

Academic IELTS — A Distilled Personal Experience

This guide is a summary of a complete experience of preparing for the IELTS exam: the resources I used, the methods that worked for me, and the mistakes that cost me time and band scores. It is organised according to the four sections of the exam, with a dedicated section on the shared fundamentals, and tables containing all of the links at the end.

My score before preparation

Overall band	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking
6	6.5	6 – 6.5	5	6

My score in the exam

Overall band	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking
7.5	8	8	7	6.5

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1 Overview of the exam

- **The exam is divided into four sections:** Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking.
- **Total duration:** about 2 hours and 45 minutes. The Listening, Reading and Writing sections are taken on the same day with no break between them, while the Speaking test may fall on the same day, or within a week before or after it.
- **The real level of the exam:** it may be easier than the Cambridge books in more than one respect, but the stress factor plays a large role in the final result.

A very important note — consistency

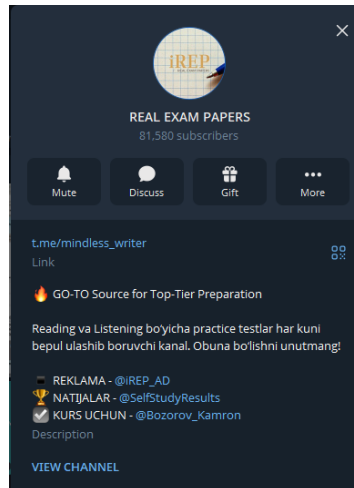
Interrupting your studying, even for a period that seems minor to you, can lower your level noticeably.

2 The shared fundamentals — for all sections

This section is not specific to one part of the exam; it is the backbone of all the sections, and I recommend setting it up from day one.

a. Shared resources

- **Cambridge books, from 13 to 21 approximately:** the single most important resource, **and they are for all sections**, not for one section only.
- **Other official and accredited books** that you can practise with:
 - Collins Practice
 - IELTS Trainer
 - Official Guide to IELTS Academic
- **Paid practice websites that I subscribed to:** I started with the **Engnovate** site, then subscribed to the **IELTSX** site.
- **Free Telegram channels:** very useful; they publish mock tests that may not simulate the exam 100%, but they are good for practice.



b. The documentation file

- You must have **Documents** in which you record your mistakes as you go, so that you do not forget them and can review them at intervals (I prefer **Notion** or **Google documents**).
- And there are **two very important files**:
 - **The spelling mistakes file** — Spelling
 - **The new words file**, regardless of its source: Reading tests, or Listening, or words from articles on the internet, or elsewhere.

c. The ANKI program for cards — Flashcards

- Every so often, once you have gathered **15 or 20 words in the new words file**, create a new **Deck** in Anki.
- Creating the cards by hand is a very exhausting business, so I used to use **Claude Code** to generate them, and I would ask it for:
 - The meaning of the word **in English** (not in Arabic).
 - Synonyms
 - Examples
- **The daily routine**: 30 to 40 minutes a day on Anki — and this benefited me greatly.
- **Note**: ANKI is free on Windows and Android. On iOS, however, it has to be opened from the **Safari** browser, not as an app.
- How to write the prompt for Claude: [the Anki prompt document](#)
- **Note**: it is possible to run into difficulties creating the ANKI Deck on a free Claude account.

PRODUCTION

DEFINITION
Extremely important and urgent; (n) something that must be done.

SYNONYMS
essential, vital, crucial, urgent, obligatory; a necessity, a requirement

What is the word? (adjective / noun)

Imperative

Repeat ×3

EXAMPLES

- It is imperative that action be taken immediately.
- Reducing emissions has become a moral imperative.
- Speed was imperative if the patient was to survive.
- It is imperative to record the data accurately.

COLLOCATIONS

- It is imperative that
- absolutely imperative
- a moral imperative
- an economic imperative
- imperative to do something
- become imperative

An example of an automatically generated Anki card: the definition, the synonyms, the examples, and the Collocations

3 Listening

Structure of the section

- **Four parts (Parts) and 40 questions**, at 10 questions per part. The length of the recording is about **30 minutes**, to which **10 minutes are added for transferring the answers** in the paper version (and two minutes for review in the computer version).
- **The recording is played only once** — there is no replay.
- The four parts:
 - **Part 1** — a dialogue between two people in a general everyday situation (a booking, or an enquiry, or filling in information).
 - **Part 2** — one person speaking in a general everyday situation (an explanation, or instructions, or a description of a place).
 - **Part 3** — a discussion between two to four people in an academic or training context.
 - **Part 4** — an academic lecture by one person without interruption.
- The parts are **graded in difficulty**, except that **Part 4** is usually easy.

