a good strategy. Usually only one answer is correct, unless instructions say something else. This task is similar to True/False/Not Given. You should decide for **every** choice of answer - is it True, False or Not Given in the passage. After you have decided, choose the one that is True – this is the correct answer. Any other choice, False or Not Given, is incorrect. Keep in mind that there are cases when all the choices are correct or none of them is correct. Read the instruction carefully and you will know what to do in such cases.

Gap-fill strategy

Look at the words around the gap to understand what's missing, a noun (like boy, toy, truck), an adjective (little, pretty, shiny) or a verb (stands, looks, moves).

For instance, if you see **Noun** before the blank ("The boy is___"), it means that it's

Adjective ("The boy is **small**") or it's **Verb** ("The boy is **smiling**") is missing.

Once you have picked a word, write it above the gap and then read the whole sentence to be sure that it makes sense.

"Chameleon" questions

They might use different words with the same meaning to confuse you. It could be expressions or synonyms.

For example, the tape says "All the candidates **have to** fill an application form" and the question says "The candidates **must** fill an application" – is it True, False or Not Given? The correct answer is True because "**have to**" means "**must**".

Watch out for traps

Trap Number One – unexpected turn

You might hear speaker starting to say one thing and then, suddenly, continuing to something completely different. This is a trap, so make sure you don't fall for it. The rule here is "Last word counts". For example, if the speaker says "I want to visit that gallery on Monday. No, wait, I've just remembered that it is closed on Monday, so I will go on Wednesday.", and the question is "when" – the correct answer here is Wednesday, and Monday is a trap.

Trap Number Two – generalizations

You might hear speaker first gives a list of things and then says them **all in one word**.

For example: “Well, I like to swim, hike, and camp – to be involved in outdoor activities.” If the question is “What kind of activities...” the correct answer is “outdoor” and not “swimming”, “hiking” or “camping”.

Trap Number Three – explicit answer choices

Explicit answers choices can be (and mostly will be) traps. The following example demonstrates what I mean:

The tape says: “This course is a must for all first year students, excluding foreign students”.

The Question is “**All** the first year students have to take this course”,
The Answer should be **F**(alse), because there is an exception – foreign students.

All the explicit answers that mean “no exceptions” are suspicious to us and call for more attention.

Check the grammar

If the answer you give is grammatically incorrect – it cannot be the right one. Checking the grammar of your answers will give you an idea whether your answer correct or not, especially in tasks like:

- Gap-fill
- Sentence completion

Use your time wisely

During the test, you have a little time between passages. Use it to check and complete your answers.

Copy answers smartly

After 20 minutes of Listening test, there are 10 additional minutes. During the test you have written all of the answers in the Listening test booklet. These 10 minutes are given you to copy your answers to the Answering sheet, and you should use them **smartly**.

The Answer Sheet has 2 sides, one for Reading test and one for Listening test, so make sure you are writing on the Listening side. I include here an example of Answering Sheet so you could get familiar with it and use it for practicing. First, copy all the answers from the booklet to the Answering Sheet, and pay attention to the following guidelines (as simple as they sound – they are BIG time savers):

- For multiple-choice questions and picking pictures - just copy the letter of correct answer, don't circle it.
- For sentence completion – just copy your answer, not the whole sentence.
- For True/False/Not given question – just copy T, F or NG, whatever your choice is.
- For gap-fills – just copy the word you have chosen for the gap.
- For answers written in short (like prof. advise) – write the full version (professional advise).
- Check that all the answers are clear and understandable. Now, if you missed some questions – it is a good time to guess.

Practice, practice, practice!

I strongly recommend that you use all the tips while practicing. In order to practice you are going to need samples of Listening test, which can be found on the internet sites (good quality, free of charge). Play the Listening samples and start using the tips while searching for answers. This is the only way to really understand how these tips work. You may have to play the same Listening file more than once, to practice in different techniques.

General tips for listening

1. You only hear the recordings once - so write the answers as you listen.
2. Listen carefully to the introduction for each section and try to imagine what the speakers will talk about. This will give you useful information about the situation and the speakers.
3. In the real test, you have time at the beginning of each section to look at the task. Use this time well to read the questions and think about the topics.
4. The questions always follow the order of the recording. Don't panic if you miss one question look ahead and think about the next one.
5. Write clearly when you transfer your answers to the answer sheet.
6. When you transfer your answers to the answer sheet, don't copy any extra words from the question paper.
7. When you read the question, you may find it helpful to think of words to listen for which have a similar meaning.
8. Listen to the intonation of the speaker as this could help you to decide whether the sentence is positive or negative.
9. It is useful to underline key words in the question to help you focus on the words (or similar words) to listen for.

