

ENGLE205F

Module 6

**Preparing for the IELTS
Speaking test**

Course team

Developer: Philip Leetch (Consultant)

Members: Ronnie Carr, OUHK (Coordinator)
Peter Storey, OUHK
Chris Baker, OUHK (Designer)

Production

ETPU Publishing Team

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The Open University of Hong Kong
30 Good Shepherd Street
Ho Man Tin, Kowloon
Hong Kong

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Introduction

This module is designed to prepare you for the IELTS Speaking test. In *Module 2*, we reviewed a number of skills and strategies for speaking in order to provide you with a good foundation upon which to build your test-taking skills. Before you start work on this module, it would be useful for you to refresh your memory of the topics discussed in the earlier module.

Module 2 looked at three key criteria of the IELTS Speaking test – fluency and coherence, lexical resource and pronunciation. In this module, we aim to provide you with further skills, strategies and resources related to the three areas covered in the earlier module. In addition, we address the fourth criterion of the IELTS Speaking test – grammatical resource – by showing you ways in which you can enrich your spoken performance by using a range of tenses and more complex sentences.

All the topics in the module are discussed in relation to the IELTS Speaking test and include IELTS test-related practice activities and feedback. The module begins with a description of the Speaking test overall, and then goes on to examine its three parts in detail.

We look at the kinds of topics the examiner will ask you to discuss and the types of questions you will be asked to respond to. We consider ways of lengthening and enriching your responses to both simple and complex questions.

In this module, then, you will:

- learn about the overall structure and three component parts of the IELTS Speaking test;
- consider the topics and questions you may encounter in Part 1 of the test;
- learn how to extend the length of your responses and enrich them grammatically;
- look at the role of body language and adverbial phrases in conveying attitude;
- consider the types of topics you will encounter in Part 2 of the test;
- work on ways of giving an extended response enriched with anecdotes and complex sentences;
- learn how to respond to follow-up questions and review ways of ‘thinking aloud’ and giving yourself time to think;
- consider the more complex questions you will encounter in Part 3 of the test; and
- practise different ways of structuring your response to questions on complex issues.

The overall structure of the IELTS Speaking test

The IELTS Speaking test aims to assess your ability to communicate effectively in English. It is an audio-taped, face-to-face, oral interview in which you interact with a trained IELTS examiner. The examiner aims to provide you with ample opportunities to demonstrate your spoken ability which is assessed according to four criteria:

- 1 *fluency and coherence* – your ability to speak continuously with a normal rate of delivery, linking ideas and language together logically and accurately
- 2 *lexical resource* – your ability to use a range of vocabulary to convey meaning and attitude and employ strategies to overcome gaps in your vocabulary
- 3 *grammatical range and accuracy* – your ability to use complex sentences, to emphasize key information and speak with a good degree of accuracy
- 4 *pronunciation* – your ability to speak comprehensibly without noticeable influence from your first language.

The test has three distinct parts known as:

- Part 1 Introduction and interview;
- Part 2 The individual long turn; and
- Part 3 Two-way discussion.

Part 1 lasts between four and five minutes and can be considered as a ‘warm-up’ for the later parts. The examiner will ask you questions about yourself.

Part 2 lasts about three minutes, including preparation time, and centres around a task card related to a specific topic.

In Part 3, the examiner will ask more abstract questions following on from the topic of Part 2. This part lasts between four and five minutes.

Part 1: Starting the test

A principal aim of the examiner is to put you at your ease and give you every opportunity to show how well you speak English. Marks are not given for any particular part of the test. If you start a little slowly or do not perform to your best once or twice, do not feel depressed. It is the overall impression that counts.

The various tasks in the test are designed to elicit English from you. As a test-taker, you should take advantage of those opportunities. The examiner is, of course, in some ways in charge, but it is the candidate who needs to be active (even proactive). You are led onto the oral stage and it is up to you to act. Saying as little as possible is not a winning strategy. You need to show off, to some extent. Be friendly and sociable. Don't be aggressive and talk constantly at great speed. The aim is to be like a good speaker on a television chat show.

Examiners are told to ignore answers that seem to have been memorized.
Do not try to use this strategy.

Introductions

When you meet your examiner, he/she will introduce him/herself. Naturally, you will return the greeting and introduce yourself. First impressions do count, so try to do this pleasantly. Smile and make eye contact.

After the greeting, there will be some formalities to settle (e.g. you will be asked for your ID card) and you will both sit down and be ready to start the test.

Topics

As mentioned already, the first part of the test takes up to five minutes. The examiner will ask you a few questions, normally on two topics of an ordinary personal kind. Examiners are allowed some flexibility in this matter, so don't be worried if yours only talks about one topic.

Here's a list of possible topics. Of course, it's not meant to be inclusive, but it gives you a rough idea of the sort of issues you can expect to be asked about and can practise with friends.

your family	food	music	phones/computers
sport	friends	entertainment	home
work	belongings	language	buildings
leisure	clothes	health	places
schooldays	daily routines	newspapers	birthdays
studies	public transport	festivals	memories
shopping	television	animals	charity

Question types

Here's another list suggesting some of the question words the examiner might use.

'Who'

'What'

'Why'

'Where'

'Which'

'When'

'How'

'How often'

'How many'

'What kind of'

Yes-no questions ('Are there ...?', 'Do you ...?', etc.), which are usually followed by 'Why?' or 'Why not?'

