

Section on Speaking

Introduction to the Speaking Module

The speaking module for the IELTS exam was changed in July 2001. The new speaking test lasts between 11 and 14 minutes. During the examination you will have a conversation with an examiner, which is recorded.

There are now three main parts within the oral exam:

Part 1: Introduction and interview

In this part of the oral examination, the examiner introduces himself/herself and confirms the identity of the candidate.

The examiner asks the candidate questions about himself/herself, their home, their interests, studies, etc. This is very similar to the first part of the oral exam before July 2001. For example, you could be asked the following set of questions:

- a) *What is your name?*
- b) *Where do you live?*
- c) *Do you have any brothers and sisters?*
- d) *What do they do for a living?*
- e) *What subject are you studying?*
- f) *Why did you choose this subject?*
- g) *How do you use English in your studies?*

The first question is obviously just your name, but you can add additional information to your answers: otherwise, the examiner will be speaking more than you! So, remember to give the examiner evidence of your ability to use the language. Look at the following short dialogue where the additional information is marked in bold:

Examiner: *What is your name?*

Candidate: *Sandra Bhatti*

Examiner: *Where do you live?*

Candidate: *I live in London now, **but I'm originally from a small town in Southern India.***

Examiner: *Have you got any brothers and sisters?*

Candidate: *Yes. One brother and two sisters. **My brother is two years older than me, but both my sisters, who are twins, are younger than me. They are 17 years of age.***

Examiner: *What do they do for a living?*

Candidate: *Only my brother is working. **He is an engineer and he's now working in Saudi Arabia for a large oil company.***

Examiner: *Let us now turn to your studies. What subject are you studying?*

Candidate: *I'm studying architecture **which I have been doing now for the past 5 years,***

Examiner: *Why did you choose this subject?*

Candidate: *I adore buildings **especially old ones like the Taj Mahal and I have a thing about bridges. My dream is to design a world famous bridge.***

Examiner: *How do you use English in your studies?*

Candidate: *I use it a lot when I am reading **as many of my books on architecture are in English.***

There is one very important difference between this part of the test and that prior to July 2001. The examiner uses a frame to ask questions and is limited in the help he/she can give you if you cannot, or do not, answer a question.

Part 2: Individual long term

In this part of the oral exam, you are given a card, e.g.

Topic Card

Describe what you like doing most in your free time.

You should say:

- when you first started doing the particular activity
- how frequently you do it
- whether you do it on your own or with other people

And explain why you like it.

You are given one minute to prepare a short talk, which will then last between one and two minutes. There is paper and pencil in the exam to make notes. Please note that the examiner is checking not just your English, but your fluency in speaking. We would advise you not to learn examples of the long turn by heart.

It is important that you make use of the minute given to organise your answer and make notes.

Example of notes

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------|
| – swimming | – on my own |
| – 5 years | – relaxing |
| – hated it at first | – feel good |
| – 3 times a week | – stops laziness |

Then when you speak you can do so in an organised manner. Look at the following example and see how information is attached to the above notes:

I think for me it has to be **swimming**, which I've been doing now for the past **5 years**. At school, ... where we were encouraged to do compulsory sport, I didn't fancy football or rugby, so I took up swimming. At first, I must say I ... **I hated it** with a passion, because I didn't like putting my head in the water. It just terrified me, but now things couldn't be more different. I now try to get in at least **three half-hour sessions per week**, and on holidays, if I can, I'll try to fit it in daily. I prefer to do it **on my own**, but obviously now and again some friends tag along - I can't say I like them being there, because they tend to want to mess around. ... I suppose you could say I am addicted to it! But it's a better addiction than smoking and drinking; ... a healthy mind in a healthy body as my father used to say. ... And **why do I like it** so much? Well, first of all, it helps me to **relax**, because it helps me take my mind off things, if I'm worried about something. What's more, I always **feel so good** after I've come out of the swimming pool. It also stops me from being **lazy** ... like some of my friends. ... And what keeps me going? It's not just the adrenaline. ... I just have to look at some of my friends and I know then why I am doing it!

