

IELTS: Your Complete Exam Guide

Academic & General Training Masterclass

 GLOBAL ACCEPTANCE

12,500+ Institutions

 TWO TEST VERSIONS

Academic vs General

What Is IELTS?

International Standard

International English Language Testing System. The global benchmark measuring your listening, reading, writing, and speaking ability.

01

Jointly Managed

Established in 1980 and jointly managed by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge English.

02

Worldwide Recognition

Accepted by over 12,500 institutions globally, and by all four main immigration authorities requiring proof of English.

03

Two Test Versions

Two distinct versions exist: Academic and General Training. You must know which version you need before registering.

04

Two Versions: Which One Do You Need?

ACADEMIC VERSION



IELTS Academic

- Required mainly by universities for higher education study.
- Needed for professional registration (Medicine, Law, Nursing, Engineering).
- Features academic-level Reading texts and Task 1 data analysis.

GENERAL TRAINING



IELTS General Training

- Required mainly for migration purposes (UK, Canada, Australia, NZ).
- Used for work placements, secondary education, and vocational training.
- Features everyday workplace Reading texts and Task 1 letter writing.

Key Takeaway: Listening & Speaking are 100% identical in both versions. Only Reading & Writing differ. Always confirm requirements directly with your receiving organization!

Test Format at a Glance

Section	Timing	Content & Format	AC vs GT
Listening	~30 min (+ transfer time)	40 questions across 4 recordings	SAME
Reading	60 min	40 questions across 3 passages	DIFFERS
Writing	60 min	2 written tasks (150 & 250 words)	DIFFERS
Speaking	11-14 min	3-part face-to-face interview	SAME

Total Test Duration: ~2 hours 45 minutes. Listening, Reading, and Writing are taken on the same day with no breaks. Speaking may take place up to 7 days before or after.

Listening: Identical for Both Versions

SECTION 1

Social Conversation

Everyday dialogue between two people (e.g. travel booking).

SECTION 2

Social Monologue

Speech set in an everyday context (e.g. local facility tour).

SECTION 3

Training Discussion

Up to 4 people in an educational/training setting.

SECTION 4

Academic Lecture

A monologue on an academic or university-level topic.

Computer vs. Paper Mode

- **Computer:** 30 min audio + 2-minute review period (answers typed directly).
- **Paper-based:** 30 min audio + 10-minute extra transfer time at the end.

Critical Exam Rules

- ✓ Recordings play **ONCE ONLY**. Accents include British, Aussie, NZ, and American.
- ✓ Enforced word limits: "No more than two words and/or a number" must be followed strictly!

Reading: Academic vs General Training

Academic Reading

- **3 Long Passages:** Sourced from academic books, journals, magazines, and newspapers.
- **Target Audience:** Written for an educated, non-specialist audience.
- **Question Types:** Multiple choice, matching headings, True/False/Not Given, diagram labeling,...

No Extra Transfer Time: You must write answers directly onto the answer sheet within the 60 minutes!

General Training Reading

- **3 Sections:** Starts with shorter everyday texts (notices, ads, workplace manuals).
- **Final Passage:** Moves to one longer, more complex text on general interest at the end.
- **Focus:** Workplace survival, everyday life skills, and general comprehension.

Scoring Difference: GT scoring is stricter — you need more correct answers than Academic for the same band!

Writing: Academic vs General Training

Total Time: 60 Minutes | Task 2 counts TWICE as much as Task 1 toward your Writing Band (Suggested: 20 min Task 1 / 40 min Task 2)

Task 1 (20 Min | Min. 150 Words)

Academic: Describe, summarize, or explain visual data (chart, graph, table, diagram, or map).

General Training: Write a letter responding to a given situation (formal, semi-formal, or informal).

Task 2 (40 Min | Min. 250 Words)

Identical for Both Versions: An essay discussing a given topic, argument, or problem.

Must present a clear position supported by evidence and relevant examples.

Task Response
Fully answer prompt

Coherence & Cohesion
Logical flow & linking

Lexical Resource
Vocabulary range & accuracy

Grammar Range
Accuracy & structures

Speaking: Identical for Both Versions

Face-to-Face Interview with Certified Examiner

TOTAL DURATION: 11-14 MINUTES

PART 1 (4-5 MIN)

Introduction & Interview

Questions on familiar topics: home, family, work, studies, hobbies, or daily routines.

PART 2 (3-4 MIN)

Individual Long Turn

Given a task card. 1 minute to prepare & make notes, then speak for 1-2 minutes continuously.

