Second Edition

The IELTS

For Beginners



Adriana Mucea

The IELTS for Beginners

Second Edition

Adriana Mucea

Copyright © 2015 Adriana Mucea

All rights reserved.

Distributed by Smashwords

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this ebook with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy.

Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Ebook formatting by www.ebooklaunch.com

Contents

1. Introduction

2. The answer sheet

3. Listening

4. Reading

5. Writing

5.1 General Training task 1, the letter

5.2 Academic task 1

5.3 Task 2, the essay

6. Speaking

7. To sum up

About the author

1. Introduction

In 2012, when the first edition of this book was written, the International English Language Testing System, more commonly known as the IELTS test, was the only one accepted by universities and other authorities in Australia.

Since then, a few things have changed in this country. Institutions accept Test Report Forms which are more than two years old and the test format is now Writing-Reading-Listening-Speaking whereas in other countries the test still begins with the Listening part. For the readers' convenience, in this ebook the skills are presented in the original exam order.

Other things have remained the same. The IELTS test still has two modules, the General Training and the Academic and the four skills are usually tested on the same day. The only break the candidates have is after the last written part, while they are waiting to take the speaking test.

Based on the module taken, General Training or Academic, the candidates have different questions for Reading and Writing so they have to make sure they are taking the right one.

For first time candidates preparing for the test can be a daunting task, particularly when attempting to study alone, even if there has been an increase in the number of books, websites and blogs which provide information.

This edition aims to help these test takers by providing detailed information on the types of questions and instructions and offering some techniques to help candidates deal with these and identify the correct answers. Furthermore, at the end of each chapter there is a section providing even more helpful tips.

The information you will read in the following pages is not exhaustive but it was tried and tested in the classroom by the author's students and by the author herself when taking the test.

For more information on the IELTS test you can visit the official website, www.ielts.org.

2. The answer sheet

For the Listening and Reading skills the answers to the questions have to be written on a special answer sheet provided by the invigilators. One side is for the Listening and the other is for the Reading. Since they look exactly the same, you have to pay attention to the strip marked *Listening* or *Reading* that comes before the answer boxes to make sure you put the answers on the correct side.

All answers must be written in pencil so if you make a mistake you can simply erase it and write the correct response.

One thing that candidates have issues with is how and what to actually write on the answer sheet. Many test takers find all the answers but in the end they cannot be awarded points because of what they transfer on this page.

So here are some tips to help you:

- You should always read the instructions carefully before beginning to answer the questions as they will tell you what you are expected to write: True, False, Not Given, letters (A, B, C), numbers, Roman numerals (i, ii, iv) or words (usually no more than three).
- Be mindful not to exceed the word or number limit.
- Words which are written with a hyphen in English (e.g.: *mother-of-pearl*) count as one word.
- You do not have to write your answers in all capitals.
- You do not have to write with initial capital unless the words have to be written that way (e.g.: days of the week, months of the year, names of people and places, calendar events - Christmas, Easter, etc.)
- Do not use symbols such as /, -, or & unless they appear in the text.
- You are allowed to use some shortened forms. For instance:
  - if the answer is ’5 per cent’ you can write it as it is, or as ‘5%’
  - if the answer is ’5 dollars’ you can write it as it is, or as ‘$5’

However, if the answer is ‘water’ you cannot write it as ‘H2O’.

- Make sure that you write legibly so that the markers can understand your handwriting.

3. Listening

Even though many people study English or even live and work in English-speaking countries before the test, they can still have problems with the listening skill.

Most times it is easier to understand English in face-to-face conversations. You don't have only your ears to rely on but also your eyes, as you can see the other person's facial expressions and interpret them. You can also ask clarifying questions. But during the IELTS test you will not be able to do this.

The listening test is made up of four sections and each will be played only once. You will hear dialogues and monologues and you will have to listen for either specific information (such as dates, numbers and names) or main ideas. Some types of questions might ask you to fill in forms or flow-charts, finish sentences or choose the correct answer out of the three or four given.

There are some similarities between this section and the Reading one in terms of the types of questions (multiple choice, fill in the blanks, table/flow-chart/notes completion, diagram labelling), some word limits and potential approaches to handling tasks.

Let's take a look at some types of questions and what can help you identify the answers faster.

> Fill in a form/plan/map/diagram/notes/summary/sentences with words or numbers from the recording.