Questions

We can then put together five questions on any of the topics.

Do you have a favourite food?

Do you eat out a lot?

Who does the cooking in your family?

Can you remember a time when you had a really bad meal?

Do you try to control your diet in any way?

How do you spend your holidays?

Have you ever been out of Hong Kong for a trip?

What's your idea of a really good holiday?

Where would you like to go one day?

Do you think long school holidays are a good idea?

The questions become slightly more general to see if you can give clear factual answers and also express an opinion.

Activity 6.1

Take three topics that you might be asked about in Part 1 and write five questions that could be asked for each topic.

Understanding the question: asking for clarification

You will not be able to do well if you do not understand what you are being asked to talk about. As we will mention more than once, you must ask if you are unsure of anything. Here are some phrases you might use for this purpose:

Excuse me, but could you repeat that, please?

I didn't quite get that.

Sorry, but could you explain what you mean by ...

Can I just check that you want me to tell you ...

I'm very sorry but I don't know that word.

Tenses

Some questions demand different tenses from others. For instance, 'Can you remember ...?' questions lead you into the past tense, as do 'Have you ever ...?' questions. However, 'Where would you like ...?' requires a future hope answer.

Remembering the advice above about 'showing off', you should try to use as many tenses as possible.

Here are examples for three of the first set of questions we looked at above:

Do you have a favourite food?

Yes, I do. Mangoes. It seems even when I was really young I was always asking for mangoes. I remember seeing my first mango tree when I was 12. I was so excited. And I still love them – on their own, with sticky rice or mango custard. Delicious.

Do you eat out a lot?

I used to. It was part of my routine, going out for lunch with colleagues and meeting friends for dinner. But I don't know what

happened. I lost interest in it and now I only go for big family meals. I prefer eating at home, if possible.

Do you try to control your diet in any way?

No, I don't make much effort. I seem to be lucky. I don't put on weight even though I am quite a big eater. But I weigh myself frequently and the day I see any increase I will put the brakes on. I don't want to be overweight – that's for sure.

Questions that seem to demand only the present tense can be developed perfectly naturally to show off your mastery of other tenses through memories, references to what you used to do and possible future changes.

Activity 6.2

Analyse the use of different tenses in the three responses given above. When you have finished, look in the feedback section at the end of the module to check how we analysed them. Then look at some of the other questions and develop answers for them using a variety of tenses.

Lost for words?

In the first part of the test, the examiner will ask you questions about yourself. It is clearly better to answer directly from your own experience. However, you don't want to get into a position where you simply have nothing to say, because of an honest lack of experience or knowledge in the area you are asked about. One way of handling this situation is to elaborate on the reasons why you are 'lost for words'.

Have you ever had a pet?

No, I haven't really. When I was young we lived in public housing and pets weren't allowed. Well, my father once had some fish, but I can't say they interested me at all. *I know people get a lot of satisfaction from keeping pets, but it is not something which has ever interested me. In fact I am frightened of cats and dogs, which is stupid I know, but that's how I am. The closest I ever came to having a pet was my grandmother's cat. I used to visit her a lot but she had to lock the cat up so that I wouldn't see it.*

The part in italics explains your inability to respond. It allows you to say something more positive than 'no'.

Length of responses

Your aim is to show off your speaking ability at its best. Short answers will *not* achieve this and must be avoided. You don't want to make a

speech but if you have 4–5 minutes available and the examiner's questions are fairly brief, you can see that your answers need to be about 30–40 seconds long. In other words, they need to be well-developed. In your answers, you should try to make use of some of the speech functions you learned about in *Module 2*.

In this section we look at the following strategies for extending the length of your responses:

- commenting on your own responses and rewording the question
- increasing the grammatical complexity of your response and adding detail
- offering reflections on factual answers
- adding further examples
- offering extra answers.

Commenting and rewording

In a conversational situation we often comment on our responses, partly as a way to gain time for thought:

Where would you like to go one day?

Oh! That's a difficult question. Where would I like to travel? There are a lot of places – some for the people I know there, some for sightseeing and so on.

As you can see in the above example, we can also reword questions. This gives us time and demonstrates our vocabulary knowledge:

Where would you like to go one day?

Where would I like to travel?

We could also say:

What place would I really like to see?

Where is my dream destination?

The place I most want to visit is ...

Activity 6.3

The skill of rewording a question requires the use of synonyms and the skill of reformulation we looked at in *Module 2*. Let's look again at some of the questions you practised in that module and match up the questions with phrases you might use when rewording them.

Look again at these four questions:

- 1 Do you look forward to old age?
- 2 Are there any parts of Hong Kong you really dislike?
- 3 Can you describe your daily routine?
- 4 Do you think young people spend too much time on the computer?

Then consider which of the following phrases you could use to reword the questions. Match the questions with the phrases:

- | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| a | overdo staring at a small screen | g | becoming a senior citizen |
| b | regular schedule | h | feelings about the ageing process |
| c | areas I cannot stand | i | cyber-addiction |
| d | teenagers and IT | j | relish the prospect |
| e | parts that disgust me | k | everyday habits |
| f | do on a normal day | l | unpleasant parts |

Practise rewording the four questions using the phrases you have selected.

