



Hints and tips for students taking the IELTS speaking test

Overall, the IELTS test is a high standard examination of your English. The following hints and tips guide will help you prepare for each part of the IELTS speaking test thoroughly and help to ensure that you achieve success in the real examination.

Remember, you can always practise your IELTS speaking test in a semi-real situation on line and have your results marked by qualified British teachers **at** www.etestme.co.uk .

The Golden rule!

There is only one the Golden rule when preparing for the IELTS speaking test and that is **to practise!** Try to practise speaking English at every available opportunity between now and the real test. Don't just practise with your teacher but try to practise with anyone you can and in any situation.

What's the test like?

The speaking test will take about 11 to 14 minutes to complete. There are three sections in total. These are as follows:

- **Part 1 – Introduction and interview.** This lasts for about 45 minutes. In this section, the Examiner will introduce him/herself and ask you questions about yourself.
- **Part 2 – Individual long turn.** Part 2 lasts for about three to four minutes. In this section, you will be asked to prepare and give a short talk for about one to two minutes on a given subject.
- **Part 3 – Two-way discussion.** Part 3 lasts for four to five minutes. In this section, you will be asked to have a short discussion linked to the subject you spoke about in part 2.

Overall, you will be assessed on your:

- fluency and coherence
- vocabulary
- range of grammar and accuracy
- pronunciation.

This means that **all** of your preparation **must** concentrate on these areas.

Part1 - Introduction and interview

During Part 1, the Examiner will introduce him/herself and ask you some questions about yourself. This is the start of the test, and it will set the scene for the remainder.

Think of the Examiner as being just like your teacher. In fact, most examiners are usually teachers, so they'll understand how you feel, because some of their own students will feel the same. They're not there to catch you out. Indeed, they'll want you to do well and will do everything that they can to make you feel comfortable.

The Examiner has a set of questions. When you're asked a question, try to answer it without repeating the whole question in your answer. For example:

If you are asked '*What's the most interesting thing about your hometown?*'

Don't reply '*The most interesting thing about my hometown is...*'

Just say '*It's...*'

Then, you can expand on your answer, if possible, by adding something like:

'Most people find this interesting because...'

You can then add a synonym of the words used by the Examiner. So, instead of *interesting* say something like:

*'Most people find this **fascinating** because...'*

So, don't try to 'fill up' your answer by repeating the question back to the Examiner and try to add a little 'extra' to show off your English. Remember, it's a conversation with the Examiner. He/she will want to see if you are fluent and coherent. They can't do this if you just repeat back large chunks of a question! Examiners are looking for your own ideas.

The topics are usually very familiar and the Examiner normally asks you about yourself. Try to give examples and create ideas, willingly. Never say, '*I don't know.*'

Here's a list of topics you might be asked about:

- Your interests
- Places in your country
- Your daily routine
- Hobbies

- Special food in your country
- Your relatives
- What people do for living in a place that you live?

Part 2 - Individual long turn

During Part 2, you'll be given a topic on a task card. You'll be given about one minute to prepare. Then you'll be required to speak for about two minutes on the topic, by yourself. During this time, the Examiner won't interrupt you and won't ask you any questions.

Here's a list of topics you might be asked to prepare for:

- A precious item
- A book, film, a piece of music or television programme
- Items of clothing
- A special journey
- People who have influenced you
- A skill you have learned
- A special day.

Use the time to plan what you're going to say! A lot of candidates don't plan what they're going to say. You won't impress the Examiner if you start speaking immediately without planning, whatever your level of English.

Always make a brief written plan, as this will help to keep you on the subject. By following the plan, you won't wander away from the points you're being asked about. The point is, if your talk isn't organised, you'll lose marks. Remember, you're being tested on your fluency and coherence. Coherence means that you must follow a logical and clear argument when you speak.

Don't worry, if you have to make up what you are going to say. You're not been tested on the factual content of what you say, but more on how you say it in English. Keep to the point, and make what you say relevant. Being relevant is just as important as being fluent.

In fact, you won't be able to say more than about 200 to 250 words in the two minutes you have available. So, never worry that you won't be able to fill the time! Two minutes will go really quickly... if you have a plan.

The task card usually asks you to describe something and then give reasons for your choice. So, for each point, write only one or two words for each prompt. In total, you should only write about 20 words in your plan.

During your planning, try the following:

- Write **notes** and don't write whole sentences.
- Write the points in a list and in order.
- Make a gap between, or draw a line between, words relating to description and explanation.
- Use nouns, verbs, adverbs and adjectives for your notes.