In this task you need to fill in the blanks as you are listening to the recording. Your answers are expected to match the grammar of the sentence where you insert them. Therefore, some small changes may be required, for example, from singular to plural (i.e.: *book* to *books*) or from present tense to past (i.e.: *dance* to *danced*).

Approach:

• Read your instructions carefully to find out what your word and/or number limit is.

• Read the form or sentences, study the plan or map to find out what information you already have and to try to predict what is missing.

• Think of synonyms and paraphrases for the key words as you may not hear the exact ones on the recording.

> Multiple choice questions

Here you have to select the correct answer out of those given. You may actually hear information related to all the answer choices however, only one is correct.

Approach:

• Read the instructions paying attention to the question word (e.g.: who, when, why, what), the subject and the verb of the question. They can give you clues as to the type of answer you need, for example singular or plural, present or past, a number, a year or a person's name.

• Read all the possible answers, but keep in mind that only one is correct.

• Think of synonyms and paraphrases for all the possible answers as you may not hear all those exact words.

> Matching statements to a list of options provided (e.g.: names, dates, etc.)

In this exercise you will be given some statements, which follow the order of the information on the recording and a list of randomly arranged options.

Approach:

• Read the statements and read all the options provided.

• Find out if you are allowed to use any of the options more than once. This would mean that you may be allowed to have the same answer for more than one question. For instance:

Question 18: A

Question 19: B

Question 20: A

• If the options on the list are proper nouns (e.g.: names of people or places) you can expect to hear the same on the recording. However, if the options on the list are common nouns (e.g.: names of usual things) then you may hear synonyms or paraphrases.

> Short answer questions

Here you are expected to provide the shortest and most logical answers to the questions. Moreover, they have to be grammatically correct.

Approach:

• Read the instructions carefully to find out what your word and/or number limit is.

• Pay attention to the question word, the subject and the verb. They can give you clues as to the type of answer you need, for instance a singular or plural noun, a name, a number.

• In your answers you should not use words from the question unless they are absolutely necessary to create a logical and correct answer.

• You can check if your answer is correct by using it in a sentence that would be the full answer to the question. If the sentence is correct and makes sense, then your answer is correct.

• If your answer needs to be made up of more than one part, then this is signaled in the question. For instance, the question would begin with '*Which TWO cities…?'*, thus your answer needs to contain two names. To avoid going over the word limit you may use a comma (,) or a semicolon (;) to separate the two answers or leave more blank space in between.

> Multiple answer questions

In this case you need to select more than one answer from those provided. The order in which these are listed is random.

Approach:

• Read the instructions to find out if you need to put all answers in the same box on your answer sheet or in more.

• Read the questions and all possible answers.

• You may transfer the answers in any order you like on the answer sheet.

Tips to improve your listening score

• Read your instructions with care. They will tell you how many words you need in the blank spaces or how many answers you need to identify.

• Read the questions and possible answers when instructed.

• Try to predict the words which are missing, more specifically the type of word (noun, adjective, verb or other) or if a singular or plural form is required.

• Make sure everything is spelled correctly and is grammatically correct.

• Review the spelling rules in English if necessary before the exam.

• When you transfer your answers make sure everything is legible.

• Listen to many things before the test, for instance the news, whether on TV or on the radio, podcasts, even your favourite songs in English. If possible, listen to speakers of English with different accents, for example American, British, Australian and others.

• Do listening activities from practice books available to get used to the style of the questions and the time limits.

• You must concentrate for the duration of the test as the recordings will be played only once and the breaks in between are enough only to allow you to spell-check the answers you have just written, to read the following questions and try to anticipate the type of answer you will have to write.

4. Reading

In this part of the test there are some differences between the candidates, meaning the reading passages for the General Training module are different from the ones of the Academic module. Here is how:

	General Training Module	Academic Module
Part 1	2 shorter passages Various topics: advertisements, leaflets, notices, travel brochures, etc.	1 passage Topic: any
Part 2	2 shorter passages Various topics: descriptions of college or university campuses, courses, admission requirements, housing, utilities, etc.	1 passage Topic: any
Part 3	1 passage Topic: any	1 passage Topic: any

There are however, more similarities between the two types of candidates:

- The texts come from authentic sources.
- The number of words the candidates read is the same.
- The time allowed for everyone is one hour.
- The number of questions to answer is forty.
- The types of questions are the same.