How to use practice tests

It's a good idea to do practice tests (e.g. using the Cambridge IELTS books) in preparation for the listening exam. Here's some advice to help you benefit from doing practice tests:

1. Your score is not the most important thing

The important thing is what you have learnt by doing the test. Were there any new words or phrases that you can learn? What did you find difficult? Did any of the questions trick you? In other words, what do you need to do to improve your score?

2. Check how accurate your answers are

Be strict with yourself; every grammar or spelling mistake is important. For example, if the speaker says "The library has a collection of newspapers", you must **not** write "collection of newspaper".

3. Get into the habit of moving on

If you missed something, forget about it and move on. Always prepare for the next question rather than worrying about a previous question. When you are given 30 seconds to check your answers, use the time to look at the next section instead.

How to use the breaks

There are breaks between the four sections of the listening test, and there are breaks in the middle of sections 1, 2 and 3. You will hear instructions like this:

1. First you have some time to read questions 1 to 5.
 2. That is the end of section 1. You have half a minute to check your answers.
1. 'Some time' means about 20 seconds, or up to 40 seconds before section 4. It's important to use this time to read the questions, make sure you understand them, and think about what kind of answer is needed (e.g. number, name, noun, verb, singular, plural).
 2. Ignore this instruction - don't check a section that you have just finished. It's much more important to be ready for the next section. If you're not ready when the recording starts, you will find it very difficult to read the questions and listen to the answers at the same time. So, use this time to read ahead.

Why is spelling important?

Some points about spelling for IELTS Listening:

1. I know students who have lost up to 10 points in their IELTS Listening tests because of spelling mistakes. This might be 2 IELTS bands!
2. Don't worry about capital letters in the exam (try to use them correctly, but you will not lose marks if you make a mistake).
3. Plurals are very important. e.g. The question asks you to fill the gap "There are many _____". The answer could be "reasons" but not "reason".

I don't recommend learning spelling rules; it's better to make a list of your mistakes, and learn the correct spelling by heart.

For example, here is a list of words from IELTS Listening tests. Can you spell them all correctly? If not, write them on your spelling list, and learn them.

- questionnaire
- orientation
- attendance
- necessary
- serious
- lecture
- lecturer
- vocational
- bachelor's degree

Tips to improve your spelling

Many students get low scores in IELTS listening because they make spelling mistakes. Here are some tips to improve your spelling:

1. Make a spelling list

Every time you make a spelling mistake, write the correct spelling of the word on a list. Hopefully the list of words that you can spell correctly will grow and grow.

2. Learn by heart

The only way to make sure that your spelling improves is to learn words by heart. Learn the words on your spelling list, and test yourself once a week.

3. Rules don't help very much

You could easily get lost in the labyrinth of English spelling rules. It's easier to remember the spelling of individual words than it is to remember all the rules.

4. Get a dictionary 'app' for your phone

Do you look up words in a dictionary at least once a day? Having a dictionary application on your phone makes it easy. For example, the Merriam-Webster dictionary app for the iPhone is a good one (and it's free).

What is the most difficult section in IELTS Listening? And why?

IELTS Listening section 4 is the most difficult section:

- There is no break in the middle of the 10 questions.
- You will hear only one person speaking.
- The language used is usually more difficult.
- The speaker tends to speak quite quickly.

Example (Track 09)

Listen to the following talk about mistakes to avoid when writing a CV (curriculum vitae = a document that summarises your education and work experience).

Fill the gaps below with a MAXIMUM of THREE WORDS.

Common mistakes when writing a CV:

1. Having a CV without a good structure.
2. Writing , with long paragraphs or sentences, will lose people's
3. It's often hard to spot your own
4. Unexplained gaps in the dates on your CV will raise questions about what you might be
5. A gap in the dates could cause an employer to think

Answers:

1. disorganised / disorganized
2. too much - interest (quickly)
3. mistakes
4. trying to hide
5. the worst

Useful advice for Section 4

Most students find section 4 of the listening test difficult, and people often ask me for advice about it. The problem is that section 4 is **supposed** to be difficult: there is no break in the middle, the speaker usually talks quite quickly, and a wide range of vocabulary is used.

So, it might seem like strange advice, but I tell my students not to worry too much about section 4. Instead, we do more work on the other three sections. If you get high scores in sections 1 to 3, you don't need many points from section 4.

Here are the scores I tell my students to aim for:

- Section 1: 10 correct answers
- Section 2: 8 correct answers
- Section 3: 7 correct answers
- Section 4: 5 correct answers

As you can see, the total is 30 (band 7), but we only need 5 correct answers for section 4.

Tips for multiple choice questions

Multiple choice questions are difficult because there is more to read, and the speaker often mentions more than one of the choices (to trick you).

