International English Language Testing System

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IELTS™

Acronym	IELTS
Type	Standardized test. Available in 2 modules: "Academic", "General training". The IELTS test partners also offer IELTS Life Skills, a speaking and listening test used for UK Visas and Immigration.
Developer / administrator	British Council, IDP Education, Cambridge English Language Assessment.
Knowledge / skills tested	Listening, reading, writing and speaking of the English language.
Purpose	To assess the English language proficiency of non-native English speakers.
Duration	Listening: 40 minutes (including the 10-minute transfer time) Reading: 60 minutes, Writing: 60 minutes, Speaking: 11–14 minutes. Total: 2 hours, 44 minutes.
Score / grade range	0 to 9, in 0.5 band increments.
Score / grade validity	2 years
Offered	Up to 4 times a month. Up to 48 times a

	year.
Countries / regions	More than 1,000 test centers in over 140 countries.
Languages	English
Annual no. of test takers	▲ Over 2.5 million in 2014
Prerequisites / eligibility criteria	No official prerequisite. Intended for non-native English speakers.
Fee	To find out the test fee in local currency, use the IELTS Worldwide search to identify a local center.
Scores / grades used by	More than 9,000 education institutions, governments, professional registration bodies and employers worldwide.
Website	www.ielts.org

The **International English Language Testing System**, or **IELTS** is an international standardized test of English language proficiency for non-native English language speakers. It is jointly managed by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment, and was established in 1989. IELTS is one of the major English-language tests in the world, others being the TOEFL, TOEIC, PTE: A and OPI/OPIc.

IELTS is accepted by most Australian, British, Canadian and New Zealand academic institutions, by over 3,000 academic institutions in the United States, and by various professional organizations across the world.

IELTS is the only Secure English Language Test approved by UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) for visa customers applying both outside and inside the UK. It is also a

requirement for immigration to Australia and New Zealand. In Canada, IELTS, TEF, or CELPIP are accepted by the immigration authority.

No minimum score is required to pass the test. An IELTS result or **Test Report Form** is issued to all test takers with a score from "band 1" ("non-user") to "band 9" ("expert user") and each institution sets a different threshold. There is also a "band 0" score for those who did not attempt the test. Institutions are advised not to consider a report older than two years to be valid, unless the user proves that they have worked to maintain their level.

In 2014, 2.5 million tests were taken in more than 140 countries, up from 2 million tests in 2012, 1.7 million tests in 2011 and 1.4 million tests in 2009. In 2007, IELTS administered more than one million tests in a single 12-month period for the first time ever, making it the world's most popular English language test for higher education and immigration.

History

The English Language Testing Service (ELTS), as IELTS was then known, was launched in 1980 by Cambridge English Language Assessment (then known as UCLES) and the British Council. It had an innovative format, which reflected changes in language learning and teaching, including the growth in 'communicative' language learning and 'English for specific purposes'. Test tasks were intended to reflect the use of language in the 'real world'.

During the 1980s, test taker numbers were low (4,000 in 1981 rising to 10,000 in 1985) and there were practical difficulties administering the test. As a result, the ELTS Revision Project was set up to oversee the redesign of the test. In order to have international participation in the redesign, the International Development Program of Australian Universities and Colleges (IDP), now known as IDP: IELTS Australia, joined Cambridge English Language Assessment and the British Council to form the international IELTS partnership which delivers the test to this day. This international partnership was reflected in the new name for the test: The International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

IELTS went live in 1989. Test takers took two non-specialized modules, Listening and Speaking, and two specialized modules, Reading and Writing. Test taker numbers rose by approximately 15% per year and by 1995 there were 43,000 test takers in 210 test centers around the world. IELTS was revised again in 1995, with three main changes:

- There was ONE Academic Reading Module and ONE Academic Writing Module (previously there had been a choice of three field-specific Reading and Writing modules)
- The thematic link between the Reading and Writing tasks was removed to avoid confusing the assessment of reading and writing ability
- The General Training Reading and Writing modules were brought into line with the Academic Reading and Writing modules (same timing, length of responses, reporting of scores).

Further revisions went live in 2001 (revised Speaking Test) and 2005 (new assessment criteria for the Writing test)

IELTS characteristics

IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training are designed to cover the full range of ability from non-user to expert user. The Academic version is for test takers who want to study at tertiary level in an English-speaking country or seek professional registration. The General Training version is for test takers who want to work, train, study at a secondary school or migrate to an English-speaking country.

