

Speaking Test: Part 2 Task Cards/ Cue Cards

As mentioned before, the IELTS Speaking Test has three parts and in the first part examiner, begins your interview and the Introduction goes on. In the Second part, a Cue Card is given with one minute for note taking. Once you are done with the 1 minute preparation time, you need to speak for 1 to 2 minutes. Lastly, in Part Three, the examiner asks you questions related to cue card which is called the Two Way Discussion.

The Cue Card/ Task Card is a card given to you in second part of IELTS Speaking Test to check a variety of skills. In response, you have to answer well by planning and organizing your ideas. Typically, the Cue Card looks like this-

Describe a place you have been to, which you find very interesting.

Please say-

- Where is it?
- Describe the place
- Why do you think it was interesting?

Preparation:

- It must be remembered that given topic cannot be changed.
- Once examiner gives you Cue Card, make notes within the minute and be ready to speak for 1 to 2 minutes. You should see what the main topic is, then make your own story or do not follow question order in Cue Card but make sure you try to answer all questions.
- Once you give general story answering question, make the last main questions lengthy by stretching them. You can expand your ideas in detail with examples, explanation, evidence and further details.
- You must always acknowledge that the short questions following the Task Card topics are to give you guidance on how you should start.
- Your Response to the Task Card will be more of a Short Speech lasting for 1.5 - 2 minutes. It should contain an Introduction, A Body and finally a Conclusion. Look at it like an Oral Essay with a Story Structure.
- Keep eye contact with examiner and interact and use variety of structures, vocabulary and tenses. Do not think too much or stop unnecessarily, this will make examiner feel that you are struggling or translating and are not competent in conversation.

Things to remember while preparing yourself for the PART II of your IELTS SPEAKING TEST

- You will be judged on your skills and knowledge of English Language. So when faced with an unfamiliar topic, it is always alright to improvise your ideas.
- Remember to add details to the questions on the cue card – otherwise you won't say enough.
- Don't expect any why questions here – you need to add your own detail questions.
- Firstly make sure you start with an introduction. This tells the examiner exactly what you will talk about and gives a frame for your little talk.
- If you have 3 things to say about each point on the card, you will get the about the right length for the short talk and not dry up – so in your preparation, choose 3 things for each point on the card.

- Imagine the event/item/person etc. in your head when you prepare- using a real story means that you will be able to talk about it more easily and make it interesting. Give some interesting details (but not too many).
- You don't have to follow the card BUT the card helps you to get a logical structure to your talk and it is there to help you. If you follow it, you will have a beginning, a middle and an end.
- Finally practise, practise, practise – if you were asked to give a short speech at a friend's wedding or special party you would practice wouldn't you – even in your own language? So make sure you have adequate preparation for this. Record yourself and keep recording over and over until YOU are happy with your performance – this really works.
- One vital thing is to get going straight away. Many times, students hesitated at the beginning and just got going when the 2 minutes was up. Put all the good stuff at the beginning NOT at the end where you might get stopped and the examiner will never hear it!
- Understanding repetition - Speaking is not like Writing. In the Writing part, you have time to sit and think about the best form of words to use. Speaking, in contrast, is a real-time activity. We don't always have time to say it perfectly first time- so what we do is go back and repeat it – to make our point more clearly. These extracts are a great model for this.

The 3 biggest mistakes made in IELTS speaking

The IELTS speaking exam is the one place where you have control. So make sure you are confident enough to take advantage of this and score a high band.

The examiner will feed you the questions but you must take the opportunity to use this part of the test to really show what you can really do in English.

Not saying enough:

The examiner can only assess what they hear. Many students could probably get higher bands but do not because they don't give enough speech to assess. Take the opportunity to speak and perform your best English.

Saying too much:

If the examiner can't get a word in edgeways, then you may not score well. This is, in essence, a conversation. So you have to listen and respond, but not just respond...and respond... and respond. Also this kind of long, long answer often becomes a ramble and loses focus. How much can you say about 'Do you like watching movies' before it just gets boring?

Thinking too much about words and phrases and not giving a fluent answer:

If you worry too much about how you are going to answer and concentrate too much on the vocabulary and grammar, then you won't give a spontaneous reply. Listen and reply as quickly and as best you can. If you've prepared well for the IELTS exam and have a good enough level of English for your band, then the grammar and vocabulary will come naturally once you relax a little. If you haven't prepared well and don't have the right level then the best thing to do is not take the test until you are really ready.