Here are a few tips:

1. Try to read the questions and choices before the listening starts.
2. Don't check your answers to the previous section; use the breaks to read ahead.
3. Underline key words in each choice. The key words are those that make the difference in meaning between choices.
4. When listening, only look at the words you underlined. Don't read everything again.
5. Expect the trick! They often mention more than one choice, so be careful.

6. If you're not sure, make a good guess, then move on to the next question.
7. If you don't have time to read everything (tip 1), don't worry. Prepare as many questions as you can, then do your best on the others.

Note: These questions are supposed to be difficult. The IELTS people don't want everyone to get band 9!

Finding the key words

In the listening test, one or two key words often give you the answer. Answer the following questions by finding the key words in the transcript below. Besides, synonyms or similar words are often the key words to getting the right answers.

1. The course takes place on
 - A) Monday, Wednesday and Friday
 - B) Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday
 - C) Monday, Thursday and Friday
2. Which argument was used *against* having a drama theatre?
 - A) It would be expensive and no students would use it
 - B) It would be a poor use of resources and only a minority would use it
 - C) It could not accommodate large productions of plays

Transcript from listening test:

The course is on three consecutive mornings starting on a Monday.

A largish minority were strongly against the drama theatre, claiming that it is elitist and a waste of funds.

Top 8 tips for IELTS Listening

1. Concentrate - it's really easy to miss the answers if you lose concentration, even for a moment.
2. Read ahead - it's more important to be ready for the next section than to check the questions you have already done (check them at the end when you have 10 minutes to transfer your answers).
3. Predict - when reading ahead, try to predict what type of word you need (is it going to be a noun, verb etc?). It might help to write notes on the question paper (in your language).
4. Have the next question in mind - when you're listening for the answer to a question, be ready for the next question as well. It's easy to miss several answers if all of your focus is on one question.
5. Expect 'tricks' - the speaker may confuse you (see my recent 'listening' lessons for examples).
6. Know the exam - do you know what kind of topics/questions to expect in each section?
7. Spelling - as well as testing your understanding and vocabulary, IELTS Listening is also a spelling test!
8. Difficult questions - don't worry if some questions seem really difficult. The exam needs to have questions that separate band 8 from band 9. If you are worrying too much, you might miss the easier questions that could get you a band 7.

Recognizing synonyms and opposites

Often you don't hear the exact words given in the question. Instead, you hear a synonym, a similar word, or an opposite. For example, if the question contains the word **difficult**, you might hear **too hard** or **not easy**.

Example:

- Risky is the synonym of too dangerous
- Needs to be more active and interesting (opposite of boring)
- Had to wait a fortnight (2 weeks) i.e. too long
- Ambitious is the synonym of difficult

How to be more careful in IELTS Listening

Here are 2 tricky questions that often cause problems in the IELTS listening test:

1. The speaker says: "nearly everyone liked the conference".

Which answer is correct?

- A) Everyone like the conference
- B) Most people liked the conference

The correct answer is B, but many students put A because they hear the word "everyone".

2. The speaker says: "early afternoon".

If there is a gap-fill question, you must write "early afternoon". If you write "afternoon", your answer will be marked wrong.

Students' problems with IELTS Listening

Here are some of the problems students have with IELTS Listening:

- You only have ONE chance to listen to the recording.
- Correct spelling is important.
- Different English accents are used.
- Some of the questions are designed to trick you.

To solve these problems, we need to do a lot of listening and spelling practice. There are also some exam tips and techniques that I can give you. However, listening practice will help you much more than exam techniques. If you want to have "a good ear", you need to listen to as much English as possible, including English songs.

The importance of capital letters and plurals

1. Is it acceptable to use lower case instead of upper case e.g. "central station" when the answer is "Central Station"?

Using lower case is fine, so "central station" would be correct.

2. Will you lose marks if you miss the "s" when the answer should be plural?

Missing the "s" is sometimes acceptable and sometimes not. It's **not** acceptable when the grammar requires a plural e.g. "the journey takes three hour" would be wrong. Some answers can be singular or plural. Check the context of the question and the sentence grammar carefully.

IELTS Listening Quick Tips!

1. Main Ideas

Important words and main ideas in conversation are ones that will come up again and again. Listen carefully for any word or words that come up repeatedly. What words come up in nearly every statement made? These words with high frequency are likely to be in the main idea of the conversation. For example, in a conversation about class size in the business department of a college, the term “class size” is likely to appear in nearly every statement made by either speaker in the discussion.

2. Voice Changes

IELTS expects you to be able to recognize and interpret nuances of speech. Be on the alert for any changes in voice, which might register surprise, excitement, or another emotion. If a speaker is talking in a normal monotone voice and suddenly raises their voice to a high pitch, that is a huge clue that something critical is being stated. Listen for a speaker to change their voice and understand the meaning of what they are saying.

Example:

Man: Let's go to Wal-mart.