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You can see how the notes help you to organise your answer. So that you can get the feel of how much you have to say, read the above text and time it. Try to speak at natural spoken speed.

After you have finished, the examiner may ask you a few questions related to what you have said. For example, the examiner might ask you here:

Do you do any other sport? Do you think it is important for people to do regular physical activity? Would you recommend swimming to other people?

Remember to give full answers, not just **Yes/No**.

Part 3: Two-way discussion

In this part of the test, the examiner starts a two-way discussion on a subject related to the topic in Part 2. For example, if you were asked to describe what you like doing most in your free time in Part 2, you might, for example, have a discussion on leisure, stress in modern life or health. This part of the oral test lasts 4–5 minutes.

Please note that the questions in this part of the test are of a more abstract nature. For example, you could be asked the following questions on leisure:

- What do you think the advantages are of doing leisure activities?
- Is a hobby like chess more important than say a physical activity like swimming?
- In what way do leisure activities help us cope with modern life?
- Should a leisure activity be incorporated in the working day?
- Do you think life will be more stressful or less stressful, in future?
- How do mental and physical activities improve health?

Remember as in Part 1 that you should give full answers. Note also that you can ask the examiner to repeat or rephrase the question.

Marking of the oral exam

It is important that you know how the examiners are marking your speaking. You are given marks for:

- **Fluency and Coherence**, which means how well you can speak naturally without stopping too much and also being organised.
- **Lexical Resource**, which covers the level and range of your vocabulary.
- **Grammatical Range and Accuracy**, which covers the level and accuracy of your grammar.
- **Pronunciation**, which covers the pronunciation of individual words and phrase and sentence stress.

Exercise 1: Individual long term

Look at the Topic Card below, which contains a subject on which you are asked to talk for one to two minutes.

Topic Card A

Describe an event in your life which changed you.

You should say:

- what the event was
- when the event took place
- what made the event special

And explain how it changed you.

Look at the notes below for the above talk, which are jumbled.

Example of notes

- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| a) motivated me | e) won a writing prize |
| b) made friends | f) change-confidence |
| c) 7 years ago | g) national |
| d) won money | |

Now look at the sample answer below. Put the notes in the correct order according to the talk.

'I would like to talk about a prize I won, ... which I won 7 years ago when I was 15. The prize was a national writing competition, which, incidentally, I entered without prompting from anyone. I saw the entry form for a writing competition, a short story of no more than 5,000 words, and I felt compelled to enter it. What made the whole thing special was not the prize money of 10,000 French francs, but having the story published in a national newspaper. As you can imagine, I was thrilled to bits and so were my parents, who were quite taken aback, ... as I hadn't told anyone about it. What winning the prize did for me is difficult to explain. But I can say that it changed my life dramatically. It may sound silly to say so, but it boosted my confidence enormously. I wasn't doing very well in school at the time, especially in English. Another thing is that it motivated me in all areas of my life, not just my school work. I started achieving high grades in all subjects and doing well in sport. And a strange thing was that I started making more friends. Before that I was quite shy, but afterwards my social life improved'.

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Now look at the following cards for the Individual long term:

Topic Card B

Describe somewhere that is special to you.

You should say:

- where the place is
- when you first realised it was special
- why you like it
- whether you would recommend it as a place for other people to visit

And explain why it is special to you.

Topic Card E

Describe the most memorable holiday you have had.

You should say:

- when it was
- where it was
- who you were with
- what made it memorable

And explain why it is special to you.

Topic Card C

Describe a person who has had the most influence on your life.

You should say:

- who the person is
- when and where you first met the person
- what made this person so special

And explain why you think the person had such an effect on you.

Topic Card F

Describe the most important day of your life.

You should say:

- which day it was
- why it was important
- what happened on that day

And explain whether you think you will have equally important days in the future.

Topic Card D

Describe something which annoys you.