Example Responses to Task Cards

Question 1: Sample answer and analysis

Describe a major decision you have taken in your life.

You should say:

- What the decision was
- What other choices were available to you
- Why you made the decision you did
- Explain if you think the decision was a good one.

Like many questions in IELTS Speaking Part 2, this one deals with an event or action in the past. There is, however, a switch to the present when the candidate is required to reflect on the decision.

Sample Answer

Over the last few years, I have had to make some important choices. In retrospect, a really important decision I've made recently though, is to study abroad. No one from my family has ever had the chance to do this before, and my parents were actually hoping I'd start working for the family textile business. I think it's too soon to join the business though. I really want to study marketing – especially e-marketing – so I can contribute more to my parent's firm in the future. If I study e-marketing in the UK, I can learn how to use the internet to sell our clothes all over the world. As for whether it was the right decision, I'm pretty confident it was and I can't change my mind now anyway because my parents have borrowed money from my uncle to pay for my tuition. I really can't wait to come back with new ideas that will help expand our business. All I need now is to get a good score in IELTS. Therefore, I believe that's an important decision in my life.

This IELTS candidate scores highly by:

- Getting straight to the point and saying what the decision was in the very first sentence
- Paraphrasing the topic: A really important decision
- Using a range of tenses – past simple, present simple and present perfect – with great accuracy
- Using a wide range of grammatical forms such as a conditional sentence (If I...) and a cleft sentence (All I need now is...)
- Answering all parts of the question
- Signalling one part of the question: As for whether it was the right decision...
- Avoiding over-formality and using expressions such as actually and pretty that are appropriate to conversational style
- Providing a summarising sentence to wrap up the response

Question 2: Sample answer and analysis

Describe something you do to forget about work or study.

You should say:

- What the activity is
- How often you do it
- How it helps you forget
- Say whether you would recommend other people try the same thing.

This is a much trickier question because the words work and study in the first sentence may lead some IELTS candidates to speak about either of those topics. In fact, you should speak about some kind of leisure activity or other form of relaxation that helps you forget about work or study.

Sample Answer

It is very important to have an activity we can always turn to, when we need break from studies or work. I'd like to talk about horse-riding. I'm actually the joint owner of a horse with two of my friends and we take turns looking after him, cleaning out the stable and so on. I don't have a part-time job so I spend most of my weekends at the stable. Taking care of a horse is quite a dirty business so it's obviously very different from studying at college. That means I can forget about my classes during the week when I'm at the stable on the weekend. There's quite a large field next to the stable and I just get a wonderful sense of freedom when I'm riding around on my horse. College seems a million miles away! Do I think other people would enjoy horse-riding? Yes, absolutely. I think everyone should give it a try at least once in their lives.

This IELTS candidate scores highly by:

- Showing a clear understanding of the question
- Getting straight to the point by mentioning the activity in the first sentence
- Using present simple verbs throughout to show that this is a regular activity
- Sticking to the question even though the topic might be a very enjoyable one to speak about
- Showing awareness of hyperbole (*a million miles*), phrasal verbs (*give it a try*) and other forms common to spoken English
- Using a rhetorical question to move from one part of the question to another: *Do I think...?*
- Ending with a clear concluding sentence, in this case a recommendation

Question 3: Sample answer and analysis

Describe a language you would like to learn.

You should say:

- What the language is
- Where it is spoken
- Why you are interested in this language
- Say if you think you will ever actually have the chance to learn it.

One problem IELTS candidates have with hypothetical questions such as this one is that they fail to recognise them as hypothetical. Since candidates are already learning English, they should talk about another language that is neither English nor their first language. This can be realistic (e.g. Spanish) or unrealistic (e.g. Ancient Greek). It doesn't matter as long as the language is not one you are currently learning.

