

**IELTS™**

# Guide for agents

Information for education  
and migration agents  
around the world



Each year, more IELTS tests are taken than  
any other high stakes English language test.

[www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)

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# International English Language Testing System

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The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is a test that measures the language proficiency of people who want to study or work in environments where English is used as the main language of communication.

Over 6000 educational institutions, professional bodies and employers, as well as governments around the world accept IELTS. This means that wherever your clients intend to go – the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK or other destinations – an IELTS result will help them get there.

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# Reasons your clients choose IELTS

**The test that sets the standard** – IELTS is designed by world leaders in language assessment and test delivery to provide a reliable and consistent measure of English language proficiency.

**Accepted for study, professional registration and migration** – IELTS is accepted for study and employment all over the world. It is also accepted for migration by governments in more countries than any other high-stakes English language test. By preparing for just one language test your clients will gain access to the widest range of opportunities.

**International recognition** – IELTS is accepted by over 6000 organisations in over 135 countries worldwide, including universities, employers, professional bodies and immigration authorities.

**Organisations that request IELTS results include:**

- all universities and the vast majority of training colleges and tertiary institutions in Australia, New Zealand and the UK
- more than 3000 higher educational institutions and programmes in the US
- over 290 universities and colleges in Canada
- immigration authorities in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the UK
- professional registration bodies covering areas such as accounting, engineering, teaching, law, medicine and nursing
- a wide range of employers from sectors such as banking and finance, government, construction, energy and natural resources, aviation, health and tourism
- universities in non-English speaking countries where English is a language of instruction

**Culturally fair** – Each IELTS question can take up to two years to develop to ensure it is accessible and fair for test takers of all backgrounds. Every question is trialled extensively to ensure it does not assume prior knowledge about a specific country, culture or academic subject. IELTS accepts American, British and Australian English and uses a variety of accents in the Listening component for a more comprehensive test approach.

**People focussed** – IELTS uses highly trained examiners to assess performance in the Speaking test. Research shows that this approach to speaking assessment is more authentic than other methods and also gives test takers the best opportunity to fully demonstrate their English language skills.

**Widely available** – IELTS is one of the most widely available English language tests in the world with over 800 test locations in more than 130 countries worldwide, making it more easily accessible for your clients. (See page 3)

**Frequent test dates** – IELTS is available up to 48 times per year, on Saturdays and Thursdays.

**Fast results** – Results are ready in 13 calendar days.

**Stringent security** – IELTS takes a multi-layered approach to security which is trusted by organisations and protects the integrity of your clients' results. Measures include secure biometric systems and high resolution photography of each test taker on registration. A comprehensive test centre audit scheme is also in place.

**“IELTS makes the world a bigger, more open place. Learning English has transformed me into a citizen of the world.”**

*Analyst at large accounting firm*





Search the list of  
organisations that ask  
for IELTS results at  
[www.ielts.org/recognition](http://www.ielts.org/recognition)

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## The international English language test

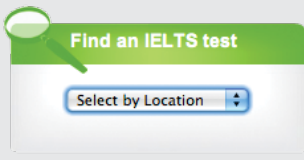
The truly international nature of IELTS makes it the preferred choice of test takers, organisations and governments. Not only is IELTS available worldwide, it has also been developed by international language experts to include content of global relevance.

- **International English:** IELTS accepts all standard varieties of native speaker English, including American, Australian, British, Canadian and New Zealand. The Listening component also includes accents from these regions.
- **International content:** The IELTS approach is recognised as being fair, reliable and valid to all test takers. The test questions are developed by a network of IELTS test material writers in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and US.
- **International consultation:** IELTS has been developed in close consultation with academics, professional bodies and immigration authorities from around the world to ensure the test is relevant to all English speaking countries.
- **International partners:** IELTS is co-owned and was co-created by a global partnership of education and language experts: the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL). These organisations are dedicated to academic excellence, cultural understanding, student placement and enabling success worldwide.

# Convenient test dates and locations



Find an IELTS test location at [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org). There are over 800 locations worldwide, in over 130 countries.



