

Introduction

Preparing classes for the IELTS exam can be hard work for both teachers and students, with lessons often settling into a gruelling cycle of exam practice and intensive language analysis. Games and communication activities may be available, but with the exam approaching it can seem inappropriate to spend much lesson time on anything which is not directly relevant to IELTS.

The games and activities in this book aim to help with this dilemma. They are fun, motivating and in many cases kinaesthetic (i.e., students use their bodies as well as their minds), yet they all relate directly to the exam, in many cases actually using the formats from the exam.

There are activities based on the formats of each part of the Listening, Academic Reading, Academic Writing and Speaking papers of the exam.

Level

IELTS candidates cover a broad range of levels, with candidates from intermediate to advanced levels taking the exam and receiving a grade which is satisfactory for their purposes. The level of each activity in this book is indicated as follows:

- ○ IELTS 5 –7: suitable for the majority of students preparing for the exam, including lower-level IELTS candidates, and students at the beginning of an IELTS course.
- ● IELTS 6 and above: primarily aimed at middle and higher-level candidates, but may be approachable by lower-level candidates as well.

Academic and General versions of the exam

The majority of candidates take the Academic version of the exam, and the activities in this book are based on that version. General versions of the Reading and Writing Papers are also available. The Reading section activities in this book may be useful to General version candidates, as the question formats are similar. The Writing activities will be less useful, as General version candidates are not required to write in an academic style.

Choosing an activity

The activities are not arranged in any particular order within each section. The easiest way to link them with your course material is probably by exam focus – for example, if part of a lesson focuses on Academic Writing Task 2, you could expand on that with an Academic Writing Part 2 activity from this book. The level of difficulty of the activity will also be a factor, of course – see the paragraph on level above.

Setting up an activity

To make sure that everybody understands the format of an activity, it can be a good idea to begin with a demonstration rather than an explanation. Join one pair/group/team, and begin the activity while the rest of the class watches.

Tell the class that the activity is directly linked to the exam, and that the skills they will use to complete it are skills they will need in the exam.

Doing an activity

When everybody is clear about the task, and has begun, visit each group/pair/team as soon as possible, just to check that everything is going well. After this initial round, visit each group/pair/team for longer. Check for language difficulties, and help any students who are having problems.

While you are doing the things listed above, make a mental or written note of any problems with pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary.

After an activity

Use the information you gathered while monitoring to practise problem areas and/or to plan future lessons which address the problems you encountered.

Elicit feedback from the class. Did they think the activity was useful? What did they learn? What aspects of it were difficult?

Follow-up activities

The teaching notes for each activity include suggestions for follow-up activities. These are entirely optional.

Practice Tests

Section 2 of this book features two practice tests which closely reflect the types of question and level of the IELTS exam. When using practice test material such as this, it is a good idea to recreate exam conditions as closely as possible. If there is space in the classroom, seat students with at least a metre between each one. There should of course be no communications between students while the test is in progress. It is essential to keep to the same timings as the exam.

Please note that the instructions for the Reading papers refer to writing on an Answer sheet. The students do this in the actual exam but not in these Practice Tests.

The recordings for the Listening section can be found on the CD that accompanies this book.

Grading Writing module scripts

In the exam, Writing module scripts are graded by trained examiners according to complex and confidential criteria. For most teachers, grading their students' IELTS practice scripts can only be an estimate based on the 9 IELTS bands. These are:

When grading students' scripts, if in doubt about which score to award, it is often better to err on the side of caution. Giving students higher grades than they would actually achieve in the exam may boost their confidence in the short term, but is likely to result in disappointment in the long term. Achievement in parts of the exam can now be reported as half bands (e.g. 7.5).

9	Expert user	Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.
8	Very good user	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	Good user	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	Competent user	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	Modest user	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	Limited user	Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.
3	Extremely limited user	Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.
2	Intermittent user	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	Non user	Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.
0	Did not attempt the test	No assessable information provided.

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Grading Speaking module performances

The Speaking module of the exam takes the following format:

Part	Nature of interaction	Timing
Part 1 Introduction and interview	The examiner introduces himself/herself, and confirms the candidate's identity. The examiner then interviews the candidate on familiar topics such as the candidate's occupation, interests, aspirations and daily life.	4 to 5 minutes
Part 2 Individual long turn	The candidate receives a written stimulus, and is given one minute to prepare to speak for one to two minutes on the topic. The examiner then asks one or two follow-up questions.	3 to 4 minutes
Part 3 Two-way discussion	The examiner invites the candidate to discuss more abstract themes based on the Part 2 topic.	4 to 5 minutes

As with the Writing module, teachers who are not IELTS examiners will generally have to estimate the attainment level of their students' speaking performances based on the nine IELTS bands listed above.

Candidates' performances are assessed according to the following criteria:

Fluency and Coherence

The rate of speech. The linking of ideas to form coherent, connected speech. The logical sequencing of sentences, and the use of cohesive devices such as connectors and conjunctions.

Lexical Resource

The candidate's range of vocabulary, and the precision with which meanings and attitudes are expressed. The variety, adequacy and appropriacy of the words used. The ability to compensate for a vocabulary gap by using other words.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

The range, accuracy and appropriacy of the candidate's grammatical usage. The length and complexity of sentences, and the range of grammatical structures employed. Especially important is the ability to achieve information focus through the use of grammatical structures.

Pronunciation

The amount of effort required by the listener, and the level of L1 interference.

IELTS candidates typically need to employ the following strategies in the Speaking module:

- Providing personal and non-personal information
- Expressing preferences
- Expressing and justifying opinions
- Comparing, contrasting and analyzing
- Narrating, paraphrasing and summarizing
- Explaining
- Suggesting
- Speculating
- Conversation repair

With the exception of the banding chart, the outline above is the author's interpretation of IELTS criteria, and is not definitive, complete or a quotation of official IELTS documents. Candidates and their teachers are advised to obtain the current IELTS handbook and other materials, available from Cambridge ESOL, 1 Hills Road, Cambridge CB1 2EU, United Kingdom. Tel. +44 1223 553355, Fax +44 1223 460278, email: ESOLhelpdesk@ucles.org.uk. A wide range of information and resources are available from the IELTS website: www.ielts.org

Exam timings

Listening Approximately **30 minutes**, plus 10 minutes for transferring answers to the answer sheets.

Reading **60 minutes** – approximately 20 minutes for each section.

Writing **60 minutes** – approximately 20 minutes for Task 1 and 40 minutes for Task 2.

Speaking **11–14 minutes**