Some common issues that candidates have:

- Unable to finish the test as they cannot read fast enough

Approach: use scanning and skimming techniques when reading.

Scanning does not actually involve reading but looking at the paragraphs to identify the information needed. This is usually names of people or places, dates and numbers.

Skimming implies a quick reading to get only the main idea of a paragraph, the gist.

- Unable to transfer the answers on the answer sheet in time.

Approach: transfer answers when every task has been completed or at the end of a section. The answer sheet must be completed in pencil thus, if a mistake is later found, it can be easily corrected.

- Unknown words delay the finding of the answers or they might completely block it.

Approach: the meaning of the words should be guessed from context. If possible, before the exam test takers should take some time to try to improve their vocabulary by reading texts from various fields, writing, listening to music, podcasts or even watching TV.

The types of questions are the same, irrespective of the module you are taking. They are of two kinds: those that follow the order of the information in the text and those that are in random order. Tasks with questions of the first type can usually be completed fairly quickly whereas questions of the second kind will require more time as the paragraphs have to be read several times.

Here are the categories of questions that follow the order of the text and ways to approach them:

> multiple choice questions

You have to identify the correct answer out of the three or four given.

Approach: Read the questions or statements to identify the key words. They can actually tell you where in the text to look for the answer.

If you decide to read the possible answers, be careful not to let them influence your final decision. Even though they may all relate to the text, only one of them is actually correct.

You may find it easier to read only the question or statement, locate the information in the text and read onward so as to find the answer. Then

you could go over the given choices and identify the best paraphrase for the words you have just found.

> multiple answer questions

Here you are expected to select more than one answer from a given list. As the answers will not appear in the text in the order in which they are listed, you may transfer them on the answer sheet in any order you like.

Approach: You should read the question first to try to identify any clues and then skim the paragraph(s) which discuss the statement and the possible answers.

> short answer questions

You have to answer questions related to the text using very few words and/or numbers. Keep in mind that the answers you provide have to be the shortest, most logical ones and they have to be grammatically correct.

Approach: Pay attention to the question words and the verb tenses when reading as they are very important. Avoid using words from the question in the answer unless they are necessary to make it correct.

> Yes/No/Not Given (identifying the writer's views and claims)

In this task you are expected to decide if the statements agree with the writer's views and claims from the text. Your answers are expected to be *Yes*, *No* or *Not Given*. Even abbreviated forms Y, N, NG are acceptable.

Approach: Read the statements to identify the key words. Pay close attention to the subjects and the verb tenses as they can be helpful in identifying the answers quicker.

In order to avoid errors, candidates could read a statement and locate its answer before moving to the next one.

> True/False/Not Given (identifying information)

This time you are expected to decide if the information in the statements agrees with the one from the text. Your answers are expected to be *True*, *False* or *Not Given*. The abbreviated forms T, F, NG are acceptable.

Approach: As this task is similar to the previous one, the way to handle it should be alike. Read the statements and identify the key words. Pay close attention to the subjects and the verb tenses so as to make sure you get the right answers.

> table/notes/flow chart/diagram completion

Here you are expected to fill in the missing information with words or numbers from the text. Keep in mind that you have a word or number limit which you should not exceed. Moreover, your answers have to be grammatically correct. This means that the words you select from the text have to match the grammar of the sentence in the chart, diagram, table or flow chart.

Approach: Read the information already given to find out which paragraphs it matches. This will help you identify quicker where to look for the missing information and also to predict the type of word missing (i.e. noun, adjective, verb, adverb, etc.).

> sentence completion with words from the text

In this kind of task you will have several sentences which either have gaps in the middle or are missing one or more words at the end. You will have to pay attention to the word or number limit and also to the grammar of the sentences as the answers you select have to match it.

Approach: Read the sentences from beginning to end and look for hints. This will help you identify the paragraphs which contain your answers. More importantly, look at the words before and after the blank space. They can allow you to predict what is missing: noun, adjective, verb, adverb or combinations of these.

> summary completion

This particular type of task has two versions.

1) Fill in the blanks in a summary with words from the text. A word or number limit will be given.

Approach: Read the summary paying close attention to the words that come before and after the gaps to try to predict what is missing and to find out which paragraph(s) you need to skim to get your answers. Keep in mind that the words you take from the text have to grammatically fit the summary. It is a good idea to re-read it at the end of the task to check that it does not contradict the text. Also, if you notice any grammar mistakes, you may need to reconsider some of your answers.

