

IELTS Speaking: Basic Information

The IELTS Speaking Test is the final part of the exam. Your test will be at some time between 1.30pm and 5.00pm. You can take only your ID document into the exam room.

The test lasts between 11 and 14 minutes. You will be interviewed by an examiner who will record your conversation. Timing is strictly controlled by the examiner, so don't be surprised if he or she interrupts you during an answer.

There are 3 parts to the Speaking Test:

1. Introduction/ interview: around 10 questions in 4 to 5 minutes.
2. Short presentation: talk for 2 minutes with 1 minute to prepare.
3. Discussion: around 5 questions in 4 to 5 minutes.

Preparation is the key to a good score in IELTS Speaking. Different skills are tested in each part, so you need to know exactly what to do.

We can predict the kinds of questions that the examiner will ask. We'll prepare ideas, possible answers and good vocabulary for each part of the test.

IELTS Speaking: advice

Here are a few simple tips that could make a difference to your score:

1. Be confident

Although you might be nervous, try to speak clearly and confidently. Smile, be friendly, and make eye contact with the examiner. As you go into the exam, tell yourself that you have prepared well and that you're going to enjoy the challenge.

2. Know that you are prepared

You will feel much more confident if you know that you have prepared and practised for the test. You should know exactly what to expect. For example, have you prepared some common topics (e.g. describe a place, a person, a hobby) for the short presentation? Are you ready for a past and a future question in part 3?

3. Imagine the examiner is your friend

Try to enjoy a normal conversation with the examiner. Instead of worrying about your grammar, listen carefully to the questions and try to give natural answers. Most of the

questions are about you, your life and your opinions, so it's best to be open. I used to be an examiner, and I always found the job more interesting when students spoke openly about their opinions and experiences.

IELTS Speaking: informal expressions

Yesterday I wrote about 'an event' for IELTS Speaking Part 2. Some of the expressions I used were informal:

- we chatted (talked)
- to get together with (meet)
- to catch up with (talk to someone you haven't seen for a while)
- what my friends had been up to (had been doing)
- to wind down (relax after something tiring)

The examiner would consider these phrases to be "less common vocabulary". In other words, a few phrasal verbs or informal expressions can help you to get a high score in IELTS Speaking.

IELTS Speaking: using the 1-minute preparation time

Martin asked a great question: "What's the best way to use the 1-minute preparation time in part 2 of the speaking test?"

I must admit, I don't have a good answer to this question (yet). I'm going to try some different approaches with my students this week - hopefully I'll find some answers.

If anyone has any suggestions, feel free to share them in the "comments" area. I'll share my ideas on Friday.

IELTS Speaking: if you don't know the answer

How do you answer a question when you don't know anything about the topic?

There are 2 things you can do:

1. Be honest and explain why you don't know
2. Guess, and tell the examiner that you are guessing

Example question:

How has technology affected the kinds of music that are popular with young people?

My answer, using both tips above:

(1) To be honest I don't really know the answer to that because I'm completely out of touch with what young people are listening to, and I'm not a fan of pop music.

(2) However, I suppose that technology must have affected music. Maybe young people are listening to music that has been made using computer software instead of real musical instruments like the piano or guitar.

Note:

Can you see any "band 7 vocabulary" in my answer?

IELTS Speaking: work or study

These are common questions at the start of the speaking test:

1. Do you work or are you a student?
2. Do you like your job / course? Why / why not?

Example answers:

1. Before I came to England I was working as an accountant, but at the moment I'm studying English because I hope to do a Master's here.
2. Yes, I really like my job because it's interesting and I work with a great team of people. **OR:** Yes, I enjoy studying English, but my real aim is to do a Master's and then find a job in an international company.

Note:

Don't ask the examiner: "Do you mean in my country or here in England?" - it doesn't matter. Don't worry if you have a job and study at the same time - you can mention both.

IELTS Speaking: use what you know

In parts 2 and 3 of the IELTS speaking test, you need to make quick decisions about what to talk about. Always try to talk about a topic you have prepared or something you know about. Here are some examples:

Part 2: *Describe a law in your country.*

Advice: Choose a typical IELTS topic like "guns". Explain why people in your country can/can't own a gun, and talk about the pros and cons of this law. There is a chapter on this topic in my ebook.

Part 3: *What new law would you introduce to improve life in your country?*

Advice: Choose an easy topic like "environment". Explain that the government could introduce new laws to reduce pollution from factories, cars etc. Explain how this would improve people's lives.

IELTS Speaking: an important conversation

IELTS Speaking Part 2:

Describe an important conversation you had.

IELTS Speaking Part 3:

What are the differences between men's and women's conversations?

What do you think are the characteristics of a good speaker?

For the part 2 question:

My advice is to speak about a conversation you had with your father or mother about your education or career. If you are studying in a different country, describe a conversation about the decision to study abroad. Then you can use ideas from the 'study abroad' topic and the 'higher education' topic (you can find these topics in my Writing Task 2 lessons).

For the first question in part 3, my advice is to use 'stereotypes':

"I think it depends on the people who are having the conversation, and it depends on the situation, but most people would say that men talk more about sport or cars, whereas women talk about their friends, family and relationships. Women are supposed to be better at expressing their feelings, while men prefer not to talk about themselves."

For the second question in part 3, use adjectives and examples:

"I think good speakers are confident and passionate about the subject of their speech. They need to be interesting and engaging. I think a speaker's body language is also really important. A famous example of a great speaker is Barack Obama; he seems to

be a naturally inspiring speaker, but I'm sure that practice and preparation are more important than natural talent."

IELTS Speaking: 'questionnaires' topic

IELTS speaking part 2:

Describe a time when you were asked to give your opinion in a questionnaire.

Advice: Say that you were given a questionnaire at the end of one of your school or university courses. Say that the questions asked for your opinions about the teaching, materials, facilities, level of difficulty, how much you enjoyed the course etc.

IELTS speaking part 3:

What kinds of organisation regularly conduct questionnaires?

All kinds of organisations and companies use questionnaires to find out what people think about them. For example, university lecturers often ask their students to answer questions about their courses. Someone from a Starbucks cafe stopped me in the street yesterday to ask me about my coffee drinking habits.

Do you think schools should ask children for their opinions about lessons?

On the one hand, it might be useful for teachers to get feedback from children about how much they learnt and how enjoyable they found the lessons. However, children don't necessarily know what's best for them, and it might do more harm than good to allow them to give opinions about their teachers.

IELTS Advice: describe your favourite...

More advice about describing your favourite book, film or piece of music:

1. You can talk about any type of book (textbook, biography etc.). You only need to describe a story if the question asks you to describe a 'novel'.
2. Many books are also films. It would be a good idea to prepare one description that you can use for both.
3. [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) is great for reviews of books, films and music. Just search for a title, then go down the page to find the reviews.
4. "Steal" the best vocabulary from the reviews that you find.

5. Use Google. I searched for "my favourite film is" on Google and found this ['My Favourite Films' website](#). It's full of good ideas.
6. Try this Google search: "my favourite piece of music is"
7. You can describe a book, film or piece of music from your country.
8. You can invent a story if necessary, but it's easier to tell the truth.
9. If you don't like books, pretend that your favourite film is a book (and vice versa).
10. Remember to include adjectives to describe your feelings/opinions. Tell the story of when you first read the book, saw the film or listened to the song, who recommended it, why you like it etc.

NB. 'Piece of music' just means a song.

IELTS Speaking Advice: be more direct

In the speaking test, examiners don't like it when students use phrases like:

- That's a very interesting question...
- It is my personal opinion that...
- Personally, I would have to say that...
- I am of the opinion that it depends on...
- To be honest, I personally believe that...

These phrases sound unnatural, and it is obvious to the examiner that the student has memorised them.

So what should you do instead? My advice: just answer the question directly. Stop using memorised phrases, and just get straight to the point.

IELTS Speaking Advice: get to the point

Yesterday I wrote that you should avoid using long phrases to begin your answers. Short phrases seem more natural. Native speakers say things like:

- I think...
 - I guess...
 - Well,...
- (and noises like 'er' 'um')

These words/phrases might seem less impressive, but you have to remember that examiners are not impressed by the long phrases either! The important thing is to get to the point of your answer.

IELTS Speaking: pronunciation

In the IELTS speaking test, 25% of your score is for pronunciation. Many students confuse 'pronunciation' with 'accent'. These are *not* the same thing!

Nobody expects you to speak with a perfect British English accent. In fact, the examiner will not judge your accent at all.

Your pronunciation score is based on these things:

- clarity (speaking clearly)
- speed (not too fast, not too slow)
- word stress
- sentence stress
- intonation (the rise and fall of your voice)

It's not easy to improve these things quickly or through deliberate practice. Good pronunciation is usually the result of lots of listening and copying. My tip is: stop worrying about your accent, and focus on speaking clearly.

IELTS Speaking: advice about grammar and vocabulary

It's difficult to think about grammar when you're trying to speak. I think it's much easier to improve your vocabulary score than your grammar score.

Remember:

- Grammar is only 25% of your speaking score.
- If you are thinking too much about grammar, you will lose fluency.
- If you try to use memorised grammatical structures, your speech will not sound 'natural'.
- You will not avoid small grammar mistakes unless you have lived in an English speaking country for many years.

I've taught many students who have achieved a score of 7 or higher, and they all made small grammar mistakes. They got their high scores because we focused on *vocabulary, ideas, opinions* and *fluency*.

Have a look through my speaking lessons, and you'll notice that the focus is usually on vocabulary.

IELTS Speaking: linking phrases don't impress

A student asked me a really useful (and common) question the other day.

Student's question:

I've gone through your speaking answers, and I rarely found linking phrases like "*I suppose I should begin by highlighting the fact that...*" or "*the point I'd like to begin with is that...*". Don't you think such phrases are the sign of a high score?

Here's my answer:

Good question. No, I don't use those phrases because examiners are not impressed by them. Even a beginner can learn linking phrases, and if it were that easy, everyone would get band 9. The sign of a high score is 'real content' ([topic-specific vocabulary](#)), not memorised phrases.

IELTS Speaking Advice: tell stories

At the end of yesterday's lesson I mentioned that you could prepare some examples or stories to make your descriptions more interesting (for speaking part 2, and maybe part 3).

When speaking in our own languages, we tell stories all the time. For example, you might tell a member of your family about what happened at work today, or you might tell your friends about a film you saw last night.

The ability to tell a story in English is a sign that you are becoming a proficient user of the language. Test yourself: try telling a story in English now! Start with something easy, like "what I did yesterday".

IELTS Speaking: how to talk for 2 minutes

Students often ask whether it's necessary to speak for the full 2 minutes in part 2 of the speaking test. The instruction is: *speak for between 1 and 2 minutes*, so it's not strictly necessary to speak for the full 2 minutes. However, my advice is that you should *try* to keep speaking until the examiner stops you.

Here are some tips to help you keep talking:

1. Go through the bullet points on the task card in order.
2. Try to develop each point, even easy ones. For example, if the first bullet point for the topic "describe a person" is "who is it?", don't just say "I'm going to describe my father". Add more information, such as your father's name, age, what he looks like, where he is now, how often you speak to him...
3. Give examples and tell stories ([click here](#) for more advice about this).

IELTS Speaking: which part is the most important?

Do the 3 parts of the speaking test carry equal weighting when your score is calculated, or is one part more important?

The simple answer is that the 3 parts are not scored separately; the examiner rates the student's performance as a whole. In this sense, neither part is more important.

However, it's useful to think about the 3 parts like this:

- Part 1 is supposed to be quite easy (like a warm-up), so you won't get a high score if you *only* do well in this part.
- Part 2 is when the examiner really gets a chance assess how good you are. He/she will now have an idea of what scores to give you.
- During part 3, the examiner is making his/her final decision. A good performance here can boost your score.