The difference between the Academic and General Training versions is the content, context and purpose of the tasks. All other features, such as timing allocation, length of written responses and reporting of scores, are the same.

IELTS Academic and General Training both incorporate the following features:

- IELTS tests the ability to listen, read, write and speak in English.

- The speaking module is a key component of IELTS. It is conducted in the form of a one-to-one interview with an examiner. The examiner assesses the test taker as he or she is speaking. The speaking session is also recorded for monitoring and for re-marking in case of an appeal against the score given.

- A variety of accents and writing styles have been presented in test materials in order to minimize linguistic bias. The accents in the listening section are generally 80% British, Australian, New Zealander and 20% others (mostly American).

- IELTS is developed by experts at Cambridge English Language Assessment with input from item writers from around the world. Teams are located in the USA, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and other English-speaking nations.

- Band scores are used for each language sub-skill (Listening, Reading, Writing, and Speaking). The Band Scale ranges from 0 ("Did not attempt the test") to 9 ("Expert User").

IELTS test structure

Modules

There are two modules of the IELTS:

- **Academic Module** and

- **General Training Module**

There is also a separate test offered by the IELTS test partners, called IELTS Life Skills:

- IELTS Academic is intended for those who want to enroll in universities and other institutions of higher education and for professionals such as medical doctors and nurses who want to study or practice in an English-speaking country.

- IELTS General Training is intended for those planning to undertake non-academic training or to gain work experience, or for immigration purposes.

- IELTS Life Skills is intended for those who need to prove their English speaking and listening skills at Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels

A1 or B1 and can be used to apply for a 'family of a settled person' visa, indefinite leave to remain or citizenship in the UK.

The IELTS test has four parts

- Listening: 30 minutes (plus 10 minutes' transfer time)
- Reading: 60 minutes
- Writing: 60 minutes
- Speaking: 11–14 minutes

The test total time is: **2 hours and 44 minutes**.

Listening, Reading and Writing are completed in one sitting. The Speaking test may be taken on the same day or up to seven days before or after the other tests.

All test takers take the same Listening and Speaking tests, while the Reading and Writing tests differ depending on whether the test taker is taking the **Academic** or **General Training** versions of the test.

Listening:

The module comprises four sections, with ten questions in each section. It takes 40 minutes: 30 - for testing, plus 10 for transferring the answers to an answer sheet.

Sections 1 and 2 are about every day, social situations.

- Section 1 has a conversation between two speakers (for example, a conversation about travel arrangements)
- Section 2 has one person speaking (for example, a speech about local facilities).

Sections 3 and 4 are about educational and training situations

- Section 3 is a conversation between two main speakers (for example, a discussion between two university students, perhaps guided by a tutor)
- Section 4 has one person speaking about an academic subject.

Each section begins with a short introduction telling the test taker about the situation and the speakers. Then they have some time to look through the questions. The questions are in the same order as the information in the recording, so the answer to the first question will be before the answer to the second question, and so on. The first three sections have a break in the middle allowing test takers to look at the remaining questions. Each section is heard only once.
At the end of the test students are given 10 minutes to transfer their answers to an answer sheet. Test takers will lose marks for incorrect spelling and grammar.

Reading

The Reading paper has three sections and texts totaling 2,150-2,750 words. There will be a variety of question types, such as multiple choice, short-answer questions, identifying information, identifying writer's views, labeling diagrams, completing a summary using words taken from the text and matching information/headings/features in the text/sentence endings. Test takers should be careful when writing down their answers as they will lose marks for incorrect spelling and grammar.

Texts in IELTS Academic
- Three reading texts, which come from books, journals, magazines, newspapers and online resources written for non-specialist audiences. All the topics are of general interest to students at undergraduate or postgraduate level.

Texts in IELTS General Training
- Section 1 contains two or three short texts or several shorter texts, which deal with everyday topics. For example, timetables or notices – things a person would need to understand when living in an English-speaking country.

- Section 2 contains two texts, which deal with work. For example, job descriptions, contracts, training materials.
- Section 3 contains one long text about a topic of general interest. The text is generally descriptive, longer and more complex than the texts in Sections 1 and 2. The text will be taken from a newspaper, magazine, book or online resource.

Writing

The Writing paper has two tasks which must both be completed. In task 1 test takers write at least 150 words in about 20 minutes. In task 2 test takers write at least 250 words in about 40 minutes. Test takers will be penalized if their answer is too short or does not relate to the topic. Answers should be written in full sentences (test takers must not use notes or bullet points).