You should say:

- what it is
- when it started annoying you
- how it annoys you
- what you do when it annoys you

And explain why it annoys you so much.

Topic Card G

Describe your favourite food.

You should say:

- what the food is
- how often you eat it
- how the food is made
- whether you make it yourself

And explain why it is your favourite food.

Prepare notes for each of the Individual long terms and practise speaking using your notes. Time yourself as you speak. Also think about some questions the examiner might ask you at the end of each long term. Compare your notes with the samples in the KEY.

Exercise 2: Two-way discussion

The discussion below is an example of what you might have in the third section of the Speaking Component of the exam.

Read the discussion and insert the examiner's questions (A–I) in the appropriate space. You may use each question once only.

Examiner's questions

- A. And working hours? Should people have a limit on the number of hours they can work per week?
- B. What do you think working hours will be like in the future?
- C. Should we have more holidays nowadays?
- D. And what about any disadvantages that holidays might have?
- E. To turn to types of holidays, which do you think are better, long or short holiday breaks?
- F. What are the advantages for workers of having holidays?
- G. Are holidays of any importance, in your opinion?
- H. And what are the arguments against this, if any?
- I. What are the advantages of limiting working hours?

Two-way discussion

Examiner: _____ 1 _____

Candidate: Yes. I think they are actually very important. Of course, there are other things that are of equal importance in life, but ... holidays give us something to look forward to, ... just like a purpose to aim for.

Examiner: _____ 2 _____

Candidate: A lot of people, in my opinion, work far too hard these days; the saying that 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' is certainly true. So ... yes, I think we do need more holidays ... to give us a chance to relax and enjoy life.

Examiner: _____ 3 _____

Candidate: I'd say that holidays are beneficial for workers themselves physically, ...

Examiner: Why?

Candidate: Well, because they give workers a good opportunity to recharge their batteries.

Examiner: Anything else?

Candidate: Another thing is that vacations also have a positive effect on employees when they return to work: they become more productive.

Examiner: _____ 4 _____

Candidate: I suppose, on the other hand, holidays can sometimes make workers feel dissatisfied with their jobs and unwilling to return to their working life, as it may seem dull and monotonous in comparison to the time they have spent on holiday. But I still think that the benefits far outweigh any disadvantage.

Examiner: _____ 5 _____

Candidate: That's a difficult question. Longer breaks have, of course, been very popular up till now, but more and more people are taking short breaks.

Examiner: And why is this?

Candidate: For instance, the chance to have a break in routine, even say for a couple of days, gives the worker a feeling of having had a proper break, even though it may have been a short one. It gives people a chance to unwind, to forget about work for a while and enjoy a different pace of life.

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Examiner: _____ 6 _____

Candidate: In many countries, I believe there is already a legal limit to the number of hours people can work per week. But I'm not sure whether this is a good thing or not; I suppose it depends on the job and how much stress and responsibility is involved.

Examiner: _____ 7 _____

Candidate: Limiting working hours means that workers cannot be exploited, and put under too much stress and pressure, which could be detrimental to their health. Sometimes, ... it could be dangerous to allow people to work too many hours. For example, an overworked and exhausted surgeon could make a mistake which could result in the death of a patient.

Examiner: _____ 8 _____

Candidate: From another point of view, it could be said that it is unfair to tell people how many hours they can or can't work. If, for example, a fit and healthy person is prepared to work many hours to earn enough money for himself and his family to have a better standard of living, should he not be allowed to?

Examiner: _____ 9 _____

Candidate: In the future, I think the working lives of people will probably become much more flexible. Most people, in Britain anyway, tend to still work from 9–5. It would be a plus for workers if they could adapt their working life to fit in with their personal circumstances. With the growth in technology, it is also now possible for many people to work from home, a trend which I imagine will continue.

Exercise 3: Example of extended discourse No.2

Look at the dialogue below. The Examiner's questions on the left are not in the correct order, but the candidate's answers are. Match the questions and answers in the dialogue. The first question of the examiner is marked in bold.