When preparing for the exam, my advice is to spend most of your time on part 2. This is the part that you can really work on in terms of topics and techniques.

IELTS Speaking: use real examples!

To improve your IELTS speaking score, use good examples to extend your answers. Real examples or stories about yourself are the best.

Use examples in part 2 when you need to make your presentation longer. Use them in part 3 to support your opinions.

Here's an example that helps me to extend a part 2 presentation about my mobile phone:

"For example, yesterday I used my phone to call some friends to arrange a get-together this weekend. Some of them didn't answer, so I either left a message in their voicemail or I sent them a text. I also replied to a few emails while I was waiting in a queue at the bank."

IELTS Speaking Advice: record, transcribe, analyse

Here are some steps that you could follow when practising for the speaking test:

1. Choose a real speaking test from one of the Cambridge books.
2. Record yourself answering one or all of the parts of the test.
3. Listen to the recording and transcribe it (write down everything you said).
4. Analyse the transcript. How could your answers be improved?
5. Take some time to prepare better answers for the same questions.
6. Try the same questions again! Record yourself, transcribe and analyse.
7. Repeat the process a few times until you are happy.

Imagine if you did this kind of hard work every day for a month. I'm sure you'd be more confident and better prepared than you are now.

IELTS Speaking: add detail

Many students worry too much about grammar. For speaking parts 2 and 3, it's more important to worry about the quality of your answers. The best way to improve the quality of your answers is by adding detail.

Example:

Describe your best friend. Say when you met him/her.

Short answer about when we met:

I met my best friend at school when I was 11 years old.

Detailed answer about when we met:

I met my best friend at school when I was 11 years old, so we've known each other

for ... years. I remember we sat next to each other in my first science lesson at secondary school, and we had to work together to do an experiment. We got on straight away, and we've been friends ever since.

Notice that by adding more information I've also used more/better vocabulary and grammar.

IELTS Speaking: the examiner's attitude

I sometimes hear from students who are worried that their examiner seemed rude or angry in the speaking exam. Maybe the examiner didn't smile or make much eye contact, interrupted a lot, or kept looking at his/her watch. Does this mean that you will get a low score, or that you should complain?

The answer is no! Don't worry, and don't think that you need to complain. The examiner's attitude is not important at all, and you should ignore all of the things I mentioned above. Focus only on answering the examiner's questions as well as you can.

Remember: it's possible to have a very nice, smiling examiner who gives you a low score. On the other hand, an examiner who seems impolite or disinterested might give you a higher score than you expected!

IELTS Speaking: how to feel more confident

Here are some tips to help you feel more confident when you go for your IELTS speaking test:

- Be prepared: you should know exactly what to expect in the 3 parts of the speaking test, and you should have read the suggestions on this website about how to answer.
- Lots of practice: a student who has practised answering all of the questions in all eight Cambridge books, as well as the questions on this site, will feel much more confident than a student who hasn't.
- Write it down: when studying at home, you have time to prepare 'perfect' answers to practice questions; write your answers down, and ask someone to help you check and improve them.
- Speak aloud: start by reading the answers you wrote down (like an actor uses a script), then gradually stop using the script.

- Record yourself: this allows you to analyse the quality of your answers, as well as your pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.
- Focus on ideas: it's difficult to think about grammar when you are speaking, so I advise students to stop worrying about grammatical structures, and focus on expressing good ideas (which means good vocabulary).

IELTS Advice: preparing speaking topics

On Friday I suggested preparing [six main topics](#) for IELTS Speaking Part 2. But how should you prepare these topics? Where can you find good ideas?

I recommend doing two things. First, have a look through the speaking lessons on this site. Second, use the Internet to do some further research. For example, if you want a good description of a famous person, look him/her up on Wikipedia and note down the best vocabulary ideas.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: musical instruments

For IELTS speaking part 1, remember to give short, simple answers. Answer the question with a full sentence and give a reason for your answer. Here are some example questions and answers about musical instruments (from Cambridge IELTS book 6):

1. Which musical instrument do you like listening to most? (Why?)

My favourite musical instrument to listen to is the guitar. I like the fact that there are different types of guitar, like classical, acoustic and electric; I love the variety of sounds a guitar can make.

2. Have you ever learned to play a musical instrument?

I took some guitar lessons when I was younger and still have a guitar at home. I don't play it much nowadays; I wish I had more time to practise.

3. Do you think children should learn to play an instrument at school?

Yes, I think it's a great skill and it's really enjoyable to be able to play a musical instrument. All children should be given this opportunity.

4. How easy would it be to learn to play an instrument without a teacher?

It would probably be more difficult without a teacher. You need someone to show you what to do and correct your mistakes; you need a lot of discipline to teach yourself.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: friends

In part 1 of the IELTS speaking test, remember to keep your answers short and simple. Here are some example questions and short answers:

1. Are your friends mostly your age or different ages?

Most of my friends are about the same age as me because we met at school or university. I've got one or two friends who are older or younger than I met through work.

2. Do you usually see your friends during the week or at weekends?

I tend to meet up with my friends at weekends because everyone's too busy during the week.

3. The last time you saw your friends, what *did* you do together?

It **was** one of my friends' birthday last weekend. Six of us **went** out for a meal to celebrate.

4. In what ways are your friends important to you?

I think it's important to have friends that you can talk to and share experiences with. My friends make me laugh, but I know I can also rely on them whenever I need help or support.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: a good example

Have a look at this video, taken from YouTube. I think it's a good example of how to do IELTS Speaking Part 1.

Remember, Part 1 is supposed to be easy. You should give short, simple answers. I think the student in the video does this well: she speaks clearly, answers the questions directly, and doesn't hesitate before answering. Her answers sound natural and she makes almost no mistakes.

Here are the first 4 questions and answers:

Do you work or are you a student?

I work and I'm studying English as well.

And what's your job?

I work in hairdressing and I do manicure, I do nails. I work part-time.

How long have you done this job?

I've been doing this job for almost one year.

Do you like it?

Actually, I don't like it very much. The part that I like is that I can communicate with people.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: strange questions

In part 1 of the speaking test, the examiner will ask around 10 easy questions. However, students have reported some strange questions, such as:

1. Do you like parks?
2. Do you think different colours can change our moods?
3. When do people give flowers in your country?

Don't be shocked by these questions. Just give a simple answer with a reason. Don't worry about using fantastic grammar or vocabulary; just try to answer without hesitating. For example:

1. Yes, I like parks because they are great places to relax. I think all cities need green areas.
2. Yes, I think bright colours, like red, can make you feel energetic. Some greens and blues can be more relaxing.
3. People give flowers on special occasions like birthdays or on Valentine's Day. In my country, giving flowers is seen as romantic.

IELTS Speaking: work or study

These are common questions at the start of the speaking test:

1. Do you work or are you a student?
2. Do you like your job / course? Why / why not?

Example answers:

1. Before I came to England I was working as an accountant, but at the moment I'm studying English because I hope to do a Master's here.
2. Yes, I really like my job because it's interesting and I work with a great team of people. **OR:** Yes, I enjoy studying English, but my real aim is to do a Master's and then find a job in an international company.

Note:

Don't ask the examiner: "Do you mean in my country or here in England?" - it doesn't matter. Don't worry if you have a job and study at the same time - you can mention both.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'neighbours' topic

I've recently bought Cambridge IELTS book 8. Below are some questions and example answers from the first speaking test in the book. Remember that part 1 is supposed to be easy, so you should give short, direct answers.

1. How well do you know your next-door neighbours?

I know my neighbours quite well. They're really nice people, and I always stop to talk whenever I see them. I think it's important to get on well with the people who live next door.

2. How often do you see them?

I see my neighbours at least a few times a week. We usually see each other when we're leaving for work in the morning or coming home in the evening.

3. What problems do people sometimes have with their neighbours?

I think the most common problem is probably noise. It's difficult to live next to people who have a dog that barks at night, or who play loud music or have too many parties.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'numbers' topic

One of my students had these questions in her exam last week. I've put an example answer below each one.

1) Do you have a favourite number or a number that is special to you?

Yes, my favourite number is... because it's the day I was born on, and it's my lucky number.

2) Do any numbers have special importance in your country?

Yes, certain ages are special. For example, your 18th birthday is important because it's when you are considered to become an adult.

3) Are you good at remembering numbers? Why / why not?

No, I'm not very good at remembering numbers. I don't think it's necessary to learn them by heart; I just save them on my phone.

4) What numbers do people often have to memorise?

The most important number to remember on a daily basis is the pin number for your bank card. Without this you can't pay for anything or get cash out.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: clothes

In part 1 of the IELTS speaking test, you will have to answer some easy questions on 2 different topics. You should give short, simple answers. Here are some example questions and answers for the topic of 'clothes'.

1. Are clothes and clothing fashions important to you? (Why/Why not?)

No, clothes and fashions are not really important to me. I tend to wear clothes that are comfortable and practical rather than fashionable.

2. What different clothes do you wear for different situations?

Well, I have to dress quite formally for work, so I wear a shirt and trousers. At home I prefer to wear jeans and a T-shirt, and on special occasions I might wear a suit.

3. Do you wear different styles of clothes now compared to 10 years ago?

No, not really, because I don't follow fashion. I think I have dressed in a similar way for the last 10 years.

4. Do you think the clothes we wear say something about who we are?

Yes, they probably do. Some people are really careful about what they wear because they want to be seen as stylish. Other people wear clothes that show wealth or status, such as clothes by famous designers.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'communication' topic

Here are some more examples for IELTS speaking part 1. Remember to give short, easy, direct answers.

1. How do you usually keep in touch with members of your family?

I mostly keep in touch with my family by phone, and I've started using the Internet to make video calls. I also try to visit members of my family in person as often as I can.

2. Do you prefer to speak to people by phone or by writing emails?

It depends on the situation. I use email and text messages to communicate with friends, but my parents prefer it if I phone them.

3. Do you ever write letters by hand? (Why / Why not?)

No, I don't write letters by hand because it's so much easier to send an email that will arrive immediately.

4. Is there anything you dislike about mobile phones?

Well, I don't like listening to other people's conversations in public places, and I don't like it when someone's phone rings in the cinema or during a lesson.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: travel habits

Remember that Part 1 questions are supposed to be easy. Just give a simple answer and a reason.

1. What form of transport do you prefer to use? Why?

I prefer to travel by car because it means that I have my own space. Also, the buses and trains in my city are usually overcrowded; my car is much more comfortable.

2. How much time do you spend travelling on a normal day?

I probably spend about an hour and a half travelling to and from work. I travel during the rush hours, so there is quite a lot of traffic.

3. What do you do while you are travelling?

I usually listen to the radio or a CD. In the morning I like to listen to the news to find out what is happening in the world.

4. Do you ever have problems with transport?

Yes, as I said, I get stuck in traffic on my way to and from work. I used to get annoyed by traffic jams, but now I'm used to them.

A few important points:

- In the answer to question 4, can you see the difference between "I used to" and "I'm used to"?
- Notice the good vocabulary: 'have my own space', 'overcrowded', 'to and from work', 'rush hour', 'find out what is happening in the world', 'get stuck in traffic'.
- If the examiner asks a question that you have already answered, just say "as I said" and repeat your answer.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: laughing

The following questions are taken from Cambridge IELTS 7, page 55. The aim in part 1 is to give *short, simple* answers. Don't worry about using 'difficult' grammar.

1. What kinds of thing make you laugh?

I laugh most when I'm with friends talking about funny things that have happened to us. I also like watching comedians and comedy films.

2. Do you like making other people laugh?

Yes, it's a nice feeling when you can make someone laugh because you can see that you've made them happy. It's great to share a funny moment with someone.