## IELTS is one of the most widely available English language tests in the world.

- Available up to four times a month in more than 130 countries
- Test centres have more places available than other high-stakes tests
- Many test centres are conveniently located within universities and college buildings or within town centres

## Registering for the test

- Test takers can register for the test at an IELTS test centre or by mail. Many test centres also offer online registration
- Tests are available on Thursdays and Saturdays
- The first step is to find a test centre at [www.ielts.org/testcentres](http://www.ielts.org/testcentres)
- The IELTS Application Form must be completed. This is available through each test centre website and at [www.ielts.org/testtakers](http://www.ielts.org/testtakers)

- Test takers must bring their current passport (or national identity card) to the test. This is the only form of identity that will be accepted on the test day. The passport/identity card must be valid/not expired at registration and on the test day
- Test fees vary from country to country and in most cases are payable in local currency. Details are provided on each test centre website

## Test takers with special requirements

Arrangements are available to IELTS test takers with special requirements including hearing, visual or learning difficulties. These include:

- Modified and enlarged papers
- Braille papers
- Lip reading version of the Listening component
- Amplification equipment for the Listening component
- Extra time for the Reading and Writing components and/or use of a computer (e.g. for candidates with dyslexia)
- A scribe to write answers on a test taker's behalf

## Key Fact

Each IELTS test is of the same level of difficulty and is marked with the same assessment criteria all over the world. This means that test takers are no more likely to receive a higher band score in one country than another.

IELTS examiners, wherever they are in the world, are qualified English language professionals who attend regular training sessions and are required to formally demonstrate their marking proficiency through a re-certification process. The marking performance of the 6000-plus IELTS examiners is systematically and regularly monitored. Examiner marking standards are maintained through the IELTS Professional Support Network, a quality assurance system designed and managed by British Council and IDP: IELTS Australia.

See also 'Reliable results', page 7.

## Advise your clients

### Special requirements

- If your client requires special arrangements to be made, you should advise them to discuss their needs with their test centre as soon as possible
- Changes to the testing environment require six weeks notice
- Changes to the test paper can require three months notice
- Each case is considered individually and will need to be accompanied by medical evidence

# Knowing the test format

## A choice of two versions of the test

IELTS offers a choice of two versions of the test - Academic and General Training, to serve both academic and non-academic purposes. This makes the test relevant to everyone, whether they plan to study, migrate, or work abroad.

## A test of four skills

Both IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training cover the four language skills – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. All test takers take the same Listening and Speaking components. There are different Reading and Writing components for IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training.

## Face-to-face Speaking test

IELTS has always included a face-to-face Speaking component which prompts the most authentic performance from test takers. The use of the face-to-face component in a high stakes test is supported by a body of current academic research and continues to set IELTS apart from other English language tests.

## A fairer environment

A secure and fair testing environment helps people perform to the best of their ability in the Speaking test. IELTS Speaking tests are conducted in a private room, one-to-one with an examiner.

## IELTS Academic

The Academic version of IELTS measures English language proficiency needed for an academic, higher learning environment. The tasks and texts are accessible to all test takers, irrespective of their subject focus.

### Listening\* (30 minutes)

- Four recorded monologues and conversations

### Reading (60 minutes)

- Three long reading passages with tasks
- Texts range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical
- Includes non-verbal materials such as diagrams, graphs or illustrations
  - Texts are authentic (i.e. taken from books, newspapers)

### Writing (60 minutes)

- Writing task of at least 150 words where the test takers must summarise, describe or explain a table, graph, chart or diagram
- Short essay task of at least 250 words

### Speaking\* (11 to 14 minutes)

- Face-to-face interview
- Includes short questions, speaking at length about a familiar topic and a structured discussion

## IELTS General Training

The General Training version of IELTS measures English language proficiency in a practical, everyday context. The tasks and texts reflect both workplace and social situations.

### Listening\* (30 minutes)

- Four recorded monologues and conversations

### Reading (60 minutes)

- Three reading passages with tasks
  - Section 1 contains two or three short factual texts
  - Section 2 contains two short, work-related, factual texts
    - Section 3 contains one longer text on a topic of general interest
- Texts are authentic (i.e. taken from company handbooks, official documents, books and newspapers)

### Writing (60 minutes)

- Letter writing task of at least 150 words
- Short essay task of at least 250 words

### Speaking\* (11 to 14 minutes)

- Face-to-face interview
- Includes short questions, speaking at length about a familiar topic and a structured discussion

\*The Listening and Speaking components are the same for both versions. The Reading and Writing components differ.