Increasing complexity and adding detail

We can increase the length of our responses by adding detail. We can do this by increasing the grammatical complexity of our sentences by inserting subordinate clauses – important in meeting one of the four IELTS Speaking test criteria. Adding detail should also make what we are saying of more interest to the examiner, which is always a positive thing to aim for. The following is an example:

I love a little restaurant in the back streets of Wanchai. It's tiny – there are only five tables. Although the décor is very simple – just white tiles – it's lovely and clean, and the owner and his wife are very warm and welcoming.

Language box

Let's return to the question about one's daily routine. It would be very easy – and probably not worth many marks – to simply list your activities:

I take the bus to work.

This needs spicing up with adjectives and adverbs:

Then rather sleepily I take a very crowded bus to work.

A relative clause might help:

Then rather sleepily I take a very crowded bus, which is inevitably late, to work.

Participle clauses can be added:

Then rather sleepily, listening to music on my walkman, I take a very crowded bus, which is inevitably late, to work.

And various other types of clause and phrase, e.g. prepositional phrases:

Then rather sleepily after a long wait at the bus-stop opposite my home, and listening to music on my walkman, I take a very crowded bus, which is inevitably late, through the heaving streets of Mongkok to work.

Possibly this is getting a bit too complex, but we hope you see the point. The greater sophistication of detail and structure, the more the examiner will be impressed and drawn towards awarding higher grades.

Activity 6.4

Build up these rather brief main clauses by adding subordinate clauses and other details:

- 1 I go to the market.
 - 2 We went for a walk in the park.
 - 3 It rained and was too hot.
 - 4 My mother cooks dinner.
-

Offering reflections

We can add general reflections to factual answers, as with this one coming after a description of a favourite eating place:

I think my favourite restaurants are always small hidden-away places. That's part of their magic. You feel you are special and not many people know the secret!

Activity 6.5

Think of some general reflections that might come after these answers:

- 1 Do you think teachers make a strong impact on their pupils?

My form teacher in the sixth form was a big influence on me. She didn't just teach us, but also helped to give us a view of life and how to deal with it. I wanted to be like her when I was older. She was calm and reasonable and certainly to my innocent eyes very knowledgeable.

- 2 Are your friends important to you?

I still have my friends from my primary school days. We should have grown apart – certainly our lives have been very different – and yet I hardly ever see my university classmates – we don't seem to have much in common and, if we do meet, we are very competitive. But I feel perfectly at home with my primary school classmates.

Adding examples

We can expand an answer by mentioning examples:

I love classic English novels; for instance, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* – my all-time favourite – and Dickens' *Great Expectations*. I have read them both three or four times and am moved each time. They don't lose their magic. But, of course, that is why they are called classics.

Note: We can add examples with phrases such as: 'for example', 'for instance', 'such as', 'a case in point being', 'to give you an idea/flavour'.

Activity 6.6

Expand the following comments by adding some examples:

- 1 I am a big fan of Cantopop.
 - 2 I think Maggie Cheung is my favourite actress.
 - 3 I enjoy soap operas on television when I have a free evening.
 - 4 I am allergic to seafood.
-

Offering extra answers

Sometimes we offer extra answers. For example, after saying how much you like classical music and naming some favourite pieces and recordings, you could add:

But as I have been answering I have been feeling a bit guilty about not mentioning jazz. When I am in the right mood, nothing is better than a smooth saxophone sound.

Activity 6.7

Think of what you could add after doing the following:

- 1 You have explained that you have always wanted to tour round Europe and see famous cities like Rome, Paris and Amsterdam.
 - 2 You have told the examiner how much you admire nurses for the difficult work they do.
 - 3 You have said how important a traditional stable family with respect among the generations is to you.
-

Body language

Body language conveys attitude. It is often said that an experienced examiner can tell how a student is going to perform by the way he or she walks into the interview room. Try to convey confidence and appear relaxed by the way you walk, the manner in which you take a seat and in the body language you use throughout the interview.

The interview itself works best when it is a pleasant, relatively informal experience in which candidates behave in a normal, friendly way, smiling and using suitable eye contact. Usually one looks one's conversational partner in the eye when starting to talk, shifts the gaze slightly away while talking, and returns eye contact as one finishes. These are normal, if usually unconscious, ways of announcing the beginning and end of one's speaking turn. Lowering the voice is often also a signal that a turn is coming to an end. These details make the conversation pass smoothly. There is little need for hand gestures in a personal conversation, though there is no objection to using them in a limited way if this makes you feel more comfortable.

Attitudinal words and phrases

Another way of communicating attitude is through the use of language. The most common attitudinal words or phrases are adverbs such as ‘frankly’, ‘personally’, ‘obviously’ or adverb phrases such as ‘it seems to me’. These expressions enrich your speech, adding ease and fluency, while sending clear signals about your attitude to what you are talking about. Of course, attitude can be negative as well as positive; and you can also be neutral in attitude, without being indifferent. Attitudinal phrases can represent caution or enthusiasm. Here are some words and phrases which signal attitude towards the topic you are discussing, categorized broadly as positive, neutral, negative and tentative.

Positive	Neutral	Negative	Tentative
really	I suppose	sadly	it seems to me
absolutely	I guess	obviously	generally
frankly	on the whole	unfortunately	possibly
definitely		regrettably	as I see it
actually			as far as I
undoubtedly			remember
naturally			this might
of course			suggest

Intonation plays a very important role in communicating attitude, as we explained in Module 2. This means that a categorization such as the above must be treated with caution as the intonation is not shown. Intonation can make a positive expression sound negative and vice versa.