3. Do you think it's important for people to laugh?

Yes, of course. It's important to see the funny side of things; humour helps us not to take life too seriously. I think that laughter is good for our health.

4. Is laughing the same as feeling happy?

It's not exactly the same because you can be happy without laughing, and sometimes we laugh when something bad has happened; a sense of humour can help us to cope with difficult situations.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: five simple rules

Part 1 of the IELTS Speaking test is supposed to be easy. You don't need to give 'difficult' answers, and you should try to avoid making mistakes.

Here are five simple rules for Speaking Part 1:

1. Keep your answers short, then stop with confidence.
2. Answer the questions using full sentences.
3. Use words from the examiner's question in your answer.
4. If possible, give a reason for your answer.
5. Don't forget to say "yes" or "no" when necessary.

Here's an example to illustrate these points:

Do you like parks?

Yes, I like parks because they are great places to relax. If you live in a city, a park is often the only place where you can escape from the noise and the traffic.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: sport

Some students worry about the 'sport' topic because they don't do any sports. Today's example answers are for those students. Remember to give short, direct answers.

1. What sports or physical activities do you regularly do?

Unfortunately, I don't have time to do any sports or physical activities because of my work commitments. I'd like to find more time for regular exercise.

2. Which sport or game would you like to be good at?

I'd like to be good at tennis. It must be great to be able to hit the ball as hard as you can and watch it land exactly where you wanted it to.

3. Do you prefer watching or playing sports?

I don't watch much sport on TV and I'm not a big sports fan, so I think I would probably enjoy doing sports more than watching them.

4. Do you think children should be encouraged to do more sport?

Yes, I think that sport is really important for children. Sports and games teach children to play together and try their best.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: emails and handwriting

At work or in your studies, do you often write things?

Yes, I write a lot of emails as part of my job. I work for a company that has offices in several countries, so we use email to communicate.

How often do you send e-mails?

I probably write between 5 and 10 work emails every day, and I send emails to friends or family a few times a week.

Do you prefer to write by hand or on a computer?

It depends what I'm doing. I prefer the computer for most things because it's faster and you can save or copy things, but I still like making notes or writing ideas down by hand.

Do you think computers might one day replace handwriting?

No, I think we will always write by hand as well. I think it's an important skill, and schools will continue to teach children to write by hand before they learn to type.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: short, simple answers

The first part of the IELTS Speaking Test lasts around 4 to 5 minutes. The examiner asks about 10 questions related to you, your daily life and your interests. Common topics are hobbies, family, friends, food, music etc.

Part 1 questions are supposed to be easy, and the examiner must get through all of the questions in 5 minutes or less. That's only about 30 seconds per question. If you try to give long answers, the examiner will interrupt you. My advice is to keep Part 1 answers very simple:

Do you prefer home-cooked food or food from restaurants?

I prefer home-cooked food because I think it's healthier and you know exactly what you're eating. I also enjoy cooking for family and friends.

You don't need to say any more than this. Just answer the question with a full sentence, give a reason, and maybe add one extra piece of information. Then stop speaking. *Stop with confidence and look at the examiner, ready for the next question.*

IELTS Speaking Part 1: home town

Here are some part 1 questions and answers on the topic of 'home town'. Remember to keep your part 1 answers short and direct.

1. Where are you from?

I'm from Manchester, which is a city in the north west of England.

2. Do you like your home town? (Why?)

Yes, I like living in Manchester because it's where most of my friends live, and because there are plenty of things to do there. The only thing I don't like is the weather.

3. Would you prefer to live somewhere else? (Why?)

For the moment I'm happy living here, but at some point I'd like to live in a country with a warmer climate, and I'd like to live near a beach!

4. Do you think your home town is a good place for young people? (Why?)

Yes, Manchester has lots of things for young people, such as sports, music and cinemas. They can watch a football match, go to one of the free museums, or even go indoor skiing.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'accommodation' topic

Here are some questions that I found on the official IELTS website, ielts.org. The answers below are my examples. Remember to keep your part 1 answers short and simple. You don't need to show off in part 1.

1. Tell me about the kind of accommodation you live in.

I live in a house that has a living room, a kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a small garden. It's not a very big house, but it's just right for me.

2. How long have you lived there?

I've lived there for about five years. It's the first house that I've owned; before that I was renting an apartment.

3. What do you like about living there?

I like living there because I think the house reflects my personality: I decorated it myself, I chose all the furniture, and everything is where I want it to be.

4. What sort of accommodation would you most like to live in?

If I could, I'd buy a bigger house near a beach or in the mountains, preferably somewhere with a warm climate.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'work' topic

Here are some example questions with short, direct answers. Remember that part 1 is like a warm-up; you are not expected to give long, complex answers for this part.

1. Do you work or are you a student?

I'm a qualified doctor, but at the moment I'm studying English so that I can work in this country.

2. Do you enjoy your job?

Yes, I really enjoy my job. Ever since I was a child I have always wanted to be a doctor; I've always wanted to be able to help people.

3. What's the best thing about your job?

The best thing about my job is that I can make a difference in people's lives. It's a great feeling to see someone recover after an illness because my colleagues and I were able to help.

4. Do you prefer working alone or with others? Why?

In a hospital you have to work as part of a team. I've got used to working with others, and I think you can achieve a lot more as a team than you would alone.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'reading' topic

Here are some part 1 questions with example answers. Remember to keep your part 1 answers short and simple.

1. Do you like reading?

Yes, I like reading a lot. I read all sorts of things, including novels, newspapers, magazines, and online articles.

2. Do you usually read for leisure or for work purposes?

Well, I have to do a certain amount of reading as part of my job, but I probably read more for enjoyment. I pick up a newspaper most days, and I usually have a book on the go.

3. *What was your favourite book or story when you were a child?*

The first book that I remember really enjoying was [The Hobbit](#). It only took me a few days to read because I liked it so much that I couldn't put it down.

4. *Do you think it's important that children read regularly?*

Definitely. I think reading is possibly the most important skill that children learn. The ability to read opens the door to all aspects of education.

[IELTS Speaking Part 1: negative answers](#)

How do you answer questions about a topic that you are not interested in? For example, many people have no interest in dancing, so what should they say?

My advice: just tell the truth. It's fine to say you don't like something. Read my examples below:

1. *Do you like dancing?*

No, I don't like dancing. I'm not a big music fan, and dancing just makes me feel uncomfortable and self-conscious.

2. *Has anyone ever taught you to dance?*

No, I've never been interested in learning to dance, so I've never taken any lessons or asked anyone to show me how to do it.

3. *Do you think that traditional dancing will be popular in the future?*

I'm afraid I have no idea because I don't follow what's happening in the dancing world! I suppose it will always be popular with some people.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: old building description

Describe an old building that you like. You should say:

- *where it is*
- *what it is used for*
- *and why you like it.*

The answer below is adapted from the [modern building](#) description I wrote last year. Can you spot some of the vocabulary that I've recycled?

1. I'm going to describe a very famous building in New York: the Empire State Building. People might not think of it as an old building, but the Empire State Building was built in 1931, so I don't think it can be classed as new. It's located on Manhattan island and it's probably the most distinctive and recognisable building when you look at New York's skyline.
2. As far as I know, the Empire State Building is an office building, but visitors can go up to an observation deck on the top floor, which is the 102nd floor. There's also a 360-degree observation area on the 86th floor. Apparently, the building makes more money from the sale of tickets to the observation floors than it does from office rentals.
3. I think the Empire State Building is still one of the most impressive skyscrapers in the world. It's such an iconic structure, and it's amazing to think that it was built around 80 years ago. The best thing about the building is the viewing deck on the top floor, which offers spectacular views of the city; it's definitely the best vantage point in New York. I'd recommend anyone who visits the city to go there and experience the view.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: old building

I've already done a description of a modern building [here](#), but the examiner might ask you to describe an old building. How can we adapt the 'modern building' description?

Looking at the vocabulary I used to describe the modern building (famous landmark, spectacular views, best vantage point etc.), it seems that we should choose an old building which is tall or has great views of a city.

One possibility that comes to mind is the [Empire State Building](#) in New York. It was built in 1931, so I think that would be old enough.

Can you think of any other examples? If you choose a famous building, it will probably have its own Wikipedia page. Do some research, and plan your description.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: 'difficult' questions

Students tend to worry about 'difficult questions', but questions are often much easier than they seem. For example:

Describe a law in your country.

Many students think they don't know anything about laws. However, there are some easy examples that they could choose:

1. In many countries it is now illegal to use a mobile phone while driving. You could start by talking about the popularity and benefits of mobile phones, and explain that people want to be able to answer calls wherever they are. Then you could explain the dangers of being distracted while driving; this law could reduce the number of road accidents, and therefore save lives.
2. If you feel confident talking about the 'education' topic, you could choose the 'compulsory education' law. This is the legal requirement that children up to a certain age must attend school. In the UK, for example, children are required by law to continue in education until they are 16 years old. This is a good topic because you can talk about the benefits of education.

Of course, you could choose a more obvious law (it is illegal to steal, carry a gun etc.) but you might have more ideas and good vocabulary if you choose a typical IELTS topic like number 2 above.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: main topics

For part 2 of IELTS speaking, I encourage my students in Manchester to prepare ideas for 6 main topic areas:

1. Describe an object (a gift, something you use etc.)
2. Describe a person (someone you admire, a family member etc.)
3. Describe an event (a festival, celebration etc.)
4. Describe an activity (e.g. a hobby)
5. Describe a place (somewhere you visited, a holiday etc.)
6. Describe your favourite (book/film/advertisement/website)

Most questions fit into one of these topics. For example, "*Describe a river, lake or sea which you like*" is number 5 - you could describe a holiday by the sea, or a city with a river.

Don't take the test without preparing some ideas for these topics first!

[IELTS Speaking Part 2: TV channel](#)

Last week we looked at this question:

Describe a TV programme or channel that you enjoy watching regularly.

- *What it is called and what is it about?*
- *When do you usually watch it ?*
- *Why do you prefer it to other programmes or channels?*

Here's a sample description with the best vocabulary underlined:

- I rarely watch traditional television channels nowadays; I much prefer searching for interesting programmes or videos online. So, although it's not a normal TV channel or programme, I'd like to talk about a website which I think is kind of a modern version of a TV channel. It's called TED, which stands for 'Technology, Entertainment, Design', and it's a great place to watch short talks and presentations about all sorts of interesting topics.
- The good thing about the videos on TED is that I can watch them whenever I want. I have ted.com saved as one of my favourites on my laptop, and I tend to visit the website every few days to check whether there is anything new. I often watch TED videos on my phone while I'm travelling to work on the train.
- The reason I like watching online videos on TED is that I learn something new every time I watch one. The tagline for the TED website is 'ideas worth spreading', and this really sums up the appeal of the site for me. Instead of watching meaningless soap operas and talk shows on TV, I d much rather spend 10 minutes watching someone talk about a breakthrough in technology, science or healthcare.

[IELTS Speaking Part 2: TV programme or channel](#)

Yap asked me about the following question:

Describe a TV programme or channel that you enjoy watching regularly.

