



ILLUSTRATION: AZRA HUMAYRA

EDUCATION

How you can prepare to get a perfect score on your IELTS

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Despite vowing to take an entire month to indulge myself in my hobbies after my graduation, I began feeling restless, having nothing to do, and decided to sit for the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Preparing for the test indeed delayed the inevitable existential dread of figuring out what to do with my life. I took the test after a week of preparation and scored an overall band 9.0, with a 9.0 in reading, listening, and speaking, and an 8.0 in writing, which happened to be an unexpected but pleasant surprise.

Since then, I've had more requests to help people out with their IELTS preparations than I have made acquaintances, which is the reason behind writing this. So, without further ado, let me take you through the motion of how my IELTS preparation went.

Do your research

By research, I really mean that you should annoy every single one of your friends who recently sat for the test about how they registered, when, where, and why. Get a feel for what to expect, whether you want to sign up online or in person, and most importantly, the facilities of the venue you're going to be attending. I decided to go to the venue in person to check it out, but for the sake of convenience, you may complete the process online.

Consider whether you'd be more comfortable taking the computer-based test or the paper-based one. I personally took the computer-based test because I thought it would be closer to my test preparation at home, and also more convenient for the writing segment. Not to mention, my handwriting is awful. If you're more comfortable attending tests in a conventional manner,

paper-based tests might be better for you.

Assess where you're at

Before registering, take a moment to set a target and evaluate how long you might need to prepare. It's not necessary to score super high if you're attending IELTS for higher studies, universities generally accept a score of 7.0 on all bands. My personal target was somewhere around 8.0, and I took free mock tests online to gauge my capabilities. I personally found that mock tests tend to be more restrictive, so don't get too anxious over receiving a lower score.

Keep in mind that there's no way to evaluate how well you're doing in writing or speaking unless you sign up for a paid online mock test or an in-person one offered by IELTS coachings. I specifically recommend this for those from a Bangla medium background like me, as I was absolutely not confident in my speaking on the day of the test.

Gather your resources

It's important you don't listen to people who hand you a list of books to practice. If you try to practice using too many resources at the same time, it's likely you'll end up spending money unnecessarily (and IELTS is expensive enough on its own) and not have a solid preparation. I used a website called IELTS Online Tests, where there are free mock tests and simulated test environments. As for speaking and writing, I found YouTube videos of IELTS instructors and practiced along.

Utilise doomscrolling

I have an obscene screentime, so I was inevitably getting sidetracked by Instagram reels while studying. So, instead of taking measures to be a better person, I decided to work smarter, not harder. I searched IELTS and related keywords

a few times, and let the algorithm do its thing. Soon, my feed was filled with IELTS content. From informative videos to borderline brain-rotting humorous skits, I was able to enhance my IELTS preparation while procrastinating.

Strategise

Approach the test with a strategy. Practice a few times to find your groove, because evenly distributing time for every section in reading or writing may not be effective. The second writing task holds more weight, and one of the reading passages will be more difficult than others, where you should ideally spend more time. Reading every sentence word for word is time-consuming, and often counterproductive. I suggest reading the questions before you read the passage during reading, and in the breaks during listening. Try not to panic while listening, because you can make up to two mistakes before your band score decreases. I zoned out and missed a question, and had to remind myself to simply tune back in.

As for speaking, keep a general structure in your head, as it's subject to change depending on your interviewer. The most important part is to keep talking. It's not an interview where you have to answer with accuracy or boast your vocabulary, you simply have to build a rapport with your examiner and have a natural conversation. This is where I got lucky, as I had a super friendly examiner who patiently let me launch into tangents and followed up with questions.

The best game plan is one that works for you, and there's really no other way to find it than practice. Keep it simple and hold onto your focus, and hopefully you'll reach your goal.

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