Activity 6.8

Listen to Audio CD 3 track 1. As you do so, identify the strategies the speakers are making use of. Listen several times to see how many examples of the strategies we have been discussing so far in this module you can identify:

- understanding questions by asking for clarification
- using a range of tenses
- extending responses with comments, rewording, added complexity, and details
- reflecting, adding examples, and offering extra answers
- using attitudinal expressions.

When you have finished, check the feedback section for our ideas.

Activity 6.9

Following the example in the recording for Activity 6.8, use the questions below to construct a conversation. Record it and listen to yourself. Even better – find another member of your tutorial group and work together on the conversations.

Questions:

- 1 Can you describe the area you live in?
 - 2 Which district of Hong Kong do you like least? Why?
 - 3 Do you think rural life is better than urban? Why?
 - 4 How do you rate the quality of life in Hong Kong?
 - 5 What criteria would you follow in choosing where to live?
-

That completes our coverage of the first part of the Speaking test. We now look at Part 2, which is different in format.

Part 2: The individual long turn

We have tried to encourage you to develop fairly long answers for the personal questions, so this part should not frighten you. The time allowed for the individual long turn is two minutes. If you speak for less time, the examiner will ask a question or two to fill up the time. As sub-questions on the topic you are given are on the task card, generating ideas is not really an issue here. A polished performance showing fluency and variety of language and structure needs to be your main concern.

Preparation

After being given a task card, you have one minute to prepare yourself. You may write some notes if you wish. Here is an example.

Describe a belief you feel has had a profound effect on your life.

You should say:

where you got this belief

when it has influenced you

how widespread it is

and explain why you think it is so important.

First step – Read the task card.

Second step – Decide quickly what your answer is. You may wonder if your very first idea might be too obvious and go for a second one, but you certainly should try not to spend more than a few seconds making a choice.

Stop for a moment now and consider what you would say for this topic – then read on.

What could you talk about? If you are religious, that might seem the obvious choice, but you might have too much to say about that and it can at times be controversial. Another choice is probably wiser. *Tolerance, telling the truth, not saying the first thing that comes to mind, expressing one's feelings openly, working hard, the importance of freedom* – all these can be the subjects of strongly-held beliefs.

Third step – Decide what to say in answer to the questions.

You have chosen to talk about telling the truth. You are asked to describe a belief, so this needs a bit of elaboration. Perhaps you agree that there are times when concealment is acceptable – for example, to protect someone from terrible news:

I believe that telling lies is a deeply destructive act and I try hard not to do it. It can be hard to resist and there may be occasions when you want to protect others – for example, telling sick people they are improving and encouraging friends even when their work is not really up to standard. But definitely lying to protect yourself is a bad policy.

I got this belief from my father. He always told me if I told the truth he would forgive and help, but he would be hurt if I lied. And that was true. I once hid a vase I had broken and he was very angry, but another time I confessed I had cheated at school and he sat and talked to me very calmly about it.

My belief has been important in my private life. I have tried to be honest even when it hurts in personal relations. And believe me – it has at times. Sadly, I do not think truth is much respected. One hears lies every day, especially from politicians. It is important because a lie is always discovered sooner or later and then the trouble is even worse. Honesty is far more realistic than lying.

Fourth step – You must decide what you want to do while you are thinking and putting together your response. One minute is a very short time and thinking seems to be the most important thing you can do. You are not going to be able to write much in that minute and it might distract you from thought. Also the task card is already a list of the main points you are going to cover. However, you must find out what suits you and decide whether or not you perform better with some written notes. If you make notes, you might also want to preserve good phrases that come to mind, such as ‘deeply destructive’.

Practise and see what works for you, but remember that Part 2 is assessing your ability to speak, not your writing skills. Certainly, your grade will be much lower if you stare at your writing rather than face the examiner when you deliver your response.

Follow-up questions

If you don’t speak for the full two minutes, the examiner will ask you one or two fairly basic follow-up questions. These will relate to what you have said and we hope that by this stage of the test you will be feeling warmed up enough to be able to answer easily. If you need time to think, remember the hesitation devices we looked at *Module 2*. You can also use some introductory phrases to indicate to the examiner that you are in the process of thinking about the new question:

That’s an interesting point/question.

I haven’t/hadn’t thought of that.

To talk off the top of my head, ...

These are examples where the speaker is in fact thinking aloud. Skilful use of such phrases will indicate your sophistication to the examiner, showing that you have the confidence to take time to think out a more

considered response, rather than jumping in with an immediate answer which may not be so appropriate or thoughtful.



Activity 6.10

Look more closely at the example above. It's given again below for convenience.

Refer back to *Module 2*, and:

- decide which words you might have trouble in pronouncing correctly;
- look through word endings and note final *s* sounds, the final plosives, the linking between words, etc.;
- underline words/syllables you would stress; and
- divide it up into tone groups.

When you have done this, look at the feedback section at the end of the module for our ideas, then:

- read it aloud and time yourself;
- listen to the recording for the activity; and
- finally, make your own recording and compare your performance with the original recording for the activity on Audio CD 3 track 2:

I believe that telling lies is a deeply destructive act and I try hard not to do it. It can be hard to resist and there may be occasions when you want to protect others – for example, telling sick people they are improving and encouraging friends even when their work is not really up to standard. But definitely lying to protect yourself is a bad policy.