IELTS Academic

- Task 1: test takers describe a graph, table, chart or diagram in their own words.
- Task 2: test takers discuss a point of view, argument or problem. Depending on the task, test takers may be required to present a solution to a problem, present and justify an opinion, compare and contrast evidence, opinions and implications, and evaluate and challenge ideas, evidence or an argument.

IELTS General Training

- Task 1: test takers write a letter in response to a given everyday situation. For example, writing to an accommodation officer about problems with your accommodation, writing to a new employer about problems managing your time, writing to a local newspaper about a plan to develop a local airport.

- Task 2: test takers write an essay about a topic of general interests. For example, whether smoking should be banned in public places, whether children's leisure activities should be educational, how environmental problems can be solved.

Speaking

The speaking test is a face-to-face interview between the test taker and an examiner.
The speaking test contains three sections.

- Section 1: introduction and interview (4–5 minutes). Test takers may be asked about their home, family, work, studies, hobbies, interests, reasons for taking IELTS exam as well as other general topics such as clothing, free time, computers and the internet.
- Section 2: long turn (3–4 minutes). Test takers are given a task card about a particular topic. Test takers have one minute to prepare to talk about this topic. The task card states the points that should be included in the talk and one aspect of the topic which must be explained during the talk. Test takers are then expected to talk about the topic for 2 minutes, after which the examiner may ask one or two questions.
- Section 3: discussions (4–5 minutes). The third section involves a discussion between the examiner and the test taker, generally on questions relating to the theme which they have already spoken about in Section 2.

Scoring

Test takers receive a score for each test component – Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. The individual scores are then averaged and rounded to produce an Overall Band Score.

Band scale

There is no pass or fail. IELTS is scored on a nine-band scale, with each band corresponding to a specified competence in English. Overall Band Scores are reported to the nearest half band.

The following rounding convention applies: if the average across the four skills ends in .25, it is rounded up to the next half band, and if it ends in 5.75, it is rounded up to the next whole band. The nine bands are described as follows:

9	Expert User	Has full 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, inappropriateness 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 at all.

IELTS and the CEFR

IELTS Band Score	CEFR Level
8.5 and higher	C2
8.0	Borderline C2/C1
7.5	C1
7.0	C1
6.5	Borderline C1/B2
6.0	B2

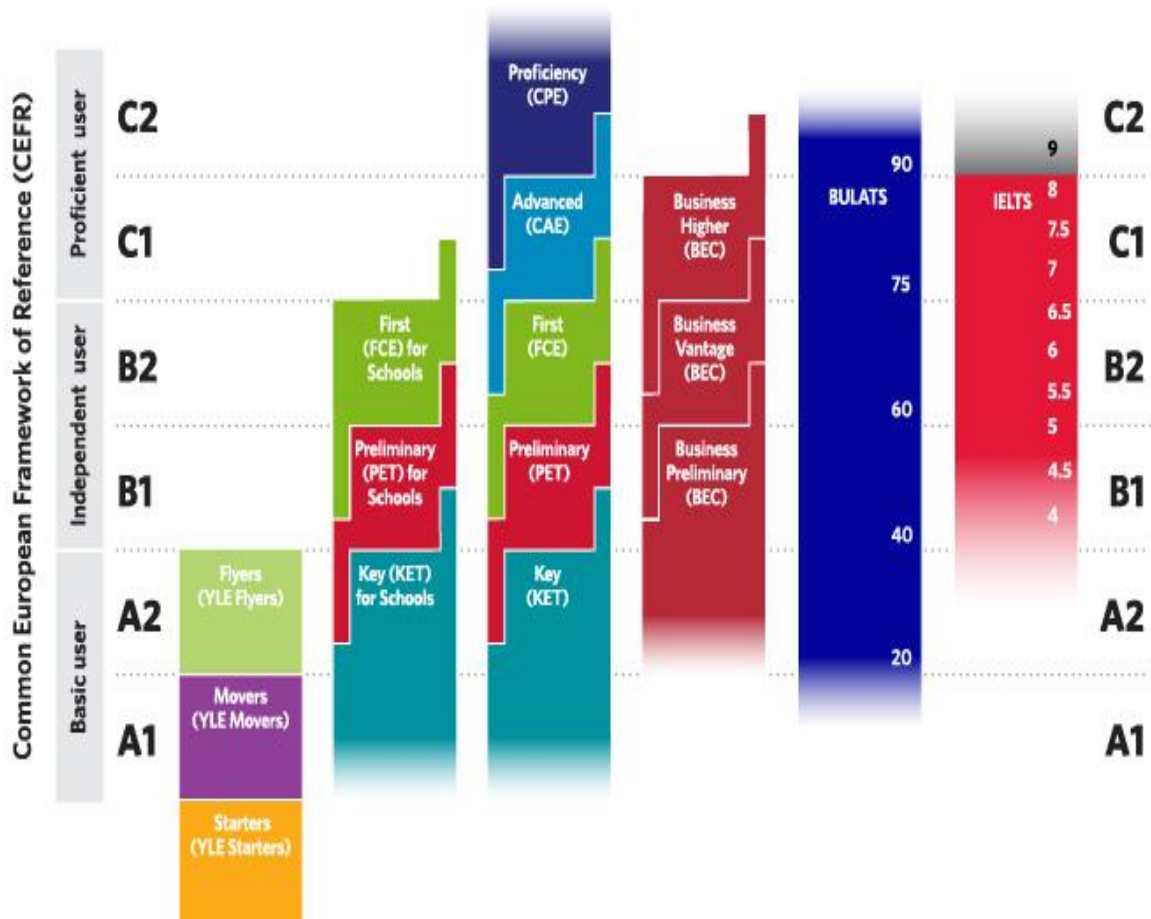|	
5.5	B2
5.0	Borderline B2/B1
4.5	B1
4.0	B1