- *What it is called and what is it about?*
- *When do you usually watch it ?*
- *Why do you prefer it to other programmes or channels?*

Yap asked whether it would be acceptable to talk about ted.com as a TV channel. I think it would definitely be acceptable - just say that it's an online TV channel. TED would be a great choice for this topic.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a vehicle

Describe a vehicle you would like to buy in the future. You should say

- *what kind of vehicle it is*
- *what you would use it for*
- *and why you would like to buy it.*

Here's my sample answer:

- If I had the money, I'd like to buy my own helicopter. I recently saw a TV programme about someone who flew around in his own helicopter, and I remember thinking that it would be great to have one. The helicopter on the programme was a small, blue, two-seater and it seemed quite easy to fly - that's the kind of thing I'd like to buy.
- Ideally, I'd use my helicopter instead of a car. First, I'd need to learn to fly it, but then I'd use it to go on short trips or holidays. It would be fantastic to be able to avoid traffic jams, and get everywhere in a fraction of the time it normally takes. I'd take friends and family sightseeing, over cities or mountain tops, and maybe I could even use it to do the shopping!
- The reason I'd like to buy a helicopter is that you can park one almost anywhere. You don't need to find a runway or an airport like you would for a plane. So I'd be able to park my helicopter in my garden - if I had a bigger garden. Also, I've always been intrigued by those helipads on the tops of tall buildings - I think it would be fun to land on top of a building. A helicopter probably isn't a realistic choice of vehicle, but you never know - I might win the lottery!

PS. You should also have a look at Martin's sample answers in the comments area below [this lesson](#).

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a vehicle

Describe a vehicle you would like to buy in the future. You should say

- *what kind of vehicle it is*
- *what you would use it for*
- *and why you would like to buy it.*

Here's some advice (I'll give you my model answer next week):

1. Make your decision quickly. Most people will choose to describe a car, but if you're feeling adventurous, it might be fun to choose an aeroplane (airplane) or a helicopter. It doesn't matter if your choice isn't realistic.
2. Develop each point in detail. For the first bullet point, tell the examiner as much as you can about the vehicle e.g. the make of the car, its colour, what it looks like outside and inside, the gadgets it has inside etc.
3. Stories are the best type of example: imagine where you would go in your new vehicle, and what you would use it for. The benefit of choosing something adventurous, like the aeroplane or helicopter, is that you are more likely to be creative and imaginative in the rest of your answer.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: use what you know

Don't worry if you get a question that you haven't prepared for. You can usually use ideas that you prepared for a different topic. For example:

Describe a piece of advice that you gave (or that someone gave you)

Why not say that you advised your friend to visit London? Then you could use all the good vocabulary from [this lesson](#). Or you could use [this lesson](#) to talk about advice that your father gave you. For example, say that your father told you to work hard. Then you could use great vocabulary such as 'major influence', 'hard-working', 'role model', 'set a good example', 'positive outlook on life'.

Think quickly during the one-minute preparation time: What can I use that I've already prepared?

IELTS Speaking Part 2: choose your topic quickly!

One of the most important things to practise for IELTS speaking part 2 is choosing your topic quickly. Take this question for example:

Describe a situation in which you were very polite. You should explain

- *where the situation took place*
- *how you showed that you were polite*
- *and why you needed to be so polite.*

It would be easy to waste your one-minute preparation time worrying about what situation to choose. If you still haven't decided what to talk about when the examiner asks you to start speaking, you'll be in real trouble!

Task:

Give yourself just 10 seconds to choose your polite situation. It doesn't really matter what situation you choose; the key is to give yourself enough time to prepare some ideas.

[IELTS Speaking Part 2: formula phrases](#)

A student asked me whether the following formula is useful for speaking part 2:

- I guess I could begin by saying something about (point 1) and I think I would have to choose...
- Going on to my next point which is (point 2), I really need to emphasise that (explain point 2).
- And now with reference to (point 3), the point I want to make here is that (explain point 3).
- And so finally, if I have time, in answer to the question of (point 4), really I should mention that...

So, are these 'formula phrases' a good idea? My answer is ***no!***

As an English speaker and ex-examiner, I find these phrases annoying. It's obvious that they are memorised, and they do not address the question topic. Please don't expect the examiner to be impressed by this kind of thing.

There are a couple of benefits to learning a formula: it gives your answer some structure, and it might make you feel more confident during the test. However, the disadvantages are greater:

1. Your focus is on the phrases you have memorised, when it should be on [answering the question](#) with relevant ideas.

2. The examiner thinks that you are using memorised phrases because you are unable to produce good language spontaneously. In other words, your use of long formula phrases suggests that your level of English is lower.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: foreign culture

Here are some ideas for [last week's question](#).

1. Which culture and how I know about it

I'm going to talk about France and French culture. I know France quite well because it was the first foreign country that I visited as a child. I've been on several family holidays there, and I lived and worked in Paris for a while after finishing university.

2. Cultural differences

The first thing that comes to mind when I think about France is the bread! I love the fact that French people buy fresh baguettes every morning, usually from small local bakeries or 'patisseries'; it makes a change from the loaves of sliced bread that most of us buy from the supermarket here in the UK. One slightly negative difference I noticed in Paris is that Parisians don't seem to make friends with their work colleagues to the same extent as we do here.

3. What I like about it

I really like the café culture in France. You can always find somewhere interesting to sit and have a coffee and chat to friends or just watch the world go by. I actually put on a bit of weight when I lived in France because I got into a habit of having a croissant or a cake in every nice café that I found. Another thing I could mention is that the last time I went to France on holiday, I played a game called 'boules' every day. The game consists in throwing metal balls as close to a target ball as possible. It's the perfect game for a relaxing afternoon when the weather's hot.

Tip:

Notice that I included personal examples or experiences in my answers. It's easy to talk for 2 minutes if you can tell a story or two.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: 'foreign culture' topic

Describe a foreign culture that you like. You should say

- *what culture it is and how you know about it*

- *what differences there are between that culture and your own*
- *and why you like that foreign culture.*

For this question, you don't need to discuss 'deep' cultural issues. Just choose a foreign country that you have visited, and talk about anything that is different from your own culture (language, food, customs, behaviour, typical activities etc.).

Feel free to share your descriptions in the comments area below this lesson. I'll post my description (or I'll use the best one of yours) next week.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: take ideas from other topics

Describe a time when you received some money as a gift. You should say:

- *who gave it to you*
- *what the occasion was*
- *how you felt*
- *and explain what you did with the money.*

If you think about some of the topics we have already prepared, the question above should be quite easy.

Some ideas:

1. You could say that you received money for your birthday and took your friends out for a meal. Take some ideas from [this lesson](#).
2. You could say that you bought yourself a new phone (see [this lesson](#)).
3. You could say that you used the money to pay for a holiday or trip, and use ideas from [this lesson](#).

Note:

I'm not recommending that you learn my answers word-for-word. Just try to take some of my ideas and adapt them to your own answers.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a website

In Part 2 of IELTS Speaking, you might be asked to describe a website that you use:

Describe a website that you often use. You should say:

- *what type of website it is*
- *how you found out about it*
- *what it allows you to do, and why you find it useful.*

Here are some ideas, with some of the band 7-9 vocabulary underlined:

1. Facebook is a social networking website. It's a free website that allows you to keep in contact with friends or find people you've lost touch with. It's one of the most popular websites in the world, with millions of users in different countries.
2. All of my friends use Facebook. One of my friends sent me an email inviting me to join. I signed up and I've been using it ever since.
3. Facebook allows you to keep up to date with what friends are doing. You have a profile page with information and status updates so that you can tell everyone what you're doing. You can post messages to other people's pages. You can upload photos and videos. I find Facebook most useful for organising my life, keeping in touch with friends and storing photos. I think social networking websites have become part of everyday life.

[IELTS Speaking Part 2: three tips](#)

Here are three quick tips for IELTS speaking part 2 (the short speech):

1. Use the 1 minute preparation time well

Think about how you would answer the question in your own language, then write down as many ideas as possible in English.

2. Give real examples

Say what you really think, talk about your real life, and give real examples. Examples are really important; whenever you don't know what to say, give an example from your own experience.

3. Don't worry about grammar

You haven't got time to think about passives or conditionals. Focus on answering the question - ideas and vocabulary.

[IELTS Speaking Part 2: which tense?](#)

- Can you use the past tense when describing a person who is still alive?
- Which tense should you use when describing a person?

The answer to the first question is *yes*. You can say: "My father was always a good role model for me when I was growing up." This doesn't mean that your father is no longer alive; it just means that you are no longer growing up!

The answer to the second question is *it depends*. As we saw above, you can use the past tense, but it would also be easy to add the present and/or future tense: "My father was always kind to me when I was a child, and he still helps me whenever I need something. I'm sure he will always be there for me."

IELTS Speaking Part 2: easier than you think

Sometimes a question seems difficult, but you might be able to turn it into a different topic. Take these questions for example:

1. Describe a photo that you like.
2. Describe an important letter you received.

Many students panic when I ask them these two questions, but they are much easier than you think. Here are some ideas:

1. You could describe a photo of your family on a special occasion (e.g. a birthday party). This would allow you to talk about the members of your family and tell the story of what happened at the party when the photo was taken. Alternatively, you could describe a holiday photo of a place you visited. Then you can talk about the place and what you did there.
2. If you have a job, you could describe the letter you received telling you that you got the job. You could talk about the job interview, how you felt when you received the letter, and what you now do in your job. On the other hand, if you are a student, you could say that you received a letter confirming your place on your degree course.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: essential preparation

It's impossible to prepare for *every* question that you might get in the speaking test, but what are the *essential* things to prepare for?

Here's my list of essentials:

1. Favourites: Don't go into the test without knowing what your favourites are. Prepare to talk about your favourite book, film, music, and website.
2. People: Be ready to talk about a famous person and a member of your family.
3. Activities: Have you prepared some ideas about a hobby? Can you describe a typical day in your life? Try to remember some special moments in your life, such as birthdays, festivals and weddings.
4. Places: You need to be able to talk about where you live. Also, think about the places you have visited, what you did there, and why you liked or didn't like them.
5. Things: Can you talk about the things you use every day, something you would like to buy, or a present that you received?

Remember that in part 2 you are always asked to "**describe**". Make sure you prepare some good adjectives for each topic, make sure you can talk about your opinions and feelings, and think about some examples or stories to make your descriptions more interesting.

[IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a business](#)

It would be a good idea to prepare some ideas for this question:

Describe a business that you would like to own or set up.

It doesn't matter what business you choose, and you don't need to tell the truth. Here are some ideas:

- Choose something that you know about. For example, if you like buying clothes, say that you would like to own a clothes shop. If you're a football fan, say that you'd like to own a football club!
- Do some online research. Find the websites of companies you like, and take some notes about what they do and why they are successful.
- Imagine what a typical day would be like if you worked in the business you have chosen. What would you do in the morning, during the day, and in the evening? Telling a story is a great way to extend your answer.

[IELTS Speaking: another garden description](#)

Last week I described a famous garden. Martin, an IELTS teacher who often contributes to the comments on this site, sent me a description of his own garden. You might find it more useful than my famous garden description!

Martin's description:

Today I'd like to describe my home garden, which I think is a beautiful one and which I like very much. The garden is part of my home's backyard, and my house is located in the suburbs, about a 1-hour drive from the city of San Francisco. There is a big tree right in the middle of my garden, which is surrounded by a hot tub, a small water fountain, several bushes, a section for vegetables, and different kinds of flowers.

This garden was actually one of the reasons why my wife and I chose to buy our house because it had been beautifully maintained by the previous owner's gardener and landscaper. It's been only 1 year since we bought the house and now we are taking care of the garden ourselves. Even though we are not experts in gardening, we still try our best to plant things that we like, such as roses and tulips, and we even grow our own tomatoes.

Whenever family and friends come to visit us, we invite them to have a relaxing time in our hot tub, and enjoy the view. So in other words, our garden has also become a kind of resort! It definitely requires lots of hard work to properly maintain the garden, but it gives us a great sense of accomplishment to "decorate" it the way we like.

All in all, the garden is one of the best features of my home and it is a place where I can relax after a long day of work or during the weekends.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a garden

Describe a beautiful garden that you like. You should say

- where it is

- what you can see there

- what people do there

and explain why you like it.