I got this belief from my father. He always told me if I told the truth he would forgive and help, but he would be hurt if I lied. And that was true. I once hid a vase I had broken and he was very angry, but another time I confessed I had cheated at school and he sat and talked to me very calmly about it.

My belief has been important in my private life. I have tried to be honest even when it hurts in personal relations. And believe me – it has at times. Sadly, I do not think truth is much respected. One hears lies every day, especially from politicians. It is important because a lie is always discovered sooner or later and then the trouble is even worse. Honesty is far more realistic than lying.

Topics

As in Part 1, the topics in Part 2 are fairly general and you are usually asked about your personal experiences or preferences. Here are three task cards for your reference.

Describe your favourite style of food.

You should say:

where you can find it

what ingredients it uses

how popular it is

and explain why it appeals to you.

(e.g. vegetarian, Shanghainese, Indian, fast food)

Describe a historical figure you admire greatly.

You should say:

when the person lived

what the person achieved

where you learned about him/her

and explain why he/she impresses you.

(e.g. Alexander the Great, Joan of Arc, Napoleon, Sun Yat Sen)

Describe a film you found particularly memorable.

You should say:

when you saw it

where you saw it

what other people thought about it

and explain why you were impressed by it.

(e.g. *The Sound of Music*, *Titanic*, the latest Harry Potter film)

Activity 6.11

Use these task cards for practice. Record your practice or work with a classmate and give one another feedback. Practise the same questions a number of times to see how you can improve and make your answers more interesting and impressive.

Remember to use various speech functions and elaborate points by:

- commenting and rewording;
- including complexity and adding detail;
- offering reflections; and
- adding examples.

When assessing your performance, remember the following important points:

- the consonants and vowels of English
 - problems native-speakers of Cantonese might have with these sounds
 - rules for the pronunciation of past tense endings and the common ending -s
 - the reduction of unstressed vowels
 - word stress
 - clause stress to establish meaning
 - rising and falling intonation patterns
 - tag questions
 - meaningful noises used when speaking
 - tone groups
 - register
 - clarity
 - fluency
 - interest
 - range of expression
 - rich and idiomatic vocabulary.
-

Anecdotes

In Part 2 of the test, you are often invited to speak about yourself. In effect, you will be telling the examiner stories about yourself or about people you know or experiences you have had. Short stories, usually about people, are called ‘anecdotes’. Anecdotes usually emerge in conversation when one person suddenly remembers an incident related to the current topic of conversation. An anecdote is, therefore, often introduced by expressions like:

That reminds me of the time when I was ...

That makes me think of ...

We don't think you will have any difficulty in filling your time but including an anecdote or two could help.

Here are some examples. Given the time constraints these are very brief:

That reminds me of Secondary 6 – we were all crazy about *Titanic* at the time. Susan in my class was famous for going to see it nine times.

That makes me think of the time I first decided to learn to swim. Our boat was in a storm and I was really frightened. That was when I decided.

Activity 6.12

Look at the following task cards.

Describe a person who has had a big impact on your life.

You should say:

when the person lived

what the person achieved

where you learned about him/her

and explain why he/she impresses you.

Describe the invention which you think has most changed the world.

You should say:

when it was made

how it was first received

how you use it

and explain why you think it so important.

Write brief anecdotes which might fit into these topics, then practise responding to the task cards including your anecdotes in your response.

Enriching language

In the individual long turn, you will have a greater opportunity to demonstrate your ability to enrich your language by, for example:

- using some less common vocabulary to show the extent of your knowledge – for ideas, you may refer back to the discussion of synonyms and formal vocabulary in *Module 1* and to the section on ‘Range of vocabulary’ in *Module 5*;
- using complex sentences, not just a sequence of simple one-clause sentences – for ideas, you may refer back to the discussion of ‘Coordination’ and ‘Subordination’ in *Module 1* and to the section on ‘Increasing complexity and adding detail’ earlier in this module; and
- expressing attitude – the section ‘Attitudinal words and phrases’ earlier in this module should give you some ideas.

Remember that two of the criteria you are assessed against are *lexical resource* – the range of vocabulary you are able to use, and *grammatical resource* – your ability to use a range of tenses and complex sentences. It is important in this part of the test, therefore, that you draw upon all that you have learned in this and earlier modules about vocabulary, the use of tenses, commenting and rewording, increasing complexity, adding detail, reflecting, and expressing attitude.

Activity 6.13

Look at the following task card and try to enrich the language in the skeleton answer given below it.

Describe something that really scares you.

You should say:

when you developed this fear

a time you experienced it

how it affects your life

and explain why it frightens you so much.

Skeleton answer:

spiders

as long as you can remember

one in the bathroom

nervous in the countryside

thought of a spider on your skin / the way they feed

Imagine the examiner asks you two follow-up questions after your response. How would you respond to these questions?

- 1 Does anyone else in your family have this fear?
- 2 Do you think there is any way to overcome such a fear?

When you have finished, look at the feedback section at the end of the module for our ideas on how it might be done, together with an analysis of the language which might be used.

Activity 6.14

Look at the following task card and think how you would respond, enriching your language in the ways we have discussed above. Then record yourself responding to the questions.



Describe your favourite story from history.

You should say:

when it is supposed to have happened

when you first heard about it

what its significance is

and explain whether you believe it to be true or not.

Listen to our version on Audio CD 3 track 3 and compare it with yours. Note where you did better than us and where you could improve.