When you have finished try to give your own answers to the examiner's questions.

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. <i>Such as?</i> | A. Well, there are several differences that I have noticed. First of all, where I come from, the bond between each generation seems much stronger than in Britain. |
| 2. <i>So, in what ways would you criticise the British way of life?</i> | B. Yes, for example the older generation, the grandparents are looked after by their grown-up children, and more often than not they live with them. |
| 3. <i>More marked, in what way?</i> | C. Well, for one thing, it means that there is always someone around to help with the children, the housework, the shopping or just to provide company for another member of the family. |
| 4. <i>And is that always a bad thing?</i> | D. Oh yes and in many ways they are even more pronounced. |
| 5. <i>But how can young people become independent if they aren't given the chance?</i> | E. Well, for instance in my country teenagers would never dream of leaving home to live somewhere else, but, in the UK, it's almost the norm. |
| 6. <i>I expect family life is different in your home country?</i> | F. Yes, if it is possible, because they need their parents both financially and, in other ways, too, for example, in an emotional or educational capacity. |
| 7. <i>Can you give me an example of this bond?</i> | G. Independence is something that comes gradually to young people in my country, but here it seems to be an instant thing. At home, young people tend to leave their parents home only when they get married and not always then either. |
| 8. <i>What about differences between parents and, say, teenagers, are there differences there too?</i> | H. Well, to start with, I think one of the disadvantages of there being weaker family ties than in my country is that children are more easily influenced by forces outside the home rather than by their parents. |
| 9. <i>So you think children should live at home as long as possible?</i> | I. Like films, their peers, the media in all its forms. |
| 10. <i>And what are the advantages of having people around all the time?</i> | J. No not necessarily, but I do feel that in the UK there is a lack of respect generally for parents as far as teenagers are concerned. |

Exercise 4: Your future plans

In the third part of the Speaking Module, you need to be able to talk about your future plans. You should think beforehand about what you are going to say, but you should not learn a speech by heart. Remember the examiner is testing your ability to use the language, not to remember it.

This exercise looks at some of the ways you talk about the future in English.

The future in English is expressed in many ways. Study Questions (i–vii) below, which ask you about what way you look at the future.

Do you

- i. make firm plans for the future?*
- ii. plan to finish something before a particular time?*
- iii. dream about doing something at a particular time in the future?*

Or do you

- iv. run your life according to a timetable or calendar?*
- v. intend to do things, but can't make firm decisions?*
- vi. make decisions about your future without really thinking?*

Or are you

- vii. very indecisive about your future?*

Now look at the statements below and match them with the categories above.

- A. I am going to start working once I finish university
- B. When I have graduated, I intend to find a good job.
- C. I am planning to go to university in the future.
- D. I am intending to go to university in the near future.
- E. If I am successful in the IELTS, my plan is to do a postgraduate course.
- F. I'm starting university next October.
- G. I'll have finished university in three years' time.
- H. I am having a small party to celebrate the completion of my IELTS exam.
- I. This time next year I'll be studying at university, I hope.
- J. The next step in my career, after this one year course, is to find a good job.
- K. Mmm, I'll become a doctor!
- L. In ten years' time, I'll be writing full-time, I hope.
- M. I might be going to university next autumn, I don't really know.

Exercise 5: Questions about the future

Now look at Questions 1–10 below, which contain questions about the future. You can see that there are four alternative answers for each question. Decide which answer is the most appropriate in each case. Note that more than one answer may be suitable.