2) Fill in the blanks in a summary with words given in a box.

This time the words you need to use are synonyms and paraphrases of the words in the text.

Approach: Similarly to the previous version, you should read the summary to identify the paragraph(s) which were summarised and to try to predict what is missing. You need to then skim the list of words to get the one that best matches the idea in the text. When you have filled in all the gaps you should take a minute to re-read the summary and check for grammar accuracy. You could also skim the reading passage to make sure your answers are correct before you transfer them to the answer sheet.

Here are the categories of questions that are random and ways to approach them:

> match statements to names/dates from a list

In this task you may have:

a) more statements than items on the list

In this case it is expected that you use any of the answers more than once.

Approach: Read the statements and identify the key words in each. Scan the text for all instances where the names or dates appear and read those paragraphs.

b) less statements than items on the list

Most times you do not need to use the same answer more than once. But if it is the case, it will usually be announced in the instructions in the form of a note (e.g.: NB: You may use any answer more than once).

Approach: If there are significantly more items on the list than the number of statements, then you may want to begin by reading the questions so as to get the clues and then start reading the text to identify the paragraphs that have the answers.

If this is not the case, then the previous approach may be applied.

> match statements to paragraphs

For this kind of task usually each question will be matched to one of the paragraphs. There are situations however, when the same paragraph is the answer to two or more questions. In this case the instructions will usually have a note (NB: You may use any answer more than once.) to warn the candidates.

Approach: Read the instructions and then the statements to identify the key words. The text should be skimmed from the beginning for each statement.

> match beginnings of sentences with endings

Here you need to choose the appropriate ending from a list for each given beginning. The sentence conclusions provided will be paraphrases of the reading passage. At the end of the task, the newly formed sentences should reflect the information in the text and should be grammatically correct.

Approach: You should read the beginnings to locate the key words. You could then read the given endings to see if you can make any matches. However, if you believe that the list of endings is too long and confusing, then, you should skim the text to try to locate the first parts of the sentences and their conclusions. It should then be easier to choose an ending from those provided.

> classify statements according to information/cues given

In this task usually every cue given will match a statement but sometimes the answers may be used more than once. If that is the case, a note will most likely appear in the instructions to warn the candidates.

Approach: Read the statements and locate the important words. If possible, scan the text to identify which paragraphs contain the information/cues given and then read them and find the matching answers. Alternatively, skim the text from the beginning to find out which paragraphs contain the information in the statements and decide on the answers.

> match the headings

This task is usually considered one of the difficult ones. The candidates have to match headings from a random list to the paragraphs of the text. Sometimes an example is done, meaning a paragraph has already been matched. Thus, the candidates no longer need to read that part and they cannot use that heading again.

Approach: There will always be more headings than paragraphs and the headings are already made up of key words, therefore, the focus should be on the text. Each paragraph should be read to get the main idea and this should correspond to one of the headings.

If you cannot decide between two or more headings for one part of the text, then leave it for a while and move on. At the end of the task, when most of the headings have been matched, re-read the paragraph and choose from among the remaining ones.

Tips to improve your reading score

Before the test:

- Read, either in print or electronically, articles on different topics. Look up any words you have trouble understanding and try to use them in conversation or writing whenever possible. This will not only be beneficial for your vocabulary but also for your reading speed.
- Do practice activities and time yourselves. Try not to spend more than twenty minutes for one section. This should include reading the text(s), identifying the answers and transferring them.

During the test:

- Read your instructions carefully to understand the type of task.
- Read the questions or statements paying attention to the key words as they are paraphrases or synonyms of the words in the text.
- If you come across a word you do not understand, try to guess the meaning from context. Also, you may find sometimes that the definition of the word or some hints about it can be found in subsequent paragraphs.
- Make sure that you do not exceed the word or number limit if there is one.
- Ensure that you transfer the answers in the correct boxes. Preferably, the transfer should be made at the end of each task or section to avoid rushing at the end.
- If you have to write two or more answers in the same box you can write the answers separated by a comma (,) or a semicolon (;) and in any order you want.
- If you come across a section that has both random tasks and tasks which follow the order of the text, you may find it easier to begin with the latter ones.
- Make sure your answers are legible on the answer sheet.

5. Writing

For candidates who are not accustomed to writing regularly in English, or even writing by hand, this part of the test can be very difficult.