Now we tackle the third, and last, part of the Speaking test, which returns to two-way discussion.

Part 3: Two-way discussion

The third part of the IELTS Speaking test, which lasts 4–5 minutes, returns to the interaction format of Part 1. In theory, Part 1 is more of an interview and Part 3 more discussion-like, but, obviously, it is the candidate who is expected to make the bigger contribution. The examiner is not looking for marks!

The main difference this time is that now that you have warmed up and shown your ability to function in a social setting, the test moves on and tries to assess your more academic qualities by shifting the attention to more abstract matters. The examiner will ask a couple of questions related to the topic established in Part 2, the individual long turn. As it is a discussion, the examiner might respond to something you say with a comment rather than a question, but it should still be regarded as a prompt for you to react to.

Topics and related questions

We will return to some of the topics mentioned earlier and imagine that these were the topic of your individual long turn in Part 2. In the two-way discussion in Part 3, the examiner will invite you to participate in discussion of a more abstract nature based on questions related to the Part 2 topic. These questions generally ask you to do things such as describe a situation, compare the past with the present, explain why something happens, or speculate about the future.

Below are some questions thematically related to possible Part 2 topics.

Topic	Thematically related questions
Family	Some people say that the replacement of the extended family by the nuclear family in developed societies is an unfortunate development. Do you agree or disagree? What changes do you foresee the family undergoing in the next century?
Sport	What positive value do you think sport has in education? What would you do about the problem of drugs in sport?
Education	How do you foresee the education system changing over the next 20 years? To what extent do you agree that everyone should have a right to a university place?

Shopping	<p>Do you agree or disagree that Hong Kong people's obsession with shopping is unhealthy?</p> <p>To what extent do you believe that the Internet poses a threat to the future of shopping malls?</p>
Clothes	<p>In what ways are men's and women's attitudes to clothes and fashion different?</p> <p>Do you agree or disagree with the view that fashion is a waste of time?</p>
Public transport	<p>What do you think is the future for the private car in Hong Kong?</p> <p>What forms of public transport do you expect to see in the future?</p>
Television	<p>How do you rate the quality of Hong Kong television?</p> <p>Do you think television's overall effect is good or bad?</p>
Tourism	<p>Describe the impact of tourism on Hong Kong in the past ten years.</p> <p>To what extent do you agree that Hong Kong has been emphasizing the worst kind of tourism and neglecting its cultural heritage?</p>
Health	<p>What are your feelings about the 'right to die'?</p> <p>How does health care today compare with health care 20 years ago?</p>
Phones and computers	<p>Do modern telecommunications improve or degrade human relationships?</p> <p>Do you agree or disagree that modern telecommunications create a threat to our freedom?</p>
Charity	<p>Do you think enough is being done to help poor countries?</p> <p>How do you feel about donors having buildings named after them?</p>
History	<p>What can we learn from history?</p> <p>Should children study history as a way of encouraging patriotism?</p>
Disease	<p>What are the advantages and disadvantages of traditional types of medicine?</p> <p>With respect to illness, do you think prevention or cure is the more important?</p>

Multiculturalism	How can people of different racial and cultural backgrounds live together harmoniously? Should immigrants be expected to adopt the ways and language of their new country?
Punishment	What do you think the purpose of punishment should be? Should parents be allowed to hit their children?
Kindergartens	Should kindergarten education be paid for by the government? At what age do you think it is best for children to begin their formal education?

Activity 6.15

As you can see from the examples above, the questions in Part 3 look at more complex issues raised by the topic of Part 2. Look at the task cards from Part 2 of the test below. What complex issues related to these topics could be developed for the Part 3 discussion? Try to think of some possible questions.

Describe a historical figure you admire greatly.

You should say:

when the person lived

what the person achieved

where you learned about him/her

and explain why he/she impresses you.

Describe your ideal marriage partner.

You should say:

what he/she looks like

what qualities the person has

what interests he/she has

and explain why he/she would suit you.

In the following section we consider strategies for responding to complex issues. Before we start, it is worth noting two points.

First, complex issues deserve complex responses. Complex responses give you more to say and this part of the test allows you to express your

opinion. If you have a strong opinion, feel free to give it. The test is a test of spoken English, and marks will not be gained or lost according to your views.

Second, we emphasized early in this module the need to make sure you understand the question before attempting to answer it. Even if this involves asking for clarification it can save embarrassment and, if done confidently, give a good impression. In Part 3 of the test, when the questions are more complex, it is even more important to make sure you have understood. If you don't know a term in the question or are not sure whether you have understood the question correctly, ask the examiner. If possible, give your own idea and ask for confirmation rather than just asking for help, e.g.

That means do I think people with serious illnesses have the right to ask to die?

As long as you deal with the problem quickly and you then give a fluent response, this should not worry the examiner. Of course, it is better if you understand, but this is the speaking test, so a small comprehension problem will not cause trouble as long as it is handled smoothly.

Strategies for discussing complex issues

In this section we look at several possible responses to Part 3 questions and analyse them in order to identify the strategies and approaches used to discuss the issues involved.

We now consider the following strategies for discussing complex issues:

- looking at an issue from both sides
- giving supporting evidence
- conceding an idea or theory with reservations
- making reference to your own experience.