1. **Do you think teachers will disappear in the future?**
 - (a) Well, I suppose some teachers will be replaced by machines.
 - (b) Yes. Machines will replace teachers.
 - (c) Well, some teachers are likely to be replaced by machines.
 - (d) Well, I think some teachers will probably be replaced by machines.
2. **Will people be able to travel on holiday to places like the moon?**
 - (a) I don't see why not. People are probably going to be able to have holidays in space way beyond the moon.
 - (b) There is every likelihood that people will have holidays in space way beyond the moon.
 - (c) I don't see why not. People are probably having holidays in space way beyond the moon.
 - (d) I don't see why not. People will probably have been having holidays in space way beyond the moon.
3. **Do you believe it will be possible to feed all the people in the world in the future?**
 - (a) Yes, I think so. We'll be able to develop new ways of growing food.
 - (b) Yes, I think so. We'll likely develop new ways of growing food.
 - (c) Yes, I think so. Within the next few decades, we'll have developed new ways to produce more food.
 - (d) Yes, I think so. We'll be producing more and more food as the world population grows.
4. **What about living in cities? Will it be any different from now in the future?**
 - (a) Well, I'm afraid it's likely that they'll be much more dangerous in the future than they are now.
 - (b) Well, I'm afraid I have to say that I think they'll certainly have become much more dangerous in the future than they are now.
 - (c) Well, I'm afraid I have to say that I think they'll certainly have become much more dangerous by the end of the decade than they are now.
 - (d) Well, I think they may be much safer in the future than they are now.
5. **What are you going to do once you finish university?**
 - (a) Well, I intend to spend a year travelling round the world.
 - (b) Well, I think I'd like to spend a year travelling round the world.
 - (c) Well, I'm intending to spend a year travelling round the world.
 - (d) Well, I'll be taking a year off to spend a year travelling round the world.
6. **When you have graduated next year, what do you intend to do?**
 - (a) I plan to take time off before starting work.
 - (b) Mmm, well, I'll take time off before starting work.
 - (c) I'm planning to take time off before starting work.
 - (d) Yes, I take time off before starting work.

- 7. Any plans for after graduation?**
- (a) Yes, I start work immediately.
 - (b) Mmm, I know, I'll go abroad for a few months.
 - (c) Mmm, I'll be going abroad for a few weeks.
 - (d) I'll hope to go abroad for a few months.
- 8. Are you intending to go to university in the near future?**
- (a) Yes, next September.
 - (b) Yes, I start next September.
 - (c) Yes, I'm starting next September.
 - (d) Yes, I might start next September.
- 9. Do you have any thoughts about where you'd like to work?**
- (a) I was thinking of applying for a research post in China.
 - (b) I like to work somewhere in South-east Asia.
 - (c) I'm really not decided yet.
 - (d) I'll like working in Australia or New Zealand, I think.
- 10. What do you hope to have achieved in two years' time?**
- (a) I hope to qualify as an accountant.
 - (b) I hope I'll be finally working as an accountant.
 - (c) I hope I finish all my accountancy exams.
 - (d) I hope I'll have finished all my accountancy exams.
- 11. Are you doing anything to celebrate the completion of your IELTS exam?**
- (a) I'll be having a rest.
 - (b) Yes I have a small get-together with some friends.
 - (c) Yes, I think I'll have a small get together with some friends.
 - (d) I'll have had a small get-together with some friends and we'll probably do something.
- 12. What do you think you'll be doing this time next year?**
- (a) I hope to start my degree course.
 - (b) I hope I'll start my degree course.
 - (c) I hope I get on my degree course.
 - (d) I hope I'll be studying at university.
- 13. What is the next step as far as your career is concerned?**
- (a) I'll apply for a job.
 - (b) I start a postgraduate course immediately once I get through the entrance exam.
 - (c) If I pass all my exams, I can start work immediately.
 - (d) I'm starting work immediately.
- 14. Where do you see yourself in ten years' time?**
- (a) Hopefully, I'll be working as a teacher.
 - (b) Hopefully, I'll have been working for quite a number of years.
 - (c) I'll be a politician!
 - (d) Happily living in a cottage in the countryside, writing books and making jam.