Woman: *There's a Wal-mart in this small town?*

If the woman's statement was higher pitched, indicating surprise and shock, then she probably did not expect there to be a Wal-mart in that town.

3. Specifics

Listen carefully for specific pieces of information. Adjectives are commonly asked about in IELTS questions. Try to remember any main adjectives that are mentioned. Pick out adjectives such as numbers, colors, or sizes.

Example:

Man: Let's go to the store and get some apples to make the pie.

Woman: How many do we need?

Man: We'll need **five** apples to make the pie.

A typical question might be about how many apples were needed.

4. Interpret

As you are listening to the conversation, put yourself in the person's shoes. Think about why someone would make a statement. You'll need to do more than just regurgitate the spoken words but also interpret them.

Example:

Woman: I think I'm sick with the flu.

Man: Why don't you go see the campus doctor?

Sample Question: Why did the man mention the campus doctor?

Answer: The campus doctor would be able to determine if the woman had the flu.

5. Find the Hidden Meaning

Look for the meaning behind a statement. When a speaker answers a question with a statement that doesn't immediately seem to answer the question, the response probably contained a hidden meaning that you will need to recognize and explain.

Example:

Man: Are you going to be ready for your presentation?

Woman: I've only got half of it finished and it's taken me five hours just to do this much. There's only an hour left before the presentation is due.

At first, the woman did not seem to answer the question the man presented. She responded with a statement that only seemed loosely related. Once you look deeper, then you can find the true meaning of what she said. If it took the woman five hours to do the first half of the presentation, then it would logically take her another five hours to do the second half. Since she only has one hour until her presentation is due, she would probably NOT be able to be ready for the presentation. So, while an answer was not immediately visible to the man's question, when you applied some logic to her response, you could find the hidden meaning beneath.

6. Memory Enhancers

You have scratch paper provided to you while taking the test. This can be a huge help. While you listen, you are free to make notes. If different people are talking, use short hand to describe the main characteristics of each speaker. As you hear main adjectives that you think might be hard to remember, jot them down quickly in order that you can refer to them later during the question stage.

Use your notes to help you remember those hard to remember facts. Don't end your test without making use of your scratch paper.

Example:

Speaker 1: I'm Bob Thomas, and I'm majoring in business development.

Speaker 2: I'm Matt Smith, and I'm majoring in chemical engineering.

Speaker 3: I'm John Douglass, and I'm majoring in speech therapy.

Your short hand might read:

Bob – Bus.

Matt – Chem. E

John – Sp. Th.

On subsequent questions about the characters, you'll be able to remember these basic facts and answer more accurately. However, don't spend so much time making notes that you miss something on the tape. You won't be able to rewind it and catch what you miss. The idea is that the notes should only supplement your memory, not replace it.

20 IELTS Listening Tips from 20 Examiners

1. You will have to practice listening to both one person speaking (a monologue) and more than one person speaking at the same time. Listening to monologues is challenging because the person doesn't often stop speaking for very long so students can feel like they are being overwhelmed. Listening to more than one person can be difficult because there may be different accents or styles of speaking and it is tricky to 'tune-in' to what is being said.
2. Be careful with your spelling. Lots of easy marks are thrown away because of poor spelling. My advice is to keep a notebook of words you find difficult to spell. Even native speakers have a hard time with some English words, so the only way is to record and learn. Both US and UK spelling are allowed in the listening test.
3. You will be given a short break (normally around 30-40 seconds) before each section and in the middle of sections 1, 2 and 3. You should NOT use this time to check your answers from the previous section. You should look at the questions in the next section and try to understand the questions and predict the answers coming next. When you predict try to think about the context of the question. Can you guess the answer? For example, if there is a '\$' in front of the answer, you will probably be listening for an amount of money. Also, establish what type of word (adjective, noun, verb etc.) the answer will be.
4. At the end you will be given 10 minutes to transfer your answers to the answer sheet. When you are doing this make sure you are very careful with spelling and make sure your answers are correct grammatically. For example, if the question was 'The man wanted to _____ a _____ car.' the answers are likely to be a verb and then an adjective. If your answers are not grammatically correct or spelled incorrectly, then they will be marked as wrong.