For more information on how IELTS band scores correspond to levels on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), please see the official conversion diagram on the IELTS website.

Cambridge English

A range of exams to meet different needs

A chart mapping Cambridge English exams against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels:

Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)

- **Proficient user** — C2, C1
- **Independent user** — B2, B1
- **Basic user** — A2, A1

CEFR Level	Young Learners	Schools exams	General exams	Business (BEC)	BULATS	IELTS
C2			Proficiency (CPE)		90	9
C1		First (FCE) for Schools	Advanced (CAE)	Business Higher (BEC)	75	8, 7.5, 7
B2		First (FCE) for Schools	First (FCE)	Business Vantage (BEC)	60	6.5, 6, 5.5, 5
B1		Preliminary (PET) for Schools	Preliminary (PET)	Business Preliminary (BEC)	40	4.5, 4
A2	Flyers (YLE Flyers)	Key (KET) for Schools	Key (KET)		20	
A1	Movers (YLE Movers)					
	Starters (YLE Starters)					

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Conversion table

This table can be used to convert raw scores (out of 40) to band scores (out of 9). This helps test takers understand how many correct answers they need to achieve a particular band score. This chart is a guide only because sometimes the scores adjust slightly depending on how difficult the test is.

Band Score	9.0	8.5	8.0	7.5	7.\0	6.5	6.0	5.5	5.0	4.5	4.0	3.5	3.0	2.5
Listening raw score (Academic and General Training)	39–40	37–38	35–36	33–34	30–32	27–29	23–26	20–22	16–19	13–15	10–12	7–9	4–6	3
Reading raw score (Academic)	39–40	37–38	35–36	33–34	30–32	27–29	23–26	20–22	16–19	13–15	10–12	7–9	4–6	3
Reading raw score (General Training)	40	39	38	36–37	34–35	32–33	30–31	27–29	23–26	19–22	15–18	12–14	8–11	5–7

Results

A Test Report Form is posted to test takers 13 days after their test. It shows:

- An Overall Band Score (from 1-9)
- A band score (from 1-9) for each section of the test (Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking)
- Whether IELTS Academic or General Training was completed
- The test taker's photo, nationality, first language and date of birth.

Test takers receive one copy of their Test Report Form, apart from test takers who are applying to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) or UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) who receive two copies.

Test Report Forms are valid for two years.

Locations and test dates

Test takers can take IELTS in more than 140 countries and in over 1,000 locations.

There are up to 48 test dates available per year. Each test centre offers tests up to four times a month depending on local demand. The Academic version is available on all 48 dates per year and the General Training version is available on 24 dates.

There used to be a minimum time limit of 90 days before which a person was not allowed to retake the test. However this restriction has been withdrawn and currently there is no limit for applicants to retake the test.

Linking IELTS Scores to TOEFL IBT Score Ranges

IELTS Score	TOEFL Score	IELTS Description
9	118-120	Expert User
8.5	115-117	Very Good User
8	110-114	
7.5	102-109	Good User
7	94-101	
6.5	79-93	Competent User
6	60-78	
5.5	42-59	Modest User
5	35-41	
4.5	32-34	Limited User
0-4	0-31	Extremely Limited/Intermittent/Non User