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Section**

KEY

Exercise 1

Topic Card A

e, c, g, d, f, a, b

Topic Card B

- wood/river/Ireland
- child/family visit
- beautiful/stunning
- keep secret/special friends
- magical, peaceful,

Topic Card C

- teacher
- secondary school
- patient/caring/good teacher
- learnt a lot/strong/knowledgeable

Topic Card D

- noise
- always annoying
- stops concentration
- use earplugs/get angry
- irritating/selfishness of those making noise

Topic Card E

- was 21
- Sierra Leone/ West Africa
- by myself
- so different/countryside/people/ food/pace of life
- met good friends.

Topic Card F

- day left secondary school
- became adult
- parents took me out
- shopping/dinner
- hope so-first big job etc

Topic Card G

- vegetable curry/rice
- twice a week
- vegetables, spices etc
- make it myself/restaurant
- reminds me of home

Exercise 2

1. G. 2. C 3. F 4. D 5. E 6. A 7. I 8. H 9. B

Exercise 3

A. 6	B. 7	C. 10	D. 8	E. 3	F. 9
G. 5	H. 2	I. 1	J. 4		

You can see that the oral exam is unpredictable. As was mentioned in the Introduction to the Speaking Section, students often prepare for the exam by learning mini-speeches by heart. Then, when they are asked a question which they are not prepared for, they cannot handle the situation.

So to prepare for the Oral, it is better just to speak with friends or in class.

Exercise 4

A. v	B. v	C. i	D. v	E. i	F. i	G. ii
H. i	I. iii	J. i	K. vi	L. iii	M. vii	

Exercise 5: Put meaning into your future

1. (a), (c), and (d) 2. (a) and (b) 3. (a), (c), and (d) 4. (a), (c), and (d) 5. All the alternatives are correct.
 6. (a) and (c) 7. (a) and (c) 8. (a), (b) and (c) 9. (a) and (c) 10. (b) and (d) 11. (a) 12. (d) 13. (b), (c) and (d)
 14. (a), (b) and (d)

Appendix: Seeing the future

Example 1.

I am having a party



The tense is the Present Continuous. Why? Because (i) the writer/speaker has made an arrangement before **Now**; (ii) the arrangement is true at the time of writing/speaking; and (iii) the event will take place at a fixed time in the future (near or distant)

Example 2

I'll have finished university by



The tense is the Future Perfect Simple. This is a combination of the Simple Future and the Present Perfect and therefore combines the two elements of these two tenses. You can use the tense to show that something will have happened before a particular point of time in the future.

Example 3

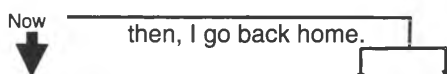
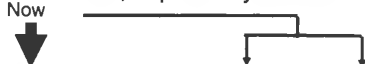
I'll be studying at university.



The tense is the Future Continuous. Like II above this is a combined tense. It combines the future and the idea of continuous action. You use it for an activity which will be in progress around a certain point of time in the future.

Example 4

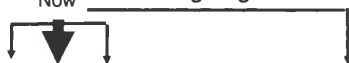
First, I spend a year working in an English speaking country;



This is the Present Simple. It is used when you want to show that the events in the future are fixed like part of a time-table.

Example 5

I'm going to start working once I finish university.



The going to Future. You use this future when you want to show that you intend to do something which is based on present information. For example, your nose may be ticklish and you feel you are going to sneeze. You might say: I'm going to sneeze. In the end, however, you may not sneeze. You could not say here: I'm sneezing.

Example 6

I'll become a doctor!



This is the Simple Future. You use this tense to show that you are making a simple prediction. When you use the Simple Future, you show that you are not planning your action. Your decision is spontaneous.

Another example is the following exchange:

A: I've got a headache.

B: Oh, I'll get you an aspirin.

B does not really have time to think when making the response. It is spontaneous.

There are of course other ways of expressing the Future in English, but these are the most common forms that you are likely to use as you are speaking in the final section of the oral exam.

Other forms you may want to look up:	It's likely that
	It's probable that
	I'll probably be
	I may
	I might
	I might just
	I may well
	There's a chance I will/ might
	If all goes well,