5. Be careful with capital letters. If your word is someone's name or a place, then it must have a capital letter to be correct.
6. Make sure you follow the instructions carefully especially when it comes to word limit. If the question states 'No more than three words' you can't write any more than this. If your answer is four words for this answer it will be incorrect.
7. A range of accents are used to reflect the international nature of English. These could be from anywhere in the English-speaking world, including the US, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand, Ireland or Australia. You could also hear one of many regional accents from the UK. You should therefore try to get used to all of these different accents. Instead of just listening to the British accent, you could try listening to the news, or anything else for that matter, from a range of different countries. A quick search on Google is all you need to find these.
8. It is important to familiarise yourself with the different types of test questions and practice IELTS past papers. When you practice these tests it should be under exam conditions, but then it is important to find out why you got certain questions wrong. Focusing on your mistakes is very important. You should listen again and again until you find out why you got the question wrong, don't just look at the answers and forget about them. If you do this you will not improve very quickly. You can also look at the transcripts and find out where you went wrong by reading.
9. I did just say that you should practice past papers, however you should also remember that this is a test of your general level of English, so you should listen to not only IELTS, but everything you can in English. In general, those who do the best on the listening test are those who have practiced listening in English the most. The best candidates listen to English a little every day.
10. Focus on getting the easy questions correct first before worrying about the more difficult questions. Anyone hoping to do well on the IELTS listening test should be getting 10 out of 10 on the first part of the test.

Make sure you can do this consistently in the first part before worrying about the other parts, especially part four.

- 11.** Make sure you don't get tricked. IELTS listening tests will often try to fool you by giving you something that seems like the correct answer first and then changing this to something else later in the recording. For example, your questions might be 'The man would like a _____ car.' At the start of the recording the person might say they want a 'big family car', but then change their minds and say they want a 'small sports car'. If you wrote down the first option you would be wrong.
- 12.** You have to get used to listening to things only once. Lots of teachers allow their students to listen to a recording three or four times. You can of course listen again and again when analysing your mistakes, but when practicing the exam you should do it under exam conditions and that means listening just once.
- 13.** Do you have messy handwriting? Lots of people do, don't worry. In the listening test you should write your answers in all capital letters if your writing is messy.
- 14.** Remember to bring an eraser. You will have to write your answers in pencil, so make sure you can change any notes or answers using an eraser.
- 15.** It's not just a listening test; it's an understanding, reading, writing, vocabulary and spelling test. Make sure you practice all of these skills under exam conditions.
- 16.** Write your answers on the question paper as you do the test. I know lots of students who don't do this and try to remember all of the answers and then use their memory to fill out the answer sheet. You are under enough pressure without making it a memory test on top of everything else. Keep it simple and note down the answers as you go.
- 17.** Practice your short hand. Short hand is when you write a shortened version of a word. For example, you might write aprox. for approximately or Ensh. for English. This will help you save time in the exam. Often two

answers will come in a very short space of time, if you are busy writing a long word instead of listening, you might miss it. Shorthand is a very personal thing, so do whatever suits you.

- 18.** Concentration is key in the listening test. It is totally normal to lose concentration and most people find it difficult to concentrate for the complete 30 minutes. To improve your concentration you need to practice active listening. Active listening involves setting yourself small tasks when you are practicing and actually doing something when you are listening, just like you will be in the IELTS listening exam.
- 19.** Don't leave any blank spaces. This might seem very obvious, but you wouldn't believe how many students do this. You are not penalized for wrong answers so you should always have a guess.
- 20.** Before each section you will be given information about the speaker and what they will be talking about. You won't be tested on this, but it will help you answer the questions that follow by understanding the context.

Taking IELTS Listening Practice Tests at Home

First, let me tell you a story... I was teaching a student recently who needed 7.5 in order to move to Canada and become a nurse. She was very good at writing, speaking and reading, but always failed to get the score she needed in listening. I was really surprised because she was one of the most focused and hardworking students I have ever met. I was determined to find out what her problem was and fix it. After talking about the problem for only a minute, it was obvious what she was doing wrong.

She told me 'I don't think I can do any more IELTS listening practice, I have listened to every practice test so many times. I'm thinking of giving up'. Can you tell what she was doing wrong?

The only listening practice she did was IELTS listening past papers over and over again. You should listen to these before your test, but you should absolutely NOT listen to them all the time. It will take you a very long time to improve this way and more importantly it is really boring!

I tell my students to follow the 90/10 rule- 10% IELTS past papers, 90% real authentic listening practice. If you listen to just 20 or 30 minutes of English every day the right way, it is far more effective than listening to lots of past papers. It will not only improve your listening skills, but your overall level of English.

6 Simple IELTS Listening Skills

Looking at the format of the IELTS listening test, we can break it down into several core skills. They are:

1. Prediction

When we look at the questions we should try to predict the answer before we hear it because this makes it easier to get the correct answer. For example, if the possible answer had a \$ sign in front of it, we would automatically know that we need to be listening for an amount of money.

You probably use prediction all the time in your native language, but you just don't think about it. For instance, when listening to the news and you hear "Volcano in South Pacific" your brain automatically starts to predict what you are going to hear and that it will probably be something to do with a volcano erupting in one of the islands in that region. If it was about something else, it would be difficult or confusing to listen to, because you were not expecting it.