As you speak, look at the list that you've made so that you can organise your answer. This will ensure that you answer all parts of the task. Think about connecting words and phrases that will guide you as you speak. However, don't try to write these down in the notes; you won't have enough time.

Try to practise your organisation as much as you can before taking the test. Practise making notes and then using them to help you speak. Learn how to build what you say, around your brief notes.

Don't try to learn set phrases before taking the test, as this will just sound false. But, do learn words and phrases that will prompt and guide you when planning your talk.

One good way to practise is to record yourself. By making a plan, and then recording yourself for two minutes, you can see how much you need to write down to fill two minutes. Remember, only use headings in your planning notes. Don't try to write full sentences; you simply won't have the time.

Here's a list of prompt words that you can use to help you prepare:

- Introductory phrases - when you start your talk:
 - I'm going to talk about...
 - I'd like to talk about...
 - I want to talk about...
 - What I'm going to talk about is...
 - I'm going to describe...
- Developing phrases - when you want to expand your argument:

- First of all...
- Secondly,...
- Additionally,...
- Another thing...
- Another reason why...
- Furthermore...
- Background phrases - when you want to add some detail:
 - It's near...
 - It happened...
 - It took place...
 - It's been going on for/since...
 - At that time...
- Impression phrases - when you want to say something that made an impression on you:
 - ... impressed me
 - ... motivated me
 - ... moved me
 - ... disturbed me
 - ... touched me deeply
 - ... had an effect on me
 - ... affected me
 - ... influenced me.
- Things you like phrases - when you want to describe or talk about things you like:
 - I like... most of all
 - I enjoy...
 - I love doing...

- ... really appeals to me because...
- I take great pleasure in...

You can also use synonyms of words which appear on the task card given to you by the Examiner.

For example, if you see the word 'benefits', think of synonyms such as 'payback', 'profit', 'advantages', 'positive aspects' and so on.

By using synonyms in this way, you'll show the Examiner that you're fluent in your use of English and that you're capable of using extra words.

Try to prepare your own examples of synonyms for common words. A good method of doing this is making a list of common words and then, using a word processing package on a PC, making an equivalent list of synonyms.

Part 3 – Two-way discussion

The last part of the test is where you and the Examiner have a discussion linked to the subject from Part 2.

There is no set format to this part of the test and the Examiner is free to develop conversation as he/she sees fit. Again, the Examiner isn't trying to catch you out. However, an Examiner will want to do things such as invite you to comment and expand on a theme.

Remember that the Examiner asks you a range of questions to encourage you to speak English.

Again, remember that this part of the test only lasts for four to five minutes. This means that the Examiner can only really ask you some six to eight questions. So, don't panic!

Here are some hints to help you:

- Listen carefully to the Examiner's questions.
- Try to be fluent and only correct yourself when it's easy to do so.
- Don't focus on your mistakes; move on.
- Try to go into detail when you explain your opinion.
- Give reasons for what you say.
- Keep to the topic.
- If you don't understand the question, ask for it to be repeated. Never answer a question you don't understand.

- Don't worry if you have to make up an answer. You are being marked on your ability to speak English, not the truth of the content!
- Don't speak quickly or slowly just speak clearly.
- Concentrate on the message you are trying to give.
- Don't worry about saying too much! The Examiner will stop you if he/she wants to.
- When you say something, try to qualify it and expand it to support your opinion or reason.
- Don't overuse words such as '*actually*', '*moreover*', '*what is more*' and so on. This will come across as padding and won't demonstrate your use of English.
- If you have time for a conclusion try saying something like: '*...and therefore I ...*'
- Follow the Examiner's lead. He/she might change direction quickly by asking an unexpected question for you to comment on. For example: What about...? Here, you might answer something like: '*Well, that's possible, but I think that...*'
- Don't try to use one breath to say everything. Pace yourself! Listen to how other people speaking English pace themselves during speech. You will find it useful to listen to spoken English, such as on radio programmes, to see how this is achieved.

How will I be assessed?

As already mentioned, you will be assessed on your:

- fluency and coherence
- vocabulary
- range of grammar and accuracy
- pronunciation.

This means that **all** of your preparation **must** concentrate on these areas.

How can I prepare?

There are several things you can do to prepare for the IELTS speaking test:

1. **Speak as much English as you can before the day.** Practise in any way you can and don't just rely on speaking to your teacher. Try to have as many conversations as you can with other people, either face-to-face or over the telephone. Additionally, listen to as many good quality radio programmes as you can; particularly the BBC news. Listen very carefully to how each item is constructed and try to practise some

of the sentences you have heard. Note down any new phrases and words which you come across.