Here are some ideas:

1. The garden I'm going to describe is famous because it belonged to the French painter Claude Monet. It's in a place called Giverny, which is in northern France, about an hour away from Paris in the province of Normandy.
2. There are actually two gardens at the Monet house in Giverny: a flower garden, and a Japanese inspired water garden. Apparently, Monet designed the gardens

himself; he even had the pond and the famous Japanese bridge made. After creating the gardens, Monet painted some of the most well-known paintings in the world, such as those of the waterlilies below the bridge on his pond.

3. Thousands of people visit the gardens at Giverny to see the magnificent scenes that inspired Monet's paintings. Visitors can walk around the gardens and take pictures, which is what I did when I went there.
4. I like Monet's gardens because they are such beautiful creations, and it's amazing to see the 'real thing' having seen the famous paintings so many times.

To learn more about Monet's gardens, have a look at [this site](#).

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a meal

Describe a popular meal from your country that you like to eat.

You should say

- *what the meal is*
- *why it's popular in your country*
- *and why you like it.*

Here's some advice:

1. Your choice of meal is important because you need to be able to say a lot about it. For example, you could choose a dish that people eat during a particular festival.
2. Spend some time on each of the 3 parts of the question. For the first part, don't just give the name of the meal; explain what it consists of and how it is made.
3. For the last part (why you like it), use some good adjectives, then tell a story about when you last ate that meal. Explain where you were and what the occasion was.

Prepare some ideas and try recording yourself. Keep practising until you are confident that you would be able to answer this question in an exam situation.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a film/movie

In part 2 of the IELTS Speaking test, you might have to describe your favourite film ('movie' is American English). My advice is to look for your film on amazon.com. You will find reviews of almost any film, from [The Godfather](#) to [Titanic](#).

The only problem is that the reviews are often quite difficult or too detailed. I recommend stealing a few ideas or a few bits of good vocabulary.

For example, here is some good vocabulary from a review of *The Godfather*:

- one of the greatest films ever made
- a masterpiece
- a brilliant story
- the actors' performances are outstanding
- it's compelling to watch

Make sure you can summarise the film's plot (the story). Try to remember where and when you first saw the film. Explain how it made you feel and why you like it.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a hobby

"Describe a hobby" seems like an easy topic. However, students often have difficulty speaking for 2 minutes when the topic is easy.

Here are 3 pieces of advice to help you to speak for 2 minutes:

1. Think about question words: What, when, where, why, who with:

One of my hobbies is photography. I've got two digital cameras: one small pocket-sized camera that I carry around with me, and one bigger, more expensive camera that I use on special occasions. I take photos so that I have a record of the things I've seen or done. Most of my photos are of friends and family, but I also take pictures of interesting things that I see.

2. Describe opinions and feelings:

I like photography because it's a creative hobby and it makes you notice the world around you. I love capturing special moments or unusual or beautiful images, and it's a great feeling to be able to look back through my pictures and relive different experiences.

3. Tell a story related to the topic:

The last time I took photos on a special occasion was at my friend's wedding a few weeks ago. I got some great pictures of the bride and groom and their guests celebrating. After the wedding I made an album of all the best pictures and sent it to my friend as a present.

Note:

You don't need to tell the truth (I exaggerated my interest in photography) but it's usually easier to tell a story if it's real.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: something that made you angry

Describe a situation that made you angry. You should say

- *when it happened*
- *what happened*
- *how you felt*

Here are some ideas. Notice that I answer by telling a story, and that my ideas are not 'academic' or 'formal' because it isn't an academic topic. Study my answer carefully - it's full of good words and phrases.

Band 9 answer:

A recent situation that made me angry was getting stuck in a traffic jam on the way to meet some friends. It was last Sunday lunchtime, and I didn't expect there to be much traffic; people don't work on Sundays, so the roads aren't usually very busy.

Everything was going well until suddenly I saw a queue of cars on the road in front of me. I had no choice but to join the queue and wait to get past whatever was causing the delay. It turned out that it was caused by some roadworks, and it took me an extra 30 minutes to get past them.

Getting stuck in traffic congestion doesn't usually make me angry, but this time it did, mainly because I wasn't expecting it and I knew that my friends were waiting to meet me for lunch. I felt frustrated and powerless because there was nothing I could do to change the situation, and I had no idea how long I would be sitting there waiting. When I finally saw the reason for the congestion, I was relieved that I was close to getting past the roadworks, but I still felt a bit stressed knowing that I was half an hour late.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: forget about eye contact

Many students worry that they need to maintain eye contact with the examiner. This is a good idea in part 1 and part 3, but not necessarily in part 2.

In part 2 of the speaking test, you don't need to worry about eye contact. It's more important to look at the question and the notes you made.

- Use the question to organise what you are saying. Answer the question point by point, and make sure you cover all parts of the task.
- You should also look at your notes. Hopefully you wrote down some good ideas during the preparation time.

Remember: the examiner **will not** reduce your score for lack of eye contact, but he/she **will** reduce your score if you don't answer the question well.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: environment problem

Describe a problem that affects the environment in the area where you live.

You should say

- *what the problem is*
- *what causes it*
- *and explain what you think could be done to solve it*

Remember, the question asks you to talk about a problem in your local area, so don't choose 'global warming'. These topics would be better:

- Air pollution caused by traffic and factories.
- Building new roads, houses, factories etc. destroys natural areas.
- Increasing amounts of litter and household waste.

Try searching for these topics on the Internet. I did a quick search for "litter on streets" and found [this article](#).

IELTS Speaking Part 2: artist or entertainer

The following question is a variation on the "describe a person" topic.

Describe an artist or entertainer you admire

You should say

- *who they are and what they do*
- *how they became successful*
- *how you found out about them*
- *and why you admire them*

I've tried to write a general example description that might help you with some ideas. In your description you **must** give the name of the person.

- I'm going to talk about a musician that I admire, called... He's a singer who also plays the guitar and writes his own songs. I think he recorded his first album about 10 years ago, and he's released several other CDs since then.
- He became successful after many years of writing songs and performing live in small venues all over the country. Gradually he built a following of people who liked his music. I think the key to his success was one of his songs that was used on a TV advertisement. This meant that more people became aware of his music.
- I found out about... because one of my friends got tickets to see him in concert. I hadn't heard any of his music before, but I went along to the gig and really enjoyed it. After that I bought the first CD, and now I've got all of them.
- The reason I admire... is that he has worked hard for his success: it takes years of practice to become a good singer and guitarist, and he spent several years playing to very small audiences before he became successful. I also like the fact that he writes his own music. I admire people who have worked hard to get where they are.

Note: I've underlined the best vocabulary. 'Gig' is an informal word for concert or performance, but it's fine to use it in this context.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a film

A student asked me this question:

"If the question asks me to describe a film, can I ask for a different question because I don't like films and I never watch them?"

Here's my answer:

If the part 2 question is about something you don't like, you should try your best. The examiner is not allowed to change the task card.

You probably have family, children or friends who watch films. You could say: "I don't really like watching films, but my children love watching" Then describe the film that your children like, say why they like it, and explain why you think it's a nice film for children.

Choose a film now so that you are ready for this question. Search for a review of the film on [Amazon](#). Write down the ideas you find, and practise with a friend.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a lesson

Speak for 2 minutes about the following topic.

Describe an interesting lesson that you attended.

You should say

- *where you attended this lesson*
- *what it was about*
- *and why you found it interesting*

Here are some ideas for a description of a science lesson:

1. I'm going to talk about an interesting science lesson that I attended at secondary school when I was 14 or 15 years old.
2. It was quite a long time ago, so I can't remember every detail, but the lesson was about respiration. We learnt about how the lungs work, how we breathe, and how oxygen passes into the blood. The science teacher also talked to us about the effects of smoking on the lungs.
3. I found this lesson interesting because my science teacher, Dr. Smith, always introduced new topics by showing us a video. We watched a short film about how respiration works, and I found this much easier to understand than a science textbook. The film showed diagrams of the lungs to explain the breathing process. Later in the lesson we saw real photos of healthy lungs and lungs that had been damaged as a result of smoking; they had turned black. I think the image of a smoker's lungs is the reason why I remember this lesson.

I could also give more information about the teacher, his personality and why I liked him. The key is to *tell a story* and add details until the time runs out.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: choosing a 'strong topic'

Most people are good at talking about their studies, work, hobbies, health etc. I call these "*strong topics*".

For the question below you can choose any topic you want, so choose something that you find easy to talk about.

Describe something that was recently reported in the news.

You should say:

- *what happened*
- *who was involved*
- *and why you found this news interesting*

Example topic choices for the question above:

1. My strong topic could be "education", so I'd say that I read a news article about universities using the Internet. [Click here](#) to see a recent article about this topic.
2. If you like football, you could talk about the news that Barcelona won the Champions League.
3. If you have studied the "health" topic for IELTS writing, you could talk about schools banning junk food. I did a quick search and found [this article](#) about schools in Dubai.

[IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a building](#)

Describe a modern building. You should say:

- *where it is*
- *what it is used for*
- *and why you like/dislike it.*

Here's my example description of a building in Manchester:

1. I'm going to describe a modern building in Manchester. It's called the Beetham Tower, and it's the tallest building in the city, with about 50 floors.
2. Although it's called the Beetham Tower, most people know this building as the Hilton Hotel. In fact, the bottom half of the tower is the hotel and the top half is apartments. The apartments are expensive because the location and views make them very desirable.
3. I'm not sure if I like the design of the building, it's just a huge glass tower, but it definitely stands out. It has become a famous landmark in the city. You can

see it as you approach Manchester, and it's an easy place to meet people because it's so distinctive and easy to find. The most interesting thing about the Beetham Tower is that there is a bar/restaurant on the 23rd floor which has spectacular views of the city; it's definitely the best vantage point in Manchester because there are no walls, only huge windows, so you can look out over the city in any direction. I'd recommend anyone who visits Manchester to go there and experience the view.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: something naughty you did

This has been a recent question in part 2 of IELTS speaking:

Describe something naughty you did when you were a child. Say

- *what you did*
- *when you did it*
- *why you did it*
- *and explain how your parents felt about it.*

This is a difficult topic for most people, so it's a good idea to prepare for it before your test. If you can remember a real situation, use that. If you can't remember being naughty, invent an easy story like my example below.

Example ideas:

1. I cheated in a test at primary school by looking at the answers in my book under the table.
2. I was about ... years old, it was a ... lesson. Give some more background about the lesson, the test, the teacher etc.
3. I hadn't studied for the test, I didn't want to fail and have to retake the test at lunchtime. Give reasons why you didn't have time to study.
4. The teacher caught me and told my parents. Explain their feelings: disappointed, angry, embarrassed. Explain the punishment e.g. they 'grounded' me for a week (informal expression, meaning 'they didn't allow me to go out or see friends').

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a skill

Describe a practical skill that you have learnt (e.g. cooking, driving).

You should say

- what the skill is
- how you learnt it
- why you learnt it
- and how this skill has helped you.

Advice:

You need to make a quick decision, so I'd choose one of the given examples (cooking or driving). Then try to expand on each point.

1. I'm going to talk about driving, which is a practical skill that I use almost every day.
2. I learnt to drive a car by taking lessons when I was 17. My parents paid for me to have lessons with a professional driving instructor. I learnt by practising: first I had to get used to steering, changing gears and using the mirrors, then we practised things like reversing and parking. I also had to learn the highway code.
3. As a 17-year-old, I wanted to have the experience of driving a car, and I was fed up with having to walk or take the bus or train whenever I wanted to go somewhere. I also knew that driving would be an extremely useful skill.
4. Being able to drive has helped me in so many ways. The public transport where I live isn't very good, so I travel to work by car most days. Having a car makes my life much easier when it comes to things like shopping or visiting family and friends. (Last week, for example,...)