PART 3 (4-5 MIN)

Two-Way Discussion

In-depth analytical questions linked to Part 2 topic. Requires abstract idea evaluation.

Assessment Criteria: Fluency & Coherence | Lexical Resource | Grammatical Range & Accuracy | Pronunciation

How Scoring Works

Band Scale (0-9)

Scores run from 0 to 9 in half-band increments (e.g. 6.0, 6.5, 7.0, 7.5). You receive an individual score for each of the 4 skills plus an overall score.

01

Overall Band Calculation

Overall score is the arithmetic average of all 4 skills, rounded to the nearest half-band.

Example: Average 6.5 stays 6.5 / Average 6.75 rounds UP to 7.0

02

No Pass or Fail

There is no single pass mark. Each institution, university, or immigration department sets its own specific minimum score requirements.

03

Assessment Methodology

Listening & Reading: Marked on raw correct-answer counts.

Writing & Speaking: Judged against detailed criteria by trained examiners.

04

What the Band Scores Mean

Band	Level	Skill Description & Common Academic Benchmarks
Band 9	EXPERT USER	Full operational command; appropriate, accurate, and fluent comprehension.
Band 8	VERY GOOD USER	Fully operational command with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies.
Band 7	GOOD USER	Standard Minimum for Top Universities & Professional Bodies (Medicine/Law).
Band 6	COMPETENT USER	Common Requirement for General Admissions & Skilled Visas. Effective command.
Band 5	MODEST USER	Partial command; clears foundation programs and vocational training routes.
Band 1-4	LIMITED/NON-USER	Basic competence only to non-user (Band 0 = Did not attempt test).

Ways to Take the Test

Computer-Delivered

Same format & content. Faster results in 1-5 days. The standard global choice today.

Paper-Based

Being phased out globally from mid-2026 as all IELTS tests transition to computer.

Writing on Paper

Hybrid option in select centers: L&R on computer, handwrite Writing tasks.

IELTS Online

Remote, at-home version of Academic test only. Not currently accepted for visa or immigration purposes.

IELTS for UKVI

Government-approved version built specifically to satisfy UK Visas and Immigration requirements.

One Skill Retake (OSR)

GAME-CHANGER FEATURE

What is One Skill Retake?

Retake just **ONE single skill** (Listening, Reading, Writing, or Speaking) instead of repeating the entire 4-section exam if you missed your target score!

Key Eligibility Rules

- Must be booked within 60 days of original test date.
- Only available after a computer-delivered test.
- Retake must match your original test type & country.

Important Restrictions

- Paper-based original tests do not qualify.
- Not currently available for tests taken in the USA.
- Always confirm your institution accepts OSR scores.

Registering & Fees

Official Registration Bodies

Book directly via official test providers: **British Council**, **IDP**, or **Cambridge English**. Select test type, date, center, and delivery mode.

 **Must bring a valid passport on test day matching your registration!**

Global Fee Structure Examples

- **United States:** \$295–\$340 (incl. admin fee)
- **United Kingdom:** £215–£250 (UKVI from £257)
- **India:** ₹17,000 – ₹18,000
- **France/Europe:** €252 (Academic/GT), €275 (UKVI)

Results Speed: Computer results arrive in 1–5 days; paper-based takes longer.

Validity Period: Test results are valid for 2 years from test date.

13. SUMMARY COMPARISON

Academic vs. General Training

Feature	IELTS Academic	IELTS General Training
Primary Purpose	University admission & professional registration	Immigration, work placements & secondary study
Reading Content	3 long academic/journal-style passages	Everyday, workplace & general interest texts
Writing Task 1	Describe visual data (chart, graph, diagram)	Write a letter (formal, semi-formal, informal)
Listening & Speaking	IDENTICAL	IDENTICAL
Required By	Universities, medical boards, professional bodies	Immigration authorities (UK, CAN, AUS, NZ)

14. FINAL CHECKLIST

Before You Register: Final Checklist

- 1 Confirm test type (Academic vs. GT) directly with your receiving university, employer, or visa authority.
- 2 Know your target band score both overall and individual minimum section requirements.
- 3 Check application deadlines — leave buffer room for results processing and potential One Skill Retake.
- 4 Select delivery format: Computer-delivered, Paper-based, IELTS Online, or IELTS for UKVI.
- 5 Register early via official portals (British Council, IDP, or Cambridge) with your valid passport.