2. **Make sure you know what is involved when taking the test.** On the day of the real test, nothing should come as a surprise to you. Become completely familiar with each section of the test.
3. **Be very positive about taking the test!** Try to be cheerful, smile and breathe evenly during the conversations with the Examiner. Stay calm and be positive!
4. **Don't learn things by heart!** If you do, it will sound false and come across as if you are making a speech! You need to sound natural throughout the test.
5. **Don't worry about being nervous!** When you are nervous, you'll often perform better! The Examiner isn't trying to catch you out and will be aware that you are nervous. He or she will try to put you at ease and make you feel comfortable.
6. **Always try to use a wide range of vocabulary.** Candidates often use less vocabulary than they know when they speak because they are afraid of making mistakes. Your range of vocabulary will improve if you practise speaking English to others; listen to the radio and read newspapers and magazines.
7. **Practise speaking clearly at all times.** Remember, speaking clearly does not mean speaking slowly! Try to speak naturally and evenly throughout the test.
8. **Concentrate on what you are saying rather than trying to be accurate.** Remember, the test is based around a three part 'conversation' with the Examiner. Therefore, concentrate on the general ideas and themes of what you're saying to the Examiner, rather than worrying about the specific accuracy. You'll make fewer mistakes that way.
9. **Get used to looking people in the eye when you speak to them.** During the test, you should always try to keep eye contact with the Examiner. Don't worry if the Examiner isn't looking at you! He/She is probably making notes!

How can I become fluent and coherent?

Although practice will help you become fluent and coherent, here are some things you can do to improve your fluency and coherence:

- First, practise, practise, and practise. If you practise your English, your fluency and coherence will improve quite naturally!
- Next, really concentrate on your planning and organisation for the test. This will help you control your nerves, and allow you to become fluent and coherent on the day. If you go into the test unprepared, you may feel much more nervous. This will mean that you might lose your concentration and you might not appear fluent or coherent to the Examiner.
- Then, when you're taking the test, concentrate only on the part you're doing. Don't worry about the other parts of the test. If you prepare yourself properly, this won't be a problem.

How can I improve my vocabulary?

You can improve your vocabulary by following a few rules:

- Read as much as possible! You should read books, newspapers and magazines.
- Use an English dictionary which clearly defines words, provides information about grammar and gives sample sentences to show how words are used in context.
- Keep a record of new words and expressions. Review these on a regular basis so that they become part of your active vocabulary and remember to put them into practice!
- Listen to as many radio programmes as you can; particularly the BBC news. If you come across some new expressions, record them for future use.

How can I improve my range of grammar and accuracy?

You can improve your range of grammar and accuracy by practising as much as possible before the test! As we've said before, try to have as many conversations in English as you can before taking the test. Additionally, try to listen to as many radio programmes as you can. You will find the BBC Radio Four channel is excellent for listening to accurate grammar and content.

A good tip is for you and one of your friends to listen to a radio programme and then discuss it in English afterwards. You'll find it helpful if you keep the subjects topical, such as the news. By doing this, you'll find that you can engage in conversation with other people, in different situations, when you meet them. Everybody likes to talk about a good news story!

As with vocabulary, keep a note of any new grammatical structures you come across. Record them for future use. By doing this, you will be able to practise the context and accuracy of your grammar.

How can I improve my pronunciation?

There is only one way to improve your pronunciation; practise, practise and practise! Practise speaking English with as many people as you can. Remember, practice makes perfect! As you practise your English, you will find that your pronunciation will improve naturally. After all, if people can understand what you are saying, then your pronunciation must be good! Hmm not sure that is necessarily true!

Lastly, you can improve your pronunciation by being confident in the way that you speak. Look people in the eye and be positive when you speak English! You could put that most good dictionaries give phonetics next to words too to help pronunciation – a lot of students know the phonetic alphabet and rely on it.

Conclusion

The IELTS speaking test is all about testing your fluency and coherence, vocabulary and grammar range, accuracy and pronunciation.

There really is no substitute for practice and planning. You must take each part of the test in turn and prepare yourself for it in the ways described above.

Take every opportunity to practise your English in as many ways as you can before you take the test. Think about how you will approach each part of the IELTS speaking test and adjust your practice accordingly.

Don't panic! The speaking test isn't very long and, providing you have prepared yourself properly, it will pass very quickly!

Good luck!

Don't forget, you can always practise your IELTS speaking test at www.etestme.co.uk.