We call this 'context' and it is important that you not only predict specific things like the \$ amount above, but also predict the general context of the thing you are going to listen to.

2. Synonyms and Paraphrasing

In many ways the listening test is not only a test of your listening skills, but also a vocabulary test. More often than not the answer will not be a direct match to the keywords in the question, but a synonym (words with the same or very similar meanings) or a paraphrase of those words. You therefore need to practice thinking about how words you see in the

question might be represented by different words that have the same meaning.

For example, the question could ask 'How did the education system improve from 1990-1999?', but the recording may describe how 'Schools got better in the '90s'.

3. Connected Speech

Lots of English teachers speak clearly and slowly to their students and this actually harms their progress sometimes. When you hear how native speakers actually talk, it is often very difficult to hear what is being said. This is mainly to do with connected speech. Connected Speech is the linking of words and sounds together in a sentence. For example, 'I have to go to the doctor, I have an ear ache.', might sound more like 'Ivtegotte the doctor, Ivenearake.'

Other sounds may appear 'weak' or change when put into a sentence. For instance 'Do you want to go?' might sound more like 'De ye want te go?'

4. Recognising Sign Posting Language

In two of the four parts of the IELTS listening test you will have to listen to someone speaking by themselves, one in a social context and one in a lecture style. When someone talks in this way they often use what is referred to as 'sign posting'. For example, when you give a lecture you might say 'This lecture is divided into three parts' and then you will say things like 'First of all...', 'Secondly...', 'After that...' and 'Finally...'. These phrases tell the listener what stage of the talk they are listening to

and what they are going to say next. If we know how to interpret these signals we are more likely to understand and follow the whole thing.

5. Listening to Two People Talking

Listening to two people talking at the same time is a very difficult skill to master even in your native language. In two of the four parts of the listening test you be listening to two people having a discussion. The people might have different accents, different styles of speaking and they might agree or disagree with each other. It makes up 50% of the IELTS listening test so it's one you have to master.

6. Note Taking

Most people who take the IELTS test do so because they hope to go to an English speaking university. One of the main things you will have to do there is to take notes in a lecture and IELTS therefore tests this skill. When you take notes, the lecturer will not slow down for you or care that English is not your first language, so you must learn how to take short notes and then transcribe them into more comprehensive notes after the lecture is over (with correct spelling).

For example, a chemistry lecturer might say 'Mix with 20 milliliters of hydrochloric acid.' You won't have time to write all of this so you could just write 'Mx 20ml of HCl'.

Are you an active or passive listener?

IELTS listening practice should always be active and never passive. Passive listening is when you listen and do just that. You don't think about what you are listening to and you might 'tune out' for large periods of time. Lots of students I have taught tell me they listen to English all the time and they are frustrated that they are not improving. This is because they are not actually doing anything to improve their skills when they are listening.

Active listening involves setting yourself small tasks when you are listening and actually doing something when you are listening, just like you will be in the IELTS listening exam. This might sound like hard work, but it actually saves you lots of time because 20 minutes of active listening is much more effective listening practice than many hours of passive listening.

What is Connected Speech?

We can practice this by doing something called 'micro-listening'. It involves pausing a sentence you don't understand and replaying it until you have understood all the words. Don't worry about how many times you have to do this, focus on hearing every word and breaking connected speech down into individual words.

Over time you will get used to how words link together and listening to native speakers will become much easier.

Podcasts are perfect for this because you can easily pause them and replay them. Podcasts are like individual radio shows that you can download and listen to whenever you like. I personally listen to them every day because there are literally millions of them on every topic you can think of. Whatever your interest; there will be a podcast about it.

Listening to Two People

When people are talking together they will agree and disagree with each other. The task I set my students when they are listening to two people is simply: when do they agree and when do they disagree? They listen actively to what is being said and when someone agrees and disagrees they should pause and think about what has been agreed or disagreed. For further practice they can then try to paraphrase this.

Often in the IELTS listening test, one person will be giving another a set of instructions, making an order or telling a story. When you are listening to two people talking and this happens, try to take on the role of the person listening and try to note down the important details of the story or instructions.

To find conversations between two people check out the podcast resources above. Some podcasts are just one person talking, but most are two or more people having a conversation in either a social or academic context.

Note Taking

To practice this skill you should go to one of the websites I recommended above that contain lectures. Watch them and pretend you are actually in the lecture and take notes on what is being said. Everyone has a very personal style of note taking, so it is up to you how you do this, but it should be a system that allows you to quickly note the important points, but not so short that you can't understand it after the lecture.

Finally, you should look at your notes and see if you can spell the important points you shortened. Spelling is also an important skill because it is exactly the same thing you will do at the end of the IELTS listening test.

