

Understanding Your IELTS Band Score

What examiners are actually measuring — and what separates a 6.0 from a 7.0

BRIX ONLINE ACADEMY / EXAM PREPARATION

Most candidates prepare for IELTS by practising English. That helps, but it is not the same thing as preparing for the test. IELTS is marked against published criteria, and candidates who understand those criteria consistently outscore candidates of equal ability who do not. This guide explains how the score is built.

1. The band scale

IELTS is reported on a nine-band scale, in whole and half bands. You receive a band for each of the four papers and one overall band. There is no pass or fail — institutions set their own requirement, typically between 5.5 and 7.5.

Band	Description
9	Expert user — fully operational command, completely accurate and fluent
8	Very good user — occasional unsystematic inaccuracies
7	Good user — operational command; occasional inaccuracies and misunderstandings
6	Competent user — effective command despite some inaccuracies
5	Modest user — partial command; copes with overall meaning in most situations
4	Limited user — basic competence limited to familiar situations

2. How the overall band is calculated

Your overall band is the average of the four paper scores, rounded to the nearest half band. The rounding rule catches people out, so it is worth knowing:

- An average ending in **.25** rounds **up** to the next half band
- An average ending in **.75** rounds **up** to the next whole band
- Anything below .25 rounds down

Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Average	Overall
6.5	6.5	5.0	7.0	6.25	6.5
4.0	3.5	4.0	4.0	3.875	4.0
6.5	6.5	5.5	6.0	6.125	6.0

What this means in practice: a single weak paper can pull down an otherwise strong profile. In the third example above, half a band more in Writing would have produced a 6.5 overall. If one skill is lagging, that is where your remaining study time belongs.

3. The four papers

Paper	Time	Format
Listening	30 minutes (+10 to transfer answers on paper tests)	Four recorded sections, 40 questions. Played once only.
Reading	60 minutes (no extra transfer time)	Three passages, 40 questions. Academic and General Training versions differ.
Writing	60 minutes	Task 1 (at least 150 words) and Task 2 (at least 250 words).
Speaking	11-14 minutes	Face-to-face interview in three parts, recorded.

4. How Writing is marked

Writing is assessed on four criteria, each carrying equal weight. Your band for the paper is not a single impression — it is built from these four, with **Task 2 counting roughly twice as much as Task 1**.

Criterion	What the examiner is looking for
Task Achievement (Task 1) Task Response (Task 2)	Did you answer the whole question? Task 1: did you select and report the key features? Task 2: is there a clear position sustained throughout, with developed ideas?
Coherence and Cohesion	Is the writing logically organised, with clear paragraphing and linking that does not feel mechanical?
Lexical Resource	Range and precision of vocabulary, including collocation and spelling.
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	Variety of sentence structures and how often errors appear — and whether they impede meaning.

What separates a 6.0 from a 7.0 in Writing

- **Errors stop being frequent.** At 6.0 errors are common but rarely block meaning. At 7.0 they are occasional.
- **The position is sustained.** A 6.0 answer often drifts or leaves the conclusion doing work the body should have done.
- **Paragraphs have one idea each**, developed, rather than several ideas listed.
- **Vocabulary is used, not displayed.** A less common word used wrongly costs more than a common word used well.
- **Linking is invisible.** Overusing "Moreover", "Furthermore" and "In conclusion" is a recognised 6.0 signal.

5. How Speaking is marked

Criterion	What the examiner is looking for
Fluency and Coherence	Speaking at length without unnatural hesitation, and connecting ideas so they follow.
Lexical Resource	Enough vocabulary to discuss unfamiliar topics, and the ability to paraphrase when a word is missing.
Grammatical Range and Accuracy	A mix of simple and complex structures, used accurately.
Pronunciation	How easily you are understood. An accent is not penalised; being hard to follow is.

The three parts

- **Part 1** — familiar questions about you, your home, work or studies. Answer in two or three sentences, not one word.
- **Part 2** — the long turn. One minute to prepare, then speak for one to two minutes. Use the prompt card's bullet points as your structure.
- **Part 3** — abstract discussion connected to the Part 2 topic. This is where higher bands are won or lost.

The most common Speaking mistake: stopping too early in Part 2. If you finish in forty seconds, you have not given the examiner enough language to assess, and the band reflects that regardless of how good the forty seconds were.

6. Where marks are most often lost

Paper	Recurring, avoidable errors
Listening	Missing the word limit ("no more than two words"); writing plurals and spellings incorrectly; losing the thread after a difficult question instead of moving on.
Reading	Spending too long on the first passage; treating True/False/Not Given as a comprehension question rather than a matching task; leaving blanks.
Writing	Under the word count; describing every data point in Task 1 instead of selecting key features; a memorised introduction that does not fit the question.
Speaking	Very short answers in Part 1; abandoning Part 2 early; treating Part 3 as another Part 1.

7. Before you book your test

- Confirm which version you need — **Academic** for university study, **General Training** for most migration and work routes. They are not interchangeable.
- Check the exact band your institution requires, including any minimum per paper. Many universities ask for an overall 6.5 with no band below 6.0 — a profile of 7.5 / 7.5 / 5.5 / 6.0 averages to 6.5 but still fails that requirement.
- Sit at least one full timed mock before test day, in one sitting, with no pauses.
- Note your results expiry — IELTS results are normally accepted for two years.

Verify before you rely on it: test formats, fees and institutional requirements change. Always confirm current details with your test centre and directly with the institution you are applying to.