Looking at an issue from both sides

Looking at an issue from both sides involves comparing and contrasting, looking at advantages and disadvantages, pros and cons. In the examples below, you will see that successful speakers often consider issues in terms of a general *criterion*. This helps them to generate the two sides of the argument. For instance, in the first example below the speaker takes *practicality* as the criterion, using the expression 'in practical terms'. *Practical terms* are often compared with *theoretical terms*. Other common criteria include: *economic, social, political, educational, environmental* and *historical*.

As you will see below, successful speakers make statements followed by examples which constitute evidence for the claims they make.

Another interesting approach to a complex issue shown in the examples is that of asking rhetorical questions to outline the scope of the issue.

Language note

- ‘In terms of’ is a useful way of considering different viewpoints.
- ‘There are two sides to a question’ is far better than ‘a coin has two sides’.
- ‘On the one hand ... on the other hand ...’ is a very useful phrase, but can only be used for strong contrast, e.g. ‘on the one hand it is good because ... on the other it is bad because ...’.
- ‘It all depends on the point of view’: one can then consider a question according to different perspectives, e.g. the point of view of women, that of men, that of children, that of the government. A point of view is not an opinion; it is a position, a viewpoint.
- ‘Gains and losses’, ‘pros and cons’, ‘advantages and disadvantages’, ‘positive points and negative’

We now look at three questions where the strategy of looking at an issue from both sides can be applied:

- 1 The replacement of the extended family by the nuclear family in developed societies is an unfortunate development. Do you agree or disagree?
- 2 Do you agree or disagree that Hong Kong people’s obsession with shopping is unhealthy?
- 3 To what extent do you agree that everyone should have a right to a university place?

You can listen to the answers on Audio CD 3 track 4 as you read them below.



Example 1

The replacement of the extended family by the nuclear family in developed societies is an unfortunate development. Do you agree or disagree?

Well, *I can see gains and losses. From the point of view of* a newly married couple, it is very nice to set up their own home and have privacy. Daughters-in-law suffered enough in the past. *In practical terms* also, the nuclear family fits the urban housing situation *better*. Not many people have houses that can hold three or more generations of family members. *On the other hand*, there have been losses. Old

people do not get *the same* care and attention; children grow up without lots of cousins to play with and aunts and uncles to talk to; and there is not the same sharing of resources. *Both* extended *and* nuclear families create and solve different problems. But only nuclear families fit the modern Hong Kong situation.

How the strategy is used:

The phrases in *italics* show the approach of seeing more than one side to the question.

The speaker uses speech signals to mark the comparison:

(on the one hand) / on the other hand both/and better the same

The speaker identifies positive and negative aspects:

gains and losses

The comparison is made in terms of what is *practical*. This is a very useful approach, as you often find that one answer may be theoretically better than another but is simply not feasible in practice.

In this case, there is also a final choice – ‘only nuclear families fit the modern Hong Kong situation’ – but this is not obligatory. It is quite possible to leave the final choice open.

Here is another similar example:

Example 2

Do you agree or disagree that Hong Kong people’s obsession with shopping is unhealthy?

Well, you can *look at that in a number of different ways*. *In terms of the economy* it is probably essential. That’s how the system works – people manufacture goods; there are import and export companies, advertising agencies and shopping malls full of shops. Think of all the jobs involved. The whole thing collapses if there are no shoppers to keep on emptying the shops so the process can start again. I also think shopping is fun. I am certainly one of those keen shoppers. *Having said that, however, I can see that in terms of the environment* all this consumption is probably harmful. I don’t really need eight pairs of shoes. And morally maybe we should not all be so materialistic. Maybe I should be painting rather than shopping. *Who can say?*

The third example below uses a slightly different approach:

Example 3

To what extent do you agree that everyone should have a right to a university place?

It seems to me that you can *approach that question from a number of different angles*. *Ideally* it would be fairer if everyone had this



opportunity and it would *in theory* give us a highly educated society, possibly with fewer problems as well-educated people should know how to behave properly. *But I am not sure* the idea is at all *practical*. Would it mean all 19- to 23-year-olds would go to university? I suppose quite a few wouldn't want to go as they don't like studying. But even if three-quarters went, the universities would have to be hugely expanded at enormous cost. Would standards stay the same and lots of people fail to graduate? Would there be enough suitable jobs for all these people or would waiters have economics degrees? I can see *lots of problems with the idea*.

How the strategy is used:

An additional technique here is *asking rhetorical questions* to show that the idea demands a lot more thought before it is accepted:

Would it mean all 19- to 23-year-olds would go to university?

Would standards stay the same and lots of people fail to graduate?

Would there be enough suitable jobs for all these people or would waiters have economics degrees?

Discussing ideas frequently involves the use of modal verbs and conditional clauses as in these examples. Note how the speaker handles them in the third example above:

you *can* approach that question ...

it *would* be fairer if everyone had ...

it *would* ... give us ...

well-educated people *should* know ...

quite a few *wouldn't* want to go ...

even *if* three-quarters *went*, the universities *would* have to ...

The three examples above have all adopted a two-sided approach. Seeing more than one way of looking at a question gives you more to say. Even if you are not explicitly asked to compare and contrast, looking at advantages and disadvantages gives structure to your response. Look at the further example below and then try using this strategy yourself:



Example 4

What has been the impact of tourism on Hong Kong in the past ten years?