## ! Advise your clients

### Choosing the right version of the test – Academic or General Training?

The version of IELTS your client should take, as well as the result they need, is determined both by visa requirements and by the requirements of any educational institution or professional organisation to which they intend to apply.

If you are unsure which version of the test your client should take, contact the organisation to which they are applying for confirmation.

“Students tend to be more focussed and motivated by IELTS. They have clearer goals.”

English language teacher,  
Perth, Australia



## Understanding the IELTS band scale

IELTS provides a profile of a test taker’s ability to use English. Results are reported as band scores, on a scale from 1 (the lowest) to 9 (the highest), as shown below. Test takers receive an overall band score and individual scores for each test component (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking).

9	<b>Expert user</b>	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	<b>Very good user</b>	Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.
7	<b>Good user</b>	Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.
6	<b>Competent user</b>	Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.
5	<b>Modest user</b>	Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.
4	<b>Limited user</b>	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	<b>Extremely limited user</b>	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	<b>Intermittent user</b>	No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.
1	<b>Non user</b>	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	<b>Did not attempt the test</b>	No assessable information provided.

This 9-band scale has remained consistent and reliable for over three decades.

Read more about band scores, examiners, marking and assessment criteria at [www.ielts.org/researchers](http://www.ielts.org/researchers)

### Key Fact

#### The Speaking test

Test takers should not be afraid to express their opinions in the Writing and Speaking tests. The examiner’s role in the Speaking and Writing tests is to assess how well a test taker is able to present ideas and arguments that are appropriate to the question, using good English. In the Speaking test, the examiner will ask test takers to explain or extend on their answers in order to encourage them to demonstrate their English as fully as possible, not in order to judge or challenge their opinions.

### Key Fact

#### Band score 9

IELTS band score 9 should not be equated with ‘native speaker standard’ because the English used by native speakers varies greatly. In fact, band score 9 represents an ‘Expert User’, that is, someone who has fully operational command of the language and makes almost no errors.



**“I got the band score required by the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools, paving the way for my immigration to the US.”**

*IELTS candidate from China*

## Minimum IELTS band score requirements

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### Level of English

The level of English needed to perform effectively in study, work or training varies from one situation to another. This is why each individual organisation sets its own minimum IELTS score requirements for applicants. Details of organisations that ask for IELTS and the minimum scores they require can be found at [www.ielts.org/recognition](http://www.ielts.org/recognition)

### Read more about IELTS scores

- Read more about band scores, examiners, marking and assessment criteria at [www.ielts.org/researchers](http://www.ielts.org/researchers)
- Order the 'IELTS Scores Explained' DVD (available from [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)). The DVD includes samples of test takers' writing and speaking responses so that you can see different levels of proficiency for yourself. Examiner comments are also provided.



### Advise your clients

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#### What score is required?

IELTS provides a valid and accurate assessment of English language proficiency on an easy to use 9-band scale, from minimal ability (band score 1) through to expert (band score 9).

The minimum band score a test taker must achieve is determined by the requirements of the visa, education programme or employment for which they are applying.

### Key Fact

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#### The same test standards all over the world

Some test takers falsely believe that by taking the test in a country where English is not the main language of communication that they will have a better chance of being one of the best performers at that test centre – therefore increasing their chances of getting a higher score. However, IELTS scores are based solely on test taker performance. The band score awarded to each test taker is not dependent on the results of other test takers in any way.

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# Getting the results

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## Delivery of results

- Provisional results are released online to test takers on the 13th calendar day after the test
- Test Result Forms are posted or available for pick up from the test centre 13 calendar days after the test
- Test takers will only receive one copy of their Test Report Form, unless they are applying to Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), or United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA) – in this case, they can receive two. Proof of application to CIC and UKBA must be provided
- Test takers may also nominate up to five organisations to receive their Test Report Form automatically, free of charge. These organisations must be nominated when registering for the test

Test Report Forms (TRF) include a high resolution photograph of the test taker as well as a number of other security features.

## Calculating the result

Test takers receive a Test Report Form showing their scores on each of the four components: Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. Each of the four scores is equally weighted. The overall band score is then calculated by taking the average of the total of the four individual component scores.