Each piece of writing is scored based on:

- How well the person answered the question,
- How logically the answer is organised,
- How correct the grammar, spelling and punctuation are,
- How varied the vocabulary is.

Moreover, the handwriting must be legible otherwise the markers will not be able to understand it and therefore, will not be able to give a good score.

The Writing test is made up of two tasks for each module:

	General Training Module	Academic Module
Task 1	Letter	Describing a visual (chart, table, diagram, graph, map)
Task 2	Essay	Essay

For Task 1 candidates are expected to write at least 150 words, while for Task 2 at least 250. It is advisable to write more than the minimum number of words given, however, not too many, as it is possible to go off topic and make spelling and/or grammar mistakes.

5.1 General Training task 1, the letter

Read the instructions thoroughly to ensure you understand exactly what you have to write about and determine the type of letter, formal or informal.

Any letter should contain the following elements:

- Greeting

- Introduction
- Body paragraphs
- Closing and signature

Formal letters are usually addressed to people whom we have never met (i.e.: managers of restaurants, banks, hotels, supermarkets, etc.) or have met but are not friends - also referred to as semi-formal letters (i.e.: work supervisors, neighbours, travel agents, etc.).

You should choose an appropriate form of greeting (unless it has already been provided in the instructions) and a matching closing. For example, if the greeting is *Dear Sir/Madam*, your closing should be *Yours faithfully*, followed by your full name. These are used when writing letters to recipients whom you have never met.

If you are writing to a person you have met before then you need to make up a name and a sex, for instance, *Dear Mr Jones*. Here your closing should be *Yours sincerely*.

The greeting should be followed by a paragraph where you have to introduce yourself, state the reason for writing and provide other details if necessary.

Even informal letters should begin with *Dear* followed by the first name of the person to whom you are writing, for example, *Dear Paul*. This type of letter is usually addressed to a friend or a relative.

The introduction of informal letters should have at least one sentence to establish the relationship between you and the recipient. For example: *I was really pleased to receive the letter and the university graduation pictures from you*.

As a closing, candidates have more choices: *Regards*, *Best regards*, *Lots of love*, etc. depending on the relationship to the recipient.

The body of every letter should be made up of two or three paragraphs detailing the information given in the instructions. You should avoid grouping everything in one large section as it may be very difficult to understand.

These should be followed by a short concluding sentence (e.g.: *I look forward to your reply*.) and then the closing and signature.

Tips to improve your writing score

• Read the instructions. If the greeting for a letter has been provided and you write a different one this may be seen as an error.

• Consider the tone of your writing. It is usually expected to be formal. If you have to write an informal letter, you may use some informal expressions but not too colloquial or slang.

• Do not use shortened forms of words (i.e.: *pics* instead of *pictures*) or contractions (i.e.: *can't* instead of *cannot*).

• Avoid using exclamation marks (!) or question marks (?).

• Take some time to think of the vocabulary you may want to use and decide which synonyms and paraphrases would be appropriate, to avoid using the same words over and over again.

• You may find it useful to spend a few minutes writing down your ideas before you begin writing the actual letter.

5.2 Academic task 1

Study the given data and make sure you understand exactly what it presents (numbers in hundreds, thousands or millions, percentages, instructions - as is the case in process diagrams - or other types of information). Most times you have to report the main features and make comparisons so you should not plan on writing about every single number or change in trend.

Only if you have a process diagram you are expected to briefly describe each stage so as to have a completed process and a final product.

You should write a short introduction and conclusion. The body paragraphs, usually two or three, are expected to contain the bulk of the information.

Tips to improve your writing score

• Read the instructions.

• Be careful with the tone of your writing. It is expected to be formal, thus formal vocabulary is required.

• Think of the language you may want to use and decide which synonyms and paraphrases would be appropriate to avoid using the same words throughout your writing.

• Think of words and phrases to help you explain the changes in trends. For example: *doubled, tripled, dropped by half*, etc.

• You are not expected to provide your own interpretation of the data.

5.3 Task 2, the essay

There are three main types of essay usually given to both types of candidates in the test: argumentative, discussion, problem or cause and solution.

Every essay should have:

- Introduction: a statement closely related to or paraphrasing the information given in the question.

- Thesis statement: a sentence to let the markers know what type of essay to expect. For example: *I agree with…* or *This essay will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of...* or *This essay will look into the causes of… and suggest solutions.*

- Body paragraphs (minimum two): each should have either a reason to support the thesis, advantages, disadvantages, causes or problems or solutions. For each argument you need at least a sentence to justify it and a short example.