I hope you have found this article useful and if you have any questions or suggestions please let me know below in the comments section. Next time you are doing IELTS listening practice try using the techniques in this article and you will see much better results than simply using past IELTS papers.

Finally I should say, when you are doing listening practice try to listen to something you are interested in. The internet has provided us with limitless resources to listen to, so why not listen to something you are passionate about?

Best Podcasts for English Learners

The best English students are always looking for new ways to develop their skills, and increasingly, podcasts have become an unparalleled source of ‘real English’. There are lots of podcasts out there that focus on teaching grammar, vocabulary and other skills, but they tend to be a little too much like being in English class and don’t expose learners to how real English speakers converse with each other.

Podcasts offer you an insight into what you can expect if you actually lived in an English speaking country. There are also so many of them, that you can pick the ones that suit your interests. How many times have you sat in an English class listening to a topic that puts you to sleep? With podcasts you can choose whatever you’re in to, improve your English and learn about your passion, all at the same time.

I’ll be honest and confess that I’m a bit of a podcast addict, but it’s mostly because I’ve learned more from them about a whole range of topics, including web design, social media, entrepreneurship, teaching, astrophysics, philosophy and the list goes on and on, than I ever did at school.

If you’re passionate about something, you’ll learn more effectively. So instead of listening to boring grammar tapes or learning lists of academic vocabulary, why not find a podcast you love and learn your grammar and vocabulary from them? I’ve sampled a bunch of podcasts and also had some recommendations from students, and below are some the best and most educational out there.

Where can I listen to podcasts?

Most people listen to them on their phone. If you have an Apple device, podcasts will already be a pre-installed app. You can download apps on any device. It's free and you can also listen to it on your computer at home.

How can they improve my English?

You can simply just relax and listen to them if you want, but this is what I call 'passive' listening. A much more effective way is something called 'active' listening. This is when you listen and actively think about the vocabulary, grammar, sentence structures or pronunciation.

If you hear a word you don't know, listen to the section again and try to guess the meaning. You can then note down the word on your phone or in a notebook and check to see if you were correct. Soon you will really expand your vocabulary.

If you listen to a sentence and you didn't understand a phrase, it is probably because of connected speech. Rewind and listen to it a few times and the words will become clearer each time. Soon you will get used to how native speakers naturally join words together. This is essential if you want to get one of the higher scores in the Listening test.

You can also imitate stress patterns, intonation and individual sounds that you find difficult. Make sure you're alone when you do this and not on the bus on the way to work.

These are just a few ways you can 'actively' listen. The great thing about podcasts is you can listen and learn anywhere.

You don't really need a teacher for IELTS Listening

It's difficult for teachers to help students with the listening test. The only 'technique' that students need to get used to is reading ahead: using the breaks to read the next section of questions before the recording starts.

Apart from that, it's a matter of practice. Listen to as much English as you can, do as many of the Cambridge past papers as possible, and analyse your mistakes carefully. You don't really need a teacher for this.

Almost any listening is good practice!

It's important to practise doing real IELTS listening tests (use the Cambridge books for this), but that isn't the only listening practice you can do. I advise my students to watch TV, films and online videos - anything that interests you is good for your ear!

Techniques to Practice with Cambridge IELTS books

Here are 4 techniques that you could experiment with when practising IELTS listening tests from the Cambridge books:

1. Work on specific sections rather than doing full tests. For example, you could focus on section 1 this week, then do lots of examples of section 2 next week.
2. Do a full test, but allow yourself to listen two or three times. See how many extra answers you get the second or third time you listen to the recording.
3. Do a full test, but give yourself as much time as you want during the breaks (by stopping the recording). This takes away the problem of not having time to read the questions properly, and allows you to focus more on your listening skills.
4. Change the listening test into a reading test. Instead of listening to the recording, use the transcript at the back of the book. Did you get a higher score than usual? If you did, your listening skills need more work. If you didn't, maybe your problem is related to vocabulary.

The importance of transcribing what you hear

A good way to work on your listening is by transcribing what you hear. Transcribing means writing down the full text of a recording. You might find it difficult and laborious, but this is the kind of hard work that pays off in the end.

Mastering Part 1

Part 1, the first section of the IELTS Listening test, is supposed to be the easy part of the listening test. It is almost always a simple gap-fill exercise with basic information about some kind of booking or appointment.

But does this mean that you don't need to practise part 1? The answer is no.

I recommend doing lots of practice for part 1. You should be aiming for 10 out of 10 in this part of the listening test because it is likely that you will lose points in parts 2, 3 and 4. In fact, a good idea would be to focus exclusively on part 1 until you regularly get 10 out of 10. Get as many of the official Cambridge books as you can, and do all of the part 1 questions. Don't move on to parts 2, 3 and 4 until you master part 1.

Listening Scores

Students often ask how many correct answers they need (out of 40) to get a band score of 7 in the reading and listening tests.