Practice resources

- **The TEDx channel on YouTube**: I used to listen to it a great deal; it has nothing to do with IELTS, but it helped me develop my listening skill noticeably — [youtube.com/@TEDx](https://www.youtube.com/@TEDx)
- **Veritasium** (available on Spotify): its subjects are academic, and you can pick up from it vocabulary covering more than one topic.

The rest of the resources are in section 2 — the Cambridge books, the official books, the practice websites, and the Telegram channels.

Method and tactics

- **Listen to the practice material at 1.25 speed:** it used to be said that the exam speed is higher, and frankly I found it to be the same speed — but it is good to get used to what is harder.
- During the time available for reading the questions: read the **Part 1** questions very quickly because they are simple, and move straight on to **Part 2**, where you read half the questions or all of them, so that you leave **enough** time for reading the **Part 3** questions, since it is the hardest part.

4 Reading

Structure of the section

- **Three passages (Passages) and 40 questions in 60 minutes.**
- The passages **increase in difficulty gradually** from the first passage to the third.
- **The question types are numerous and varied** — True/False/Not Given, Matching Headings, Summary Completion and others — and this is the first thing you must master.

Practice resources

- **Udemy — IELTS Band 7 Preparation Course:** from it I studied the question types, and it is the same course from which I studied Writing — [course link](#)
- **The 500-word file for Reading:** study it in full — it is the foundation of the vocabulary for this section — [file link](#)
- **The additional Reading vocabulary file:** extra vocabulary specific to reading passages — [file link](#)

Method and tactics

- With so many videos out there for this section, the only method I found effective is [IELTS Lilie's](#):
 - Read **the title of the paragraph** first.
 - Then read **all the questions** at the beginning.
 - Then move forward **paragraph by paragraph**, and see whether it contains any answer to the questions you read.
 - We move on to the next paragraph after answering any question relating to the previous paragraph, and so on.
- And the way I divided the time was: **15 minutes for the first part, 20 minutes for the second part, and 25 minutes for the third part.**

Based on personal experience

No technique will help you if you do not have a **sufficient stock of vocabulary**. Technique organises your time for you, but it does not compensate for a shortage of vocabulary.

Reviewing after every test — the most important step

- Understand **where you went wrong**, and why this answer is correct and that one is wrong.
- Record **the new words** from the questions.

- Copy the passages into **ChatGPT** and ask it to extract the difficult words, or those above a certain level, then transfer these words into **the new words file** mentioned earlier, in preparation for creating a Deck in ANKI.

Mistakes and personal experience

- This is **the section I stumbled in most**, for one reason: I was not reviewing my mistakes. I stayed stuck at **6 and 6.5 in the practice tests** for a long time, then it rose gradually to the 7.5 range.
- My level rose after I began **reading articles, and with continuous practice**.

5 Writing

Structure of the section

- **Two tasks (Tasks) in 60 minutes**, and both are compulsory.
- **Task 1** — describing and summarising visual information, **at least 150 words**, with a suggested time of about **20 minutes**.
 - The possible Task 1 types: Pie chart · Line graph · Mixed charts · Bar chart · Map · Process
- **Task 2** — an opinion or discussion essay, **at least 250 words**, with a suggested time of about **40 minutes**.
- **Task 2 carries double the weight of Task 1 in the score** — try to allocate your time accordingly.

Practice resources

- **Udemy — IELTS Band 7 course**: from it I learned Task 1 primarily — [course link](#)
- **For the Process specifically**: [this course on Udemy](#), in addition to the **IELTS Advantage** channel on YouTube.
- **ChatGPT**: the mainstay for correction and assessment. I bought the paid version in the last two weeks, but the free version is enough.
- **IELTS Liz website**: examples and the topics that may come up — [IELTS 100 Essay Questions](#). But it is not necessarily the case that the question will come from there — although the writing questions are mostly repeated.
- **Writing9 website**: frankly excellent for reading essays at different levels — [website link](#).
- **The IELTS with Juva and Fasttrack IELTS channels on YouTube**: from them came part of the techniques, which I learned haphazardly from more than one source.