I would say it has both damaged and brought benefits. To be negative first, it is environmentally unsound. Thousands of people staying on a beautiful island is bound to create pollution and damage ecosystems. Secondly, tourism degrades culture. Ancient festivals, sacred places and native art forms become commercialized, just performances for tourists. But to turn to the positive side, tourism creates jobs and

brings money into a place. That's very good for the locals. Secondly, tourism gives great pleasure and surely that is a big plus in its favour?

Activity 6.16

Work on the following questions in the ways suggested above. Try writing your answers before practising them orally:

- 1 Should parents be allowed to hit their children?
- 2 What are your feelings about the 'right to die'?
- 3 Do you think television's overall effect is good or bad?

Giving supporting evidence

In the first example of a speaker looking at an issue from both sides, the speaker was responding to the question:

The replacement of the extended family by the nuclear family in developed societies is an unfortunate development. Do you agree or disagree?

In the response, the speaker gives supporting evidence for every statement made about nuclear and extended families. This is done in the form of examples and these constitute *evidence* supporting the speaker's claims.

Statement	Evidence
The nuclear family fits the urban housing situation better.	People don't have houses that can hold three generations.
On the other hand, there have been losses.	Old people lack care and attention. Children lack cousins, aunts and uncles. There is not the same sharing of resources.

It is always a good idea to have some evidence to support what you want to say. The same applies to the *reasons* which support the *points* you want to make in an argument. The response given to the following question on Audio CD 3 track 5 illustrates this approach:

What changes do you foresee the family undergoing in the coming two or three decades?



It's very hard to foresee, but I do agree that great changes are likely in the more Westernized societies. Let me suggest two. First, I think men will take on a far clearer home-building role. Women are now as educated as men and can have just as good careers, so their contribution to the family is bound to change and that will cause men's to change as well. Second, I think there will be far more unconventional families. Attitudes to so many things are changing with gay marriage, single-parent families and changed approaches to divorce. Families a few generations from now will be very non-traditional.

How the strategy is used:

The answer consists of a warning that it is hard to foresee the future, and then two possible changes, expressed naturally enough in the future tense. After each suggestion or argument, a reason is given to justify and explain the view taken.

Argument	Reason
Men will take on a clearer home-building role.	Women are now as educated as men and can have good careers, so their contribution to the family will change and that will cause men's role to change.
There will be far more unconventional families.	Attitudes are changing with gay marriage, single-parent families and changed approaches to divorce.

Activity 6.17

Attempt a similar answer to this question:

What would you do about the problem of drugs in sport?

Conceding an idea or theory with reservations

As we saw in *Module 3*, in academic arguments in written English writers often acknowledge (or 'concede') that there is more than one point of view. They signal differences by combining contrasting clauses in complex sentences using discourse markers such as 'while', 'although', and 'despite the fact that'. Making concessions in order to make a point is an approach you may adopt in responding to complex questions in Part 3 of the Speaking test. For example, you may acknowledge or concede a theory but deny its practical applications. One can concede in other ways as well. For instance, one could concede that an idea might have many good side-effects but might still lower the overall quality of life and

simply not be fun, as in the example below. Read the answer and underline the examples of concession:

Do you agree or disagree with the view that fashion is a waste of time?

Well, when you put it like that: yes, I suppose it is. The world isn't a better place because of fashion. If we all dressed simply, life could go on much as before. In fact, lots of people don't pay much attention to fashion. In my experience, not many middle-aged men care much about their clothes and are happy to let someone else choose them. But having said that, I don't think the point is at all important. All human societies that I know of have worried about looking nice, dressing up and being admired. Fashion may be a waste of time, but it is a deep instinct in our species.

Now listen to this response on Audio CD 3 track 6.



Activity 6.18

Attempt a similar answer to this question:

Is there any future for the private car in Hong Kong?

Making reference to your own experience

Finally, if your own experience seems relevant, don't hesitate to use it. It can make an answer more interesting:

Do modern telecommunications improve or degrade human relationships?

I know that you do read of young people – it seems especially prevalent in Japan – who shut themselves away from human contact and only communicate with their computer screen, and I have heard it said that an excess of communication, as with constant telephone messages, reduces its value and meaning. But this doesn't accord with my own experience. I think it's wonderful the way one can keep in touch with friends and family, even when far apart by phone and email. I speak to my sister in Canada a couple of times a week and email her every day. I feel so close. I say, 'Hurrah for modern telecommunications!'

Of course, this answer also uses concession and contrast.

Now listen to this response on Audio CD 3 track 7.



Activity 6.19

Attempt a similar answer for this question:

Do shops have a future when we can buy things over the Internet?

A final word of advice

As you hear the news and read newspapers, look out for the general social and moral issues that are on people's minds at this time. This will help you to think quickly and easily of responses to these somewhat abstract questions.

Conclusion

In this module, we have looked closely at and practised the three stages of the IELTS Speaking test.

In Part 1, we stressed that you need to show off your oral English abilities; and to do this, you need to be willing to answer at length, volunteering extra information and detail.

In Part 2, we provided quite a few examples of the sort of task cards you might receive in the test, practised developing questions to familiarize you with the format and style, and went through the preparation process in some detail. We also looked at some follow-up questions and thought about anecdotes and ways of enriching basic answers.

In Part 3, we talked about the sort of questions that might come up in the discussion and then considered different strategies for answering them in a reflective way that fills up the time usefully and allows you to show off your English to its best advantage. You read and listened to a number of models and practised creating similar answers though, of course, the techniques can be used in a mix-and-match fashion to suit the questions you encounter.