Note:

If you need to keep speaking, give examples for point 4.

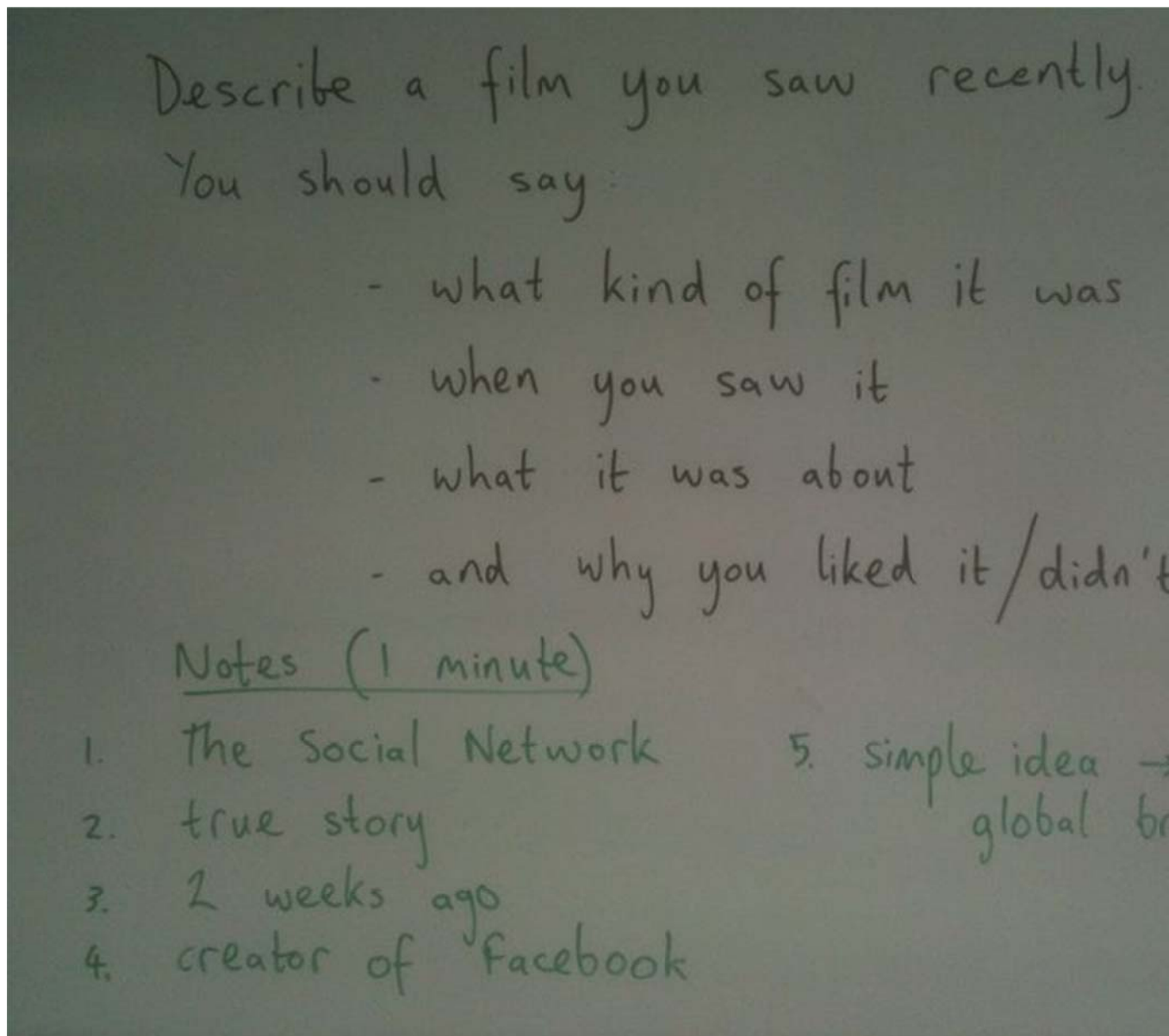
IELTS Speaking Part 2: 1-minute preparation

This week I've been thinking about different ways to use the 1-minute preparation time. Here's what I've learnt:

1. One minute is a very short amount of time! I found it just as difficult as my students did.
2. A simple list is probably faster and easier than a diagram or mind map.
3. You need to decide on your topic as quickly as possible. Then spend most of your time making notes.
4. Try to write at least one key idea for each part of the question.
5. Don't write sentences, and don't waste time erasing "mistakes".

6. Try to use a topic you have already prepared.
7. Forget about grammar. Focus on answering the question.
8. Finally, fast preparation is a skill that you can practise. Why not train yourself by making notes for a few different questions every day?

The following photo shows a part 2 question with my notes below. As you can see, I couldn't write much in 1 minute, but I followed the advice above.



[IELTS Speaking Part 2: 'difficult' questions](#)

Last week I wrote about 'using what you know'. Here are some more quick examples of how you can make a 'difficult' question much easier:

1) Describe something that you collect.

Most students panic because they don't collect anything. But this question is easier than you think. If your hobby is listening to music or reading books, just tell the examiner that you collect CDs or novels. You could talk about your "collection" of clothes or shoes. Everyone has a collection of something, even if you don't call yourself a collector.

2) Describe an important decision that you made.

Easy. Just talk about the subject you chose to study or the career you decided to pursue. If you moved to live/study in a different country, you could talk about that.

3) Describe an important letter you received.

Use the answer you gave for number 2 (with a few small changes). Talk about the letter you received confirming your place on a university course, or confirming a successful job application.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a foreign person

Jay sent me this interesting IELTS question:

Describe a foreign person that you like. You should say:

- *where you met him/her*
- *why you like him/her*
- *and explain what you learnt from him/her*

Some advice:

1. The easy choice would be to describe an English teacher. You could then talk about your lessons and easily explain what you learnt.
2. I think it would be acceptable to describe someone you have never met. Just say "I've never met the person I'm going to describe, but I hope to meet him/her one day".
3. If you do number 2 above, choose your hero. It's best to choose someone you know a lot about. Give as much real information as possible. Do some Google research to get ideas.

Finally, remember that this is a "describe a person" question. Hopefully you can use some of the ideas from [this lesson](#).

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a place

In part 2 of the speaking test, you might have to describe a place. There are several possible questions about places. For example:

1. Describe a place you have visited.
2. Describe a historic place.
3. Describe a holiday.
4. Describe a place you would like to visit.
5. Describe somewhere you have lived or would like to live.

My advice is to prepare a description of one place that you could use to answer all of these questions. Then search the Internet for some good vocabulary.

For example, here are some ideas I found to describe London:

- **Adjectives:** it's exciting, busy, hectic, cosmopolitan, multicultural, unique. It's historic but modern at the same time, it's a thriving, prosperous city, it's fashionable, lively, fun...
- **Activities:** London is famous for its history, culture, art, museums. Tourists go there to see Big Ben, The Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, Trafalgar Square etc. You can get a fantastic view of the city from the 'London Eye'. It's also famous for its theatres and shows in the West End, its shops, restaurants and nightlife. There are endless things to see and do.
- **Negatives:** London is expensive, crowded, stressful, polluted. The underground system is dirty, travel is overpriced and unpleasant. The cost of living is high (shopping, house prices etc.), the locals are always in a hurry and can be unfriendly, there are social problems (like you can find in most big cities).

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe an event

Describe a recent event that made you happy.

You should say:

- **when and where it was**
- **who was involved**
- **what happened**
- **and explain why it made you happy.**

The following description contains the kind of phrases that native speakers (like me) really use. I've underlined the best vocabulary.

1. **When and where:** my friend's birthday party, last Saturday evening, we went for a meal in an Italian restaurant.
2. **Who:** there were about 10 of us, he invited some close friends and work colleagues, most of them were people I've known since university.
3. **What happened:** we met at the restaurant, I gave my friend a present and a birthday card, we ordered some food, while we ate dinner everyone chatted, after the main course the waiter brought out a cake and we sang 'Happy Birthday', everyone went home quite late.
4. **Why it made me happy:** it was great to get together with old friends, I had some interesting conversations, it was a good opportunity to catch up with what my friends had been up to, it was a nice way to wind down after a hard week at work, the food was delicious, I went home feeling full after a fantastic meal.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a person

Describe a person you admire.

You should say:

- *who the person is*
- *what he or she is like*
- *and why you admire him or her.*

Here are some ideas. I've underlined the best vocabulary.

- I'm going to talk about my father because he has been a major influence in my life.
- My father was always a good role model for me as I was growing up. He's hard-working, patient and understanding; he's also got a good sense of humour and seems to get on well with everybody. Hopefully I've inherited some of these traits.
- I admire my father because I think he brought me and my brothers/sisters up well; he was quite strict but always fair, and he has always been someone I can turn to for advice. I think my father set a good example by working hard and having a positive outlook on life. I remember that he used to leave for work early and come home quite late, but he always made time for me and my brothers/sisters.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a festival

A common topic for the short presentation (IELTS Speaking Part 2) is "describe an important festival in your country".

My advice is to look for a description of your festival on Wikipedia. Copy the best parts of the description and make small changes if necessary. As an example, I've copied a short description of Christmas from Wikipedia.

Describe a festival: Christmas

Christmas is an annual holiday that, in Christianity, commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ.

Popular customs of the holiday include gift-giving, music, an exchange of greeting cards, church celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various decorations; including Christmas trees, lights, nativity scenes, and holly. In addition, Father Christmas (known as Santa Claus in some areas) is a popular figure in many countries, associated with the bringing of gifts for children.

Over the Christmas period, people decorate their homes and exchange gifts. In some countries, children perform plays re-telling the events of the Nativity, or sing carols that reference the event. Christmas, along with Easter, is the period of highest annual church attendance.

A special Christmas family meal is an important part of the celebration for many, and what is served varies greatly from country to country. In England and countries influenced by its traditions, a standard Christmas meal includes turkey, potatoes, vegetables, sausages and gravy, followed by Christmas pudding, mince pies and fruit cake.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: example presentation

Watch this YouTube video of a student doing IELTS speaking part 2.

These are his good points:

- He speaks clearly. His pronunciation is good.
- He answers the questions.
- He sometimes corrects his own small mistakes.

These are some of the sentences he uses:

- When I was very young she told me to smile to people (should be 'at people').
- She treat everyone equally. (should be 'treats')
- I was really shy when I was young and I rarely talked to strangers, so she gave me this advice to teach me how to deal with people.
- It can increase my confidence and people will have a good impression on me. (should be 'impression of me')

As you can see, there are some small mistakes but also some good words and phrases (treat equally, I rarely talked, gave me advice, deal with people, increase my confidence, have a good impression).

What score do you think he deserves?

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe an advertisement

Describe an interesting advertisement that you have seen. You should say:

- *where you saw it*
- *what it was about*
- *why you think it was an interesting advertisement.*

Choose something simple. Here's an example with the "band 7" vocabulary underlined:

1. I'm going to talk about an advertisement for Coca-Cola, which is one of the biggest brands in the world. I've seen Coke advertised everywhere, on posters and TV commercials.
2. The advert shows a picture of Santa Claus smiling and holding a bottle of Coke. I think the aim is to target children and associate (link/connect) the brand with Christmas time.
3. The advert is interesting because the company is deliberately trying to influence and attract children. The marketers are trying to capture young customers. They are presenting the drink as something special, a gift for Christmas. However, Coca-Cola is not necessarily a healthy drink for children; it contains a lot of sugar. Maybe this kind of advertising manipulates children and encourages them to pester their parents.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe an object

In IELTS speaking part 2, you might be asked to describe an object. For example:

- Describe something you bought recently.
- Describe a gift you gave or received.
- Describe something you own which is important to you.