- Conclusion: restate what you have written in the body paragraphs. Make sure you do not add any new information.

In an **argumentative** essay you are expected to agree or disagree with a specific topic. In this case, in the body paragraphs you should have at least two reasons to justify your thesis statement. Each reason has to be clearly stated, preferably at the beginning of each paragraph. You should be able to explain and provide an example for each.

Sometimes you may need to provide the extent to which you agree or disagree (e.g.: totally/completely, partly/somewhat, etc.). Here, the content of your body paragraphs depends on your choice of thesis:

- *I completely agree* or *I completely disagree.* ? two reasons to support this thesis

- *I partly agree* or *I partly disagree* ? one reason to support the thesis and another to argue the opposite side, meaning the reason why you

cannot agree or disagree completely.

This type of essay is subjective, therefore you should write in first person, so you should use words such as *I, me, my* or phrases such as *in my opinion, I believe, I think*.

In order for your essay to be considered correct you have to take a side and justify it. You cannot say that you are neutral or that you neither agree nor disagree.

To help you write this type of essay faster, during the planning stage you can try to think of reasons for both sides. If you would like to agree with the topic yet you cannot come up with enough reasons, then maybe it would prove quicker and easier to write about the other side.

The **discussion** essay, as the name says, is asking you to discuss the two sides of a topic. This means objectively analysing them or writing about both advantages and disadvantages. In this case you cannot take a side and you should not give your opinion unless it is asked in the question.

You have to avoid the words *I, me, my* or the phrases *in my opinion, I believe, I think* and have more impersonal and passive voice constructions, such as: *it is said*, *research has found*, etc.

Ensure that you have separate paragraphs for each side of the discussion or advantages and disadvantages. Your opinion, if needed, may appear after these paragraphs as the focus should be on the discussion.

The third type of essay will ask you to identify some **causes or problems** of a given situation and provide some **solutions**. For this reason one of the body paragraphs could focus on the issues and the other on solutions. Just like in the discussion essay you should not take sides and avoid giving your own opinion unless required by the question.

Tips to improve your writing score

- Read the instructions and the writing prompt to make sure you understand them and the style of essay you are asked to write.
- Be careful with the tone of your writing. It is expected to be formal.

• Take a few minutes to plan what you are going to write. It is not desirable to waste time erasing and rewriting the same paragraph over and over again. Write your ideas on the question booklet and tick them if you have used them. Do not write full sentences, just key words. For example:

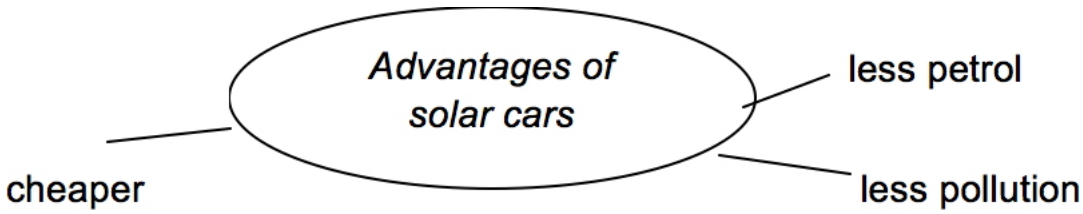
'*Advantages of solar cars':*

- cheaper

- less petrol used

- less pollution

If you are a visual person, you can draw mind maps.



• Identify the key words as you are planning and select some synonyms for them since you are expected to use varied vocabulary in order to get a higher score and this might prove difficult to do while you are writing.

• Make sure you use varied linking words to connect your ideas. Using '*and*', '*so*', '*but*' several times is not desirable. Try to include '*moreover*', '*therefore*', '*however*', '*although*' and others.

• Make sure your paragraphs are easily identified, either by using an indent (some space at the beginning of the first line of a new paragraph) or by leaving a blank line after each idea.

• You are expected to have both simple and complex sentences in your paragraphs, but you should not write very long sentences as they may become difficult to understand and you may make grammar mistakes.

• Do not use contractions (e.g.: don't, can't) because they count as one word. Write all words in full.

• Do not use any symbols, such as '*&*' instead of the word 'and', question (?), exclamation (!) or quotation ("…") marks.