Overall band scores are reported to the nearest whole or half band.

For example:

- A test taker achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.0 for Writing and 7.0 for Speaking would be awarded an overall band score of 6.5 ( $25 \div 4 = 6.25 =$  rounded up to the nearest band score of 6.5)
- A test taker achieving 6.5 for Listening, 6.5 for Reading, 5.5 for Writing and 6.0 for Speaking would be awarded band 6 ( $24.5 \div 4 = 6.125 =$  Band 6)

For more information on how IELTS band scores are calculated visit [www.ielts.org/researchers/score\\_processing\\_and\\_reporting.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/researchers/score_processing_and_reporting.aspx)

Marking of IELTS Reading and Listening components is carried out by clerical markers using an answer key. IELTS clerical markers are carefully selected and trained. Systematic monitoring and double marking of a proportion of answer sheets is carried out each test day and clerical markers are required to undergo re-certification on a regular basis.

## Reliable results

Assessment of IELTS Writing and Speaking components is carried out by highly qualified and experienced examiners who work to clearly defined criteria and are subject to extensive and detailed quality control procedures. Their performance is monitored by the IELTS Professional Support Network which manages training, standardisation, certification and stringent monitoring procedures globally.

Read more about IELTS examiners and assessment processes in the '*Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing*' guide, available to download at [www.ielts.org/institutions](http://www.ielts.org/institutions)



## Advise your clients

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### Right of appeal

An 'Enquiry on Results' service is available to test takers who are not satisfied with their results. Tests are remarked by a Senior Examiner. If the result is changed, the fee for this service is refunded.

Applications for an Enquiry on Results must be made to the test centre at which the test was taken within six weeks of the test date.



## Advise your clients

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### How long is an IELTS score valid?

The IELTS test provides an accurate picture of a test taker's English language skills at a given point in time. The IELTS partners recommend that organisations and institutions that accept IELTS results should only accept a Test Report Form which is more than two years old if it is accompanied by proof that the test taker has actively maintained or tried to improve their English.

“In Iran I saw the IELTS test as an obstacle! But now that I’m studying in Australia I can see the value of taking the test. When I’m in a university exam I need to read even more quickly and write my answers in even less time than during the IELTS test. I really think now that the IELTS test was my best friend.”

Law student from Iran, studying in Australia



## Helping your clients prepare

Preparation materials and advice for test takers can be found online at [www.ielts.org/testtakers](http://www.ielts.org/testtakers)

Test takers are advised to:

- consider taking an English language course. Although it is not a requirement for test takers to attend a language course, it is proven to be one of the most effective ways to improve language proficiency. A course will not only provide more opportunity for your client to practise their English, it will also ensure they receive constructive feedback to help them improve.
- read the *Information for Candidates* booklet. This contains essential guidance which every candidate should read in relation to test format, task types, time limits and test procedures.
- understand the IELTS band scores (page 7) and the IELTS assessment criteria ([www.ielts.org/criteria](http://www.ielts.org/criteria)). This will help your client determine whether they are ready to sit the test.

- use their English everyday at home and at work/university – this includes speaking English with friends, watching and listening to English language programmes, reading English publications and practicing their written skills wherever possible.
- practise the free sample test available at [www.ielts.org/testtakers](http://www.ielts.org/testtakers) in order to better understand what is expected in each part of the test.
- consider purchasing the *IELTS Official Practice Materials* books from the [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org), or from an IELTS test centre. Many independent IELTS products are also available.



- think about taking an IELTS preparation course where test takers will receive feedback on their answers to practice questions.

### ! Advise your clients

#### Re-sitting the test

There are no restrictions on retaking the test. If the required score is not achieved, test takers can register for another test as soon as they feel they are ready. Test takers should be advised, however, that they are unlikely to gain a better score unless they work to improve their English and prepare for the test (see above).

## Further information

Further IELTS information and resources can be found online at [www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org) including:

- ‘Find a test centre’ search tool
- ‘Who accepts IELTS?’ database listing of over 6000 organisations
- Sample test questions
- Frequently asked questions
- Data showing the average performance of takers by nationality and language group
- *Information for Candidates* booklet
- *Ensuring quality and fairness in international language testing*
- *IELTS Annual Review*



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