Choose something easy, like a mobile phone:

I'm going to describe my mobile phone. I bought it online / in a mobile phone shop / it was a present from...

I use the phone to keep in touch with friends and family, for communication by voice, text and email. It has various features like video, MP3 player, wireless Internet, digital camera and games. It's easy to share photos and music. I use it for almost everything, it even has a calendar that reminds me about appointments.

My phone is an essential part of my life. It holds my contacts, my photos, my music collection. I've got instant access to my favourite websites. It's like having my whole life in my pocket. I couldn't live without it.

Note:

I've underlined the best phrases for IELTS band 7 or higher.

IELTS Speaking: describe a toy

Below, you can read an example description of a toy (for IELTS speaking part 2). See yesterday's lesson for the full question.

Lego Car Description:

One special toy that I remember getting was a Lego car. It was a birthday present from my parents. I can't remember exactly how old I was, but I was probably about 10 or 11.

The special thing about this car was that I had to build it myself out of hundreds of pieces of Lego. The pieces came in a box with a picture of the finished car on the front, and I had to follow step-by-step instructions to put all the pieces together in the correct way. This wasn't an easy task because the car even had an engine, movable seats and gears. It took me a day or two to make, and required a lot of concentration.

When the car was finished it looked great, and I felt a sense of accomplishment. I seem to remember that I didn't play with the car very much; the fun part had been the process of building it.

Don't just read this description once. Spend some time analysing it:

- Is the description well-organised and easy to follow?
- Can you find any good 'band 7' words or phrases?
- Could you write a similar description for a different toy?

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a toy

Aida sent me this difficult speaking question:

Describe a toy that was special to you when you were a child.

You should say:

- ***when you got it***
- ***what it looked like***
- ***who gave it to you***
- ***and how you used it or played with it.***

If you can't remember a real toy that you had, choose something simple like a toy car (typical boy's toy) or a doll (typical girl's toy). Both of these toys are easy to describe.

I'll write some example ideas about this topic tomorrow. If you have any suggestions, please share them in the "comments" area below.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe an animal

Several students have asked me about this question:

Describe a wild animal from your country.

You should say

- ***what the animal is and what it looks like***
- ***where it lives***
- ***and explain how people in your country (or you) feel about this animal.***

You might not be able to copy my example because I've described an animal that is common in the UK. However, hopefully my description will give you some ideas.

1. I'm going to describe the 'robin' which is a wild bird that is common in the UK. The robin is a small bird with brown and white feathers and an area of bright red colour on its face and on the front of its body. The area of red colour makes robins very easy to distinguish from other birds.
2. Robins are common garden birds. Many houses in the UK have a garden, and you can often see this bird sitting in a tree. They make their nests in trees and go looking for food. You might also see a robin if you go for a walk in the countryside or in a park.
3. Robins have a special place in British culture. They are considered to be christmas birds, and are often used on christmas cards. Many people leave food in their gardens for robins and other small birds to eat.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: children's toys

Here are some questions related to last week's part 2 topic:

1. Do you think it's important for boys to play with "boys' toys" and for girls to only play with "girls' toys"?

I think boys naturally seem to prefer playing with "boys' toys" and girls with "girls' toys". When I was young I had toy cars, trucks, guns and things like that, whereas my sister always wanted to play with dolls. I don't suppose it really matters if a boy plays with a doll or a girl plays with a toy car, but children learn quickly what toys are supposed to be for boys and for girls.

2. Do you think it's good if parents only buy "educational" toys for their children?

No, I don't agree with only giving children educational toys. In my opinion, children learn by playing with whatever interests them. Children invent their own games, even if they don't have any toys at all. It's important for children just to have fun; there will be plenty of time for parents to worry about education when their children get older.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: status symbols

In part 3 of the IELTS speaking test you should try to give longer answers with opinions, reasons, comparisons and examples. Here are some example questions and answers related to last week's part 2 topic:

In your country, what possessions show a higher status or position in society?

In my country, people who are wealthy tend to buy big houses and cars. Certain makes of car such as Mercedes or Ferrari are status symbols. They let other people know that you are important or powerful. People who want to give this impression often wear expensive designer clothes, or watches by brands like Rolex.

Do you think we place too much importance on possessions?

Probably, yes. Some people are obsessed with showing off their new mobile phone or wearing the latest fashions. I think it's a problem for teenagers because there's a lot of peer pressure to follow fashion or buy the latest gadget that their friends have got.

Do you think things were different 50 years ago?

Yes, maybe people were less materialistic. I think they bought things that lasted longer; my grandparents talk about how they repaired things rather than throwing them away. Maybe brands and advertising weren't as powerful as they are now.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: verb tenses

In IELTS speaking part 3 the examiner often asks a question about the past and a question about the future. Be careful: the examiner is listening to your grammar! You need to show that you can use past, present and future tenses correctly. Here are some example questions:

1. Did people have more free time when your grandparents were young?
2. Do you think the hobbies people have will be different in the future?

In the first answer, the examiner wants to hear some past tense verbs. In the second answer, you will need to use a future tense. Here are some example answers:

1. When my grandparents were young, I think they had less leisure time. They didn't have the gadgets we use nowadays, so they probably spent more time doing simple things. For example, nowadays we can cook meals in a microwave in less than 5 minutes, whereas in the past people had to cook everything themselves.
2. No, I don't think hobbies will change much in the future. I'm sure people will still play games and sports. On the other hand, maybe the Internet is changing the way we spend our free time. In the future, more and more people might have online hobbies.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: How will the Internet affect our lives?

The "perspectives technique" for generating ideas (see 6th October) can also be useful in the IELTS speaking test. Here's an example:

How do you think the Internet will affect our lives in the future?

Personal perspective:

I think the Internet will have a huge impact on our lives. More and more people are using social websites to keep in touch with friends. I think the Internet will probably replace TV because most channels are already available online.

Economic perspective:

Also, I think we'll do more online shopping. Web-based companies like Amazon are already really successful. In the future, there will probably be more companies that

only sell via the Internet, and I expect we'll spend more money online than in traditional shops.

Educational perspective:

Schools and universities might also use the Internet to provide courses, so online learning will probably become a normal part of life.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: technology at work

1. What technology or equipment is used in most workplaces nowadays?
2. Does technology help workers, or does it make their lives more difficult?
3. What effect does new technology have on employment?

1. Advice: give a list of different technologies, then talk about one in detail:

In most workplaces people use equipment such as computers, phones, printers, fax machines and photocopiers. I think the computer is probably the most essential piece of equipment because we rely on it for almost everything: communicating by email, writing reports, organising data, and finding information on the Internet.

2. Advice: talk about the positives AND the negatives:

Technology definitely helps workers because it makes many tasks so much easier. For example, email is such a useful tool for communication between employees in different offices, or even in different countries. On the other hand, technology can make life more difficult, especially when it goes wrong. It causes a lot of stress when the Internet is down or a computer crashes.

3. Advice: give the good effects AND the bad effects:

I think technology is often responsible for people losing their jobs. Machines have replaced people in areas like manufacturing and agriculture, and whenever a new technology is introduced, there are redundancies. At the same time, jobs might be created thanks to a new technology; there would be no computer programmers if the computer hadn't been invented.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: make it personal

In part 3 of IELTS speaking, it really helps if you give personal examples:

1. Do you think it's important for people to have hobbies? Why?

Yes, I think people need to have hobbies because we all need to do things we enjoy in our spare time. In my case, I find that playing football once a week with some friends helps me to relax, keep fit and forget about work. I think it's the same for everyone.

2. Can hobbies have any negative effects?

Yes, if you spend too much time on your hobby, it can affect other parts of your life. I remember that one of my friends spent most of his time at university playing computer games instead of studying. In the end, he failed most of his exams.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: longer answers

Here are 3 techniques to help you give longer, more detailed answers:

1. Keep asking yourself "why?"
2. Explain the alternatives
3. Give an example

Question:

Do you think that school children should be encouraged to have their own ideas, or is it more important for them to learn what their teachers give them?

Answer:

I think that we should definitely allow children to be creative and have their own ideas. (**why?**) Children need to develop the ability to think for themselves and solve problems (**why?**) because as adults they will not always have somebody to guide them or tell them what to do. (**alternatives?**) If we don't allow children to have their own ideas, they will be less successful in the adult world; they will be too reliant on others. (**example?**) A doctor, for example, might encounter a situation that he or she hasn't been trained for, but will still be expected to make a decision that could save someone's life.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: present, past, future

In part 3 of the speaking test, it's common to get questions about the past and future, as well as questions about 'now'. Here are some examples:

What types of transport are there in your town?

In Manchester I think you can find every form of transport apart from an underground system. You can drive around the city by car or get on a bus; there are even free buses that take people between the train stations. Manchester also has a tram system, and of course there are taxis too.

How has transport changed since your grandparents were young?

Well, they had cars, trains and planes back then, and London already had the underground system, but I suppose the difference is that technology has moved on. Having said that, the transport system is not necessarily better nowadays; people travel a lot more, and I'm sure we spend more time stuck in traffic.

What types of transport do you think we will use in the future?

I'm not sure, but hopefully we'll have cars that drive themselves and never crash. I think we'll probably fly more, and it might become normal to have your own plane. On the other hand, many cities are building more bicycle lanes, so maybe we will use cars less for getting around towns and cities.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'lessons' topic

The following answers are at 'band 9' level. Which words and phrases help my answers to get such a high score?

1. What do you think makes a good lesson?

I think a good lesson is one that is interesting and engaging. By 'engaging' I mean that the students should feel involved in the lesson; they should feel that they are learning something new that is relevant to them. In my opinion, a lot depends on how the teacher delivers the content of the lesson in a way that students like. My favourite teacher at university used to involve the students by making us teach some of the lessons ourselves.

2. Do you think it's better to have a teacher or to teach yourself?

Well, there's no substitute for a good teacher. I think you can teach yourself, but you can learn a lot more quickly with the guidance of a teacher. For example, when learning a language, you really need someone to correct your mistakes; you can get the grammar and vocabulary from books, but books can't tell you where you're going wrong.

3. Do you think the traditional classroom will disappear in the future?

I don't think it will disappear, but it might become less common. I think more people will study independently, using different technologies rather than sitting in a classroom. Maybe students will attend a lesson just once a week, and spend the rest of their time following online courses or watching video lessons.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: adding details

These are the 3 techniques I use to create longer, more detailed answers:

1. Explain why
2. Give an example
3. Explain the alternatives

Question:

Why do you think friendship is important?

Answer:

I think friendship is important for all sorts of reasons. (**why?**) We need friends to share experiences with, to talk to, and for support. (**example?**) In my case, I like to meet up with friends at the weekend to do something enjoyable, like see a film or go out for dinner. I like chatting with my friends about what we've been doing during the week, or about what's happening in the world. (**alternatives?**) Without friends to talk to, life would be dull and boring; we would only have our families to talk to.

For another example of this technique, [click here](#).

IELTS Speaking Part 3: "it depends"

Many students answer questions in IELTS speaking part 3 by saying "it depends".

"It depends" is not a full answer. What does it depend on, and why?

Example question:

Do you think it's important to find a job that you love, or is it more important to earn a good salary?

Don't say:

"It depends. Some people prefer to find a job they love, but other people want to earn a good salary." (This answer just repeats the question)

Do say:

"Personally, I'd prefer to do a job that I really enjoy; as long as I earn enough to live comfortably, the salary is less important. However, I can see the benefits of doing a job that you don't like if it pays well. With a good salary, you can probably do more enjoyable things in your free time."

[IELTS Speaking Part 3: sports](#)

In the example answers below, I've underlined some of the phrases that examiners would like. They might seem easy to understand, but they are the kind of natural phrases that native speakers use. My answers are at band 9 level.