Method and tactics

General rules before starting

- To obtain a high score, it is very important that you review all your mistakes with ChatGPT and identify your weak points.
- If your weak point from the outset is **Grammar**, then you must study it first before you continue with Writing.
- The mistakes that ChatGPT extracts: record them and review them day after day until they settle in and you stop repeating them.
- Set aside a separate section for **Natural Collocations**, because they are very important in Task 2, such as:
 - Perform better academically

- Adopt a healthy lifestyle

Task 1

- **How I studied:** writing down what came up in these lectures, in addition to vocabulary from ChatGPT for everything relating to a particular question, so that I would have variety in the way I write sentences.

Task 2

- I used to ask ChatGPT to correct my work and prepare a table according to each Criteria, containing all the mistakes and their corrections along with the reason.
- **And most importantly:** learn vocabulary connected with the common topics — the environment, technology, artificial intelligence, health, and others — in addition to the different question types such as Discuss both views and Agree or disagree and others.
- **Do not be discouraged** if ChatGPT assesses you with a low score — what matters is that you benefit from the mistakes and learn from them. And you can ask it for an improved version of what you yourself wrote, so that you read essays appropriate to the score you want to reach.

6 Speaking

Structure of the section

- A live interview, face to face or online at the test centre, lasting from **11 to 14 minutes**, and it is recorded as audio.
- Three parts:
 - **Part 1** — general questions about you: home, family, study, work, and interests (4 to 5 minutes).
 - **Part 2** — a topic card (Cue card): one minute to prepare, then you speak for up to two minutes, after which there is a question or two from the examiner.
 - **Part 3** — a deeper and more abstract discussion around the topic of Part 2 (4 to 5 minutes).

Practice resources

- **The practice prompt with ChatGPT:** I found it on the internet and it is frankly excellent — [the Speaking prompt document](#)
- **IELTS Advantage videos:** you can benefit from them greatly — [playlist link](#)
- **The Makkar book:** it is absolutely essential that you look through it.

Method and tactics

- I used to practise mainly with ChatGPT in a random way: I would ask it, "ask me questions as if you were an examiner."
- **And the most important thing in the end:** ask it to prepare a table of all the mistakes you fell into (Grammar and others), so that you do not repeat them.
- Use ChatGPT for practice and for correcting mistakes, not as a final indicator of your score.

Mistakes and personal experience

- I would practise for a period and then break off for a period, and that affected my score a great deal. **Consistency here is the most important thing.**

7 Tables of resources and links

Shared — for all sections

Source	Type	Link
Cambridge IELTS 13 – 21	Books	—
Collins Practice • IELTS Trainer • Official Guide to IELTS Academic	Official accredited books	—
Engnovate	Subscription website	Open link
IELTSX	Subscription website	Open link
Free Telegram channels	Mock tests	Open link
ANKI	Flashcards app	—
Notion	Note-taking and documentation	—
Prompt for generating Anki cards	Google document	Open link

Listening

Source	Type	Link
TEDx channel	YouTube	Open link
Veritasium	YouTube / Spotify	—

Reading

Source	Type	Link
IELTS Band 7 Preparation Course	Udemy course	Open link
IELTS Lilie	YouTube	Open link
IELTS Reading vocabulary	Google document	Open link
500 words for IELTS	Google document	Open link

Writing

Source	Type	Link
IELTS Band 7 Preparation Course — Task 1	Udemy course	Open link
Mastering IELTS Writing Task 1 — Process	Udemy course	Open link
IELTS Advantage channel	YouTube — Process	—
IELTS Liz – 100 Essay Questions	Website — Task 2	Open link
Writing9	Website for questions and for reading answers at different levels	Open link
IELTS with Juva · Fasttrack IELTS	YouTube	—

Speaking

Source	Type	Link
Makkar book	Question bank	—
IELTS Advantage	YouTube playlist	Open link
Speaking practice prompt	Google document	Open link