According to official IELTS guidelines:

- Band 6 is about 23 out of 40
- Band 7 is about 30
- Band 8 is about 35

Note: The score needed for each band can change depending on the difficulty of each test. If you have a really difficult test, the score needed for band 7 might be 28 or 29. If the test is easier, you might need to score 31 or 32 to get a 7.

Students' most frequently asked questions (FAQs)

1. What aspects of listening are tested in IELTS Listening?

Sections 1 and 2 of IELTS Listening test the types of listening skills needed for survival in an English-speaking country in situations relating to accommodation, transport, entertainment, health, shopping etc. The main focus is on understanding key points of factual information. Sections 3 and 4 focus on the types of academic situations likely to be encountered by students following a training or study course in an English speaking country, including lectures, tutorials, seminars, and discussions with other students on academic matters. Here the student must be able to identify key points as well as detail, and also to cope with the negotiation of meaning and follow a line of academic argument.

2. Do the different sections use different task types?

No. Any section may include any of the task types listed in the Overview. However, there will not generally be more than three different task types in any section, and in some cases the whole section may consist of just one task type.

3. Are all the sections equally difficult?

No. IELTS Listening tests a wide range of abilities, and in order to allow this, the sections gradually get more difficult from Section 1 to Section 4.

4. How do candidates record their answers?

Candidates write their answers on the Listening Question Paper during the test. At the end of the recording they are given 10 minutes to transfer their answers onto the Listening Answer Sheet.

5. When the instructions state that the candidate should answer in, for example, **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS**, would they lose marks by writing an answer with more than three words, even if one is 'a' or 'the'?

Yes. Answers which exceed the word limit will be marked incorrect.

6. Do answers in IELTS Listening have to be correctly spelled?

Yes. Incorrect spelling and grammar are penalised. However, words which the candidates have to write will generally be high-frequency words. Both UK and US varieties of spelling are accepted. Proper names may be spelled out in the recording.

7. Does IELTS Listening always include all the different task types listed in the Overview?

No. Each test version will contain a different combination of task types.

8. How is the band score for IELTS Listening calculated?

One mark is awarded for each of the 40 questions. A Band Score conversion table is produced for each version of IELTS Listening which translates scores out of 40 onto the IELTS 9-band scale. Scores are reported as a whole band or a half band.

9. How does the Listening band score relate to the overall band score?

The overall score is worked out based on the band scores for each of the four Modules; the final score may be reported as a whole band or a half band.

10. Will studying for IELTS Listening help students to improve their general listening skills?

Yes. Students will be encouraged to listen in different ways for different purposes and to become more aware of the strategies that English speakers use to communicate in speech.

11. What information are candidates given before each section?

At the beginning of each section candidates hear a short description of the situation they are about to listen to. This may give information about who the speakers are, where they are and what the general topic is. This description is **not** written on the Question Paper, so it is important for candidates to listen carefully.

12. Will candidates have time to look at the questions before they listen?

Yes, there is time for candidates to look at the questions before each section. They are told which questions to look at.

13. Will there be a break during the recording?

There is one break during each of Sections 1, 2 and 3 to allow candidates time to look at the following questions. However, there is NOT a break in Section 4.

14. Will there be an example at the beginning?

There is usually an example at the beginning of Section 1, and for this section **only**, the recording relating to the example is played twice.

15. How many times do candidates hear the recording?

Each recording is heard ONCE only.

16. Do the questions follow the order in which the information occurs in the recording?

Yes. This is the case for all task types in IELTS Listening.

17. Will candidates have time to check their answers at the end of each section?

Yes, candidates have half a minute to check their answers at the end of each section.

18. What is the best way to write a date?

There is no best way, and all normal ways of writing dates are accepted e.g. 7th April, 7 April, April 7th etc.

19. What is the best way to write a time?

Again, as long as the time is correct, it shouldn't matter too much how you write it. You can write 9am, 9.00am, 9:00 am etc.

20. Do we need to include articles ('a' or 'the') before nouns?

Usually you don't need the article. If the answer is a noun, just write that word. However, if you need to fill a gap in a sentence, the grammar should be correct, so you may need an article. If you're unsure, write the article that you hear.

21. Are correct use of capital letters and singular/plural important?

Yes, examiners notice these things! In the writing test, one small mistake won't affect your score, but many small mistakes will. In the listening test, a singular / plural mistake could lose you a whole mark.

22. Should we write "bookshop" or "book shop"?

I mentioned the problem of words like "bookshop" and "seafood". If the instruction says WRITE ONLY ONE WORD, then "book shop" will be acceptable as well.

Tips for IELTS Listening

Academic/General Training Module by Adam Smith

First Published in 2016

 IELTSJOURNAL