1. Why do you think sport is important?

I think sport is important for different reasons. For me, doing a sport is about having fun. When I play football, for example, I forget about everything else and just enjoy myself. Also, doing a sport helps you to keep fit and healthy, and it's a good way to socialise and make friends.

2. Do you think famous sportspeople are good role models for children?

I think that sportspeople should be good role models. Children look up to their favourite football players, like David Beckham for example, so I think that these people have an enormous responsibility. They should try to be a good influence, and behave in the right way.

3. Do you agree that sports stars earn too much money?

In my opinion, it's fair that the best sportspeople earn a lot of money. Being a top sportsperson requires hours of practice, and there are millions of sports fans who are willing to pay to see them play. If we don't want sportspeople to earn so much money, we shouldn't go to watch them.

[IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'wildlife' topic](#)

Here are some Part 3 questions and band 9 answers for this topic. I've underlined the 'band 7-9' vocabulary.

What effects do you think humans have on wild animals?

Humans have a huge impact on wild animals. We have destroyed a lot of natural habitats, and many animals are in danger of extinction. Tigers and rhinos, for example, are endangered species because of humans. The pollution and waste that we produce also have an effect on animals. In some places there are no fish in the rivers.

What measures could we take to protect wildlife?

I think we need stricter rules to protect natural areas and the wild animals that live there. For example, we should stop cutting down trees in the rain forest. National parks are a good idea because they attract tourists while protecting wildlife.

Is it the responsibility of schools to teach children about protecting wildlife?

Yes, schools can play a big part in educating children about this issue. Children should learn how to look after the natural environment. I think schools already teach children about endangered species and the destruction of rain forests, so hopefully future generations will do a better job of protecting wildlife.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: opinions

Having opinions is really important for IELTS Speaking Part 3. Even if your grammar is excellent, you will not get a high score if you don't know what to say.

For example, do you have an opinion about whether governments should protect old buildings?

Here are some possible opinions:

- Historic buildings are part of a country's heritage.
- Old buildings are often considered to be works of art.
- They give character to cities, and attract tourists.
- We identify countries by architectural symbols, like the pyramids in Egypt.
- Governments should spend money on looking after historic buildings.
- They need regular repairs and maintenance.

These opinions come from my ['Ideas for IELTS Topics' ebook](#). The sentences above are what a native speaker might say (i.e. band 7-9).

IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'parties' topic

In part 2 of the speaking test you might be asked to [describe a party](#). Here are some part 3 questions that could follow that topic:

1. What types of party do people have, and why are parties important?

People have parties to celebrate special occasions like birthdays, weddings, or the beginning of a new year. I think it's important to celebrate these things because they are landmarks in our lives. Parties are a good way to bring people together, and they're an opportunity to let off some steam.

2. Why do you think some people like parties but others hate them?

Most people like parties because they have a good time at them - eating a nice meal, chatting to friends, or having a dance. People who don't like them might find social situations difficult because they are shy, or maybe they don't enjoy having to make small talk with people they don't know.

3. Do you think parties will become more popular in the future?

No, I don't think anything will change. People have always had parties, and I'm sure they always will in the future. Humans need to socialise and enjoy themselves, and parties are one of the best ways to do that.

PS. I've underlined the band 7-9 phrases.

[IELTS Speaking Part 3: leisure activities](#)

Here are some questions that a student sent me, with example answers below.

1. What is the relationship between leisure and the economy?

Well, people spend a lot of money on all sorts of leisure activities nowadays, so I think leisure is a very important part of the economy of most countries. Leisure could be anything that people do in their free time, such as eating out, going to the cinema, watching a football match, or staying in a hotel. Millions of people are employed in these areas.

2. How does the economy benefit from people's leisure activities?

The leisure industry makes a huge contribution to the economy. As I said before, it keeps millions of people in employment, and all of these employees pay their taxes and have money to spend on other goods and services. At the same time, most people

spend some of their earnings on leisure activities, and this money therefore goes back into the economy.

3. Do men and women enjoy the same type of leisure activities?

Yes and no. I think both men and women enjoy things like eating in restaurants or going to the cinema, but I'm sure there are other activities that are more popular with one gender. For example, I think more men than women go to football matches.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: verb tenses

In part 3 of the IELTS speaking test, you will probably get some questions about the past and the future. The examiner will be listening carefully to make sure you use the correct tense.

- If the examiner mentions “50 years ago”, “when your parents were young” or “when you were a child”, you should answer using the past simple.
- If the question asks you to predict, or if it mentions “in 50 years” or “in the future”, use a future tense (will + infinitive).

Do you think people had easier lives 50 years ago?

Yes, maybe life was simpler and less stressful 50 years ago. The mobile phone didn't exist, so I suppose it was easier to forget about work at the end of the day because people couldn't contact you so easily.

Do you think life will be more stressful in the future?

Yes, it probably will be more stressful. As the world gets smaller, employees will probably have to travel to different countries more often and stay in touch with colleagues and clients all over the world. There will also be more competition for jobs and the cost of living will keep going up.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'emotions' topic

The following questions follow on from [this topic](#).

Do you think it's good to show your emotions when you're angry?

I think it depends on the situation and how you show your emotions. I find that if I'm angry with a friend or someone in my family, it's best to tell them what the problem is

and try to express how I feel. However, I don't think it helps to argue with people when you're angry; it's better to control the anger and explain what's wrong.

In your opinion, do women show their emotions more than men?

The stereotypical view is that women are more emotional, and in my experience there is some truth in this; my mother, for example, tends to show her feelings much more readily than my father. However, I'm sure that there are exceptions to the stereotype.

Why do you think men tend to show their emotions less than women?

Maybe it's because of the way we are brought up. I think that boys are often taught from an early age not to cry. Also, boys are aware that their friends might see it as a sign of weakness if they show their feelings. Perhaps girls are brought up to be more sensitive to their friends' feelings.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: competitions

The following questions come from Cambridge IELTS 7. I've underlined some of the good words and phrases in my answers.

1. Why do you think some school teachers use competitions as class activities?

I think teachers use competitions to motivate the children in their classes. I'm sure that teachers try all kinds of activities to engage their pupils, and competitions might be one of the best ways to keep children interested or get them excited. Children love winning things.

2. Is it a good thing to give prizes to children who do well at school? Why?

It might be a good idea to encourage children to do well in games or sports, but I don't think we should give children prizes for their academic work. Children need to learn that the reason for studying is to learn useful things that will help them in their lives. I don't like the idea of children thinking that they will only work hard if there is a prize.

3. Would you say that schools for young children have become more or less competitive since you were that age? Why?

I'd say that they have become more competitive since I was young. Children now have to take exams from a much younger age, so I think there is more of a focus on doing well in tests. Parents also seem to be getting more competitive; I think that many parents push their children to do extra homework rather than letting them play with friends.

IELTS Speaking part 3: rivers, lakes, sea

1. What do you think are the functions of rivers nowadays?

Rivers have various functions. In the UK, they were probably more important in the past because they were used for the transportation of goods, but I suppose this is still the case in many parts of the world. Rivers can be used as a source of renewable energy in the production of hydro-electric power, and they are also a source of fresh water for drinking and irrigation. Leisure activities are another function: fishing, canoeing, swimming, bathing... I'm sure there are many other things I haven't thought of.

2. What do you think of boats and ships as forms of transportation?

I'm not really a fan of boats and ships. If I'm going abroad, I like to get to my destination quickly, so I prefer travelling by plane. Of course, ships are vital for the transportation of oil and other heavy cargo.

3. Why do some people like to live near rivers, lakes or the sea?

Well, the view is probably a major factor; most people like to look out to sea, or across a river or lake. I'd much prefer to look out of my window onto a natural landscape than an apartment building in a city. Then there's the lifestyle: if you live by the sea, for example, you can lie on the beach, go for a swim, or do water sports like surfing or waterskiing. I definitely wouldn't mind living near a beach at some point in my life!

Note:

These answers are less formal than the essays I write for the writing test, and I say things like "probably" or "I suppose" when I'm not sure about the facts.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: common question types

Here are 3 common question types that the examiner could ask you:

1. Compare and contrast.
2. Give an opinion.
3. Imagine.

If the topic is 'cities', the examiner could ask:

1. How is life different in cities compared to rural areas?
2. How do you think life in big cities could be made easier?
3. What do you think cities will be like in 50 years time?

In my answers below I've underlined a few 'markers' that show comparisons, opinions and future predictions.

1. Firstly, the cost of living in cities is much higher. Housing is much more expensive in cities compared to rural areas; everything costs more. I think life in cities is more difficult. There are more people, so there's more competition for jobs. Life is a lot slower in rural areas, everyone knows each other and there's a sense of community. I don't think rural areas experience the social problems that you find in cities, like crime and homelessness.
2. In my opinion cities need to be well-planned. Good public transport can definitely make life easier because there are so many people and it can be really stressful just to move around. Public areas like parks are also important because people need space to relax, and I think cities should be made into healthier places to live and work.
3. I imagine cities will be less polluted because we'll have electric cars and better public transport. More people might work from home so maybe cities won't be so busy. But I think there will probably still be problems because more and more people are migrating to cities. So I'm not so optimistic about issues like crime, homelessness and unemployment.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: explain, alternative, example

In part 3 of the speaking test, you need to give longer, detailed answers. A good way to do this is by organising your answers according to the following steps:

1. Idea: answer the question directly.
2. Explain: give a reason or explain your answer in more detail.
3. Alternative: explain an alternative (e.g. the opposite) to your answer.
4. Example: give an example to support your answer.
5. Another idea: sometimes you think of another idea while you are speaking. Just add it on the end of your answer.

You can give a really good answer without including all five steps, but you might find it useful to practise including all five, as I've done here:

Why do you think some people prefer to buy products from their own countries rather than imported items?

(*idea*) I suppose it's because those people want to support the economy of the country they live in. (*explain*) If they buy something that was made in their own country, they know that they are contributing to the salaries of workers within the same country, (*alternative*) whereas if they buy imported items, a foreign company and its employees will benefit. (*example*) For example, if I buy some meat that originates from a local farm rather than a farm in another country, I'm helping one of my fellow citizens to carry on in business. (*another idea*) Also, I think that trust is an issue; people might feel that they can trust domestically produced items more than imported ones.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: comparing past and present

In part 3 of IELTS speaking, you might be asked to compare the past with the present. The examiner will be listening to your use tenses. For example:

Are there any differences between the types of people who were seen as celebrities in the past and those who are celebrities nowadays?

Yes, I think there have been some big changes in the types of people who become famous. In the past, before the invention of television, I suppose there were very few national or international celebrities; maybe kings and queens, military, political and religious leaders were the only household names. With the advent of TV and radio, performers such as actors and musicians became more well-known. However, we now seem to have a completely new breed of celebrity as a result of 'reality' television programmes; these are people who don't really have any special skills as performers, but who are famous for just being themselves.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'politeness' topic

Two weeks ago I showed you a part 2 question about a situation in which you were polite. Let's have a look at some related questions for part 3 of the test:

In your country's culture, how do you show that you are being polite?

We really value politeness and good manners in the UK, and there are many types of polite behaviour. One of the first things we learn as children is to say "please" and "thank you". As adults, I think we are careful not to be too direct in the language we use. For example, we would never say "Bring me the bill" in a restaurant because this

kind of direct instruction would sound rude. It would be much more polite to say "Could we have the bill, please?".

Are we less polite with members of our families than with people we don't know?

I suppose it's normal to be a bit more relaxed about politeness with family members. Most people tend to speak in a more informal way at home; in the UK, we still say "please" and "thanks", but it's fine to use colloquial language and things like nicknames that you would never use with someone you didn't know.