• The conclusion should not have any information that has not already appeared in the essay.

- If you are not confident in your knowledge of grammar or spelling, you should take some time before the test to revise the points you find challenging and do some exercises.
- Practice writing by using questions which have appeared in previous IELTS tests and ask a friend to read them to make sure your handwriting is legible and your thoughts can be easily understood.

One of the main issues that candidates face is the lack of ideas. Added to the pressure of writing in a limited amount of time may lead to unfinished essays and, therefore, an unsuccessful score. For this reason, practicing as often as possible is very important. The more you write, the easier it will become.

6. Speaking

If candidates take all the test components on the same day then this is the last one. In some test centres around the world, however, the Speaking may be done either before the written sections or after, on a different day. Each candidate is individually assessed by an examiner for almost 15 minutes and the test is recorded.

Just like in the Writing, the examiner is interested in coherence, range of vocabulary, sentence structures. But he or she will also take into consideration the number of mistakes the candidate makes and the pronunciation (whether it is correct or not, according to the rules of the English language). The candidate's accent is not important for the final score.

The Speaking test is made up of three parts:

- A short interview, where the examiner asks questions on various topics (family, education, job, hobbies and interests, etc.).

The examiner can simply jump from one topic to another, asking candidates questions that might seem too easy sometimes. The reason for this part is to make them fell less stressed about the test and also to try to determine their level of English.

- The long turn

In this part the candidate will receive a topic card and they will be allowed one minute to prepare and make notes. Then the candidate will speak uninterrupted for as close to two minutes as they can on the topic.

Some candidates consider this part very challenging because, just like in the Writing, they find it difficult to come up with ideas and the minute they have is not enough to prepare.

- A discussion with the examiner

In this last part, the candidate will be asked questions based on the topic from the cue card. This is also seen as difficult because the questions are longer and test takers are expected to answer them immediately, without written preparation.

Tips to improve your speaking score:

• If you do not understand a question, ask the examiner to repeat it.

• Pay attention to the question word and the tense (present, past, future) of the questions. Your answer should contain an appropriate one.

• The question card you receive from the examiner has some bullet points that tell you what information to include in your monologue, so use them. Make some notes so you do not forget what you want to say. Add some extra details to make sure you speak for almost two minutes.

• You should try to make your monologue more like a story than the answer to questions, so you should avoid repeating the information on the card before you begin your answer.

• If you cannot answer a question straight away, starting with *'aaah'*, *'umm'* or *'so'* is not always a good idea. Try to use a phrase like *'Well, that's an interesting question', 'Well, let me think', 'I have never thought of it this way'* or anything else you find appropriate.

• Practice by using books containing past exam questions. Ask a friend to play the role of examiner and to time and record you. You could then play back the recording to see how well you answered the questions, what synonyms and paraphrases you used and what mistakes you made.

7. To sum up

Before the test:

> Revise spelling rules of English.

> Revise grammar rules of English.

> Read as much as you can (newspapers, magazines, books, etc.)

> Watch TV and listen to music in English.

> Write and speak English often and ask the others to correct you if you make mistakes.

> Practise writing by hand in pencil or pen to get used to it again.

> Do some practice tests to see how long it actually takes you to answer all the questions. Time yourself or ask a friend to time you.

> Make sure you have identification documents with you on the test day.

During the test:

> Read the questions carefully.

> Make sure that all the answers are written in pencil on the answer sheet (for Listening and Reading) and in the correct order.

> Make sure everything is spelled correctly.

> Make sure you have not gone over the maximum number of words allowed in one box.

> If you cannot find the answer to a question during the Reading do not spend too long trying to work it out. Answer another question and come back to this one later. Remember to leave some sign on the answer sheet in this question's box so you do not write the next answer in the wrong place.

> Leave a blank row between paragraphs in the Writing or some space at the beginning of the first line.

> During the Speaking test, especially in the long turn, most candidates are very nervous but try not to speak too quickly. It is very

likely you will speak for less than the time required and you will make some mistakes.

I hope you will find this information useful and it will make your IELTS experience less stressful.

Good luck!

About the author

Adriana Mucea is a teacher of General English and IELTS preparation classes and she has taken this test herself. Born in Europe and educated in Europe and Australia, she currently teaches and writes in Sydney.

Her previous ebooks, *'The IELTS for Beginners'* and *'Which Article?'*, can be found at Smashwords and other retailers.