SAMPLE ANSWER

Let me tell you about a language I've always wanted to learn, which is Russian. It's spoken in Russia, obviously, but also in many other countries which have been influenced by Russia including places like Mongolia and Kazakhstan. The reason I would like to learn Russian is that the energy industry is huge and there are lots of jobs. A lot of my country's oil and gas comes from Russia so it's really useful to be able to speak that language if you want to work in the energy field. And I know that a lot of Russians can't speak English very well so there's another reason to learn their language. The problem is I'm already in my thirties and I've spent more than ten years learning English. I don't know if I would ever be able to study Russian because it uses a completely different alphabet and sounds really difficult. However it would be really nice to have the chance to learn it.

This IELTS candidate scores highly by:

- Beginning with an impact sentence: *Let me tell you about...*
- Using *would* to show that the response is hypothetical
- Signalling parts of the question: *The reason I would like to learn Russian is...*
- Using reference links to avoid overuse of the key topic word 'Russian': *that language; their language; it*
- Giving more than one reason
- Returning to the main point of the question in the final sentence

These three sample answers show that there are certain techniques that can be applied regardless of the topic in IELTS Speaking, Part 2.

There are also factors such as Pronunciation (not mentioned here) as well as nonverbal communication which, although not included in the scoring criteria for IELTS Speaking, can certainly influence an examiner's judgement of your ability.

Here are a couple of **CUE CARD RESPONSES which** have received **poor** marks. From the examples below, try to capture the mistakes and make sure they do not occur in your tests

Example 1:

Something that you learned from an accident

- Where did it occur?
- How did it happen?
- Who was with you?
- Describe what you learned from it.

Sample Response:

Once I faced accident in my life. It happen when I in my childhood. I was ride bicycle at the road. I ride very carefully. I was wear my helmet and jacket for safety. From the other side of road car was come at high speed and driver not see me at all. The car was hit my bicycle very hardly and I just fall on the road. My hurt knee and leg. There was bloody situation and I just hurt so badly. The driver come out to me and say "Are you okay my child?", then I totally shout him "No, I am in very pain! My leg is hurt too much!". He suddenly call the ambulance and send me to hospital. My father pick me from hospital. It was very worst experience in my life. Thank you.

This IELTS Candidate has scored poorly by:

- Notice the underlined parts of the sentences. These indicate the mistakes made by the candidate
- Here the student is poorly marked by the examiner because of the grammatical mistakes and tense error
- Inappropriate usage of Auxiliary Verbs with Main Verbs has resulted in poor scoring as well
- It is completely inappropriate to use DIRECT SPEECH in a Cue Card Response. Thus the use of such has resulted in Negative Marking as well. Candidates must always speak in Third Person Point of View while referring to examples
- The first question "Where did it occur", which indicates the response to include location of the accident was not carried out properly
- Take note of the fourth question in the Cue Card's requirements "Describe what you learned from it.", this question was not answered in the Speech and hence this will result in negative marking and student will receive poor marks in the sections for "Coherence and Cohesion".

Example 2:

A foreign food item you would like to taste

- Which one is it?
- How did you know about it?
- Why do you want to taste it?
- Explain your reasons.

Sample Response:

I often taste new food items whenever I visit abroad or in my country. This thing makes me very happy. I am kind of fan of new and exciting food items. And my favourite food items are many and many. I would like to mention with you a fantastic foreign food I want to taste. It name is Sushi. It made from fish, rice and vegetable. It is serve with special sauce. My uncle came Dhaka and tell me about this food. It is Japanese food and many Japanese restaurant available in our country. It is very expensive to buy, so I have to save money for this food. I will go some day with my uncle and eat this delicious food. I also planned with my friends to go some day to a restaurant name Izumi to try this food.

Here the IELTS Candidate scores an average marking for the following reasons:

- Candidate has managed to answer all the required queries which will lead to positive marking
- Notice the underlined parts of the sentences
- These indicate the mistakes made by the candidate
- Here the student is poorly marked by the examiner because of the grammatical mistakes and tense error
- Inappropriate usage of Auxiliary Verbs with Main Verbs has resulted in poor scoring as well

Now it's your turn to prepare!

The following 20 Cue Card topics are for your practice.

You must choose at least two topics on which you will have 5 minutes for each topic in class to prepare a speech.

1. Describe a museum

- How often do you visit the museum?
- Describe the museum
- When did you last visit the museum?
- How was our experience?

2. Describe your favorite photograph

- Where was the photo taken?
- Who took the photo?
- What can be seen in the photo?
- Explain why it is the favorite photograph for you.

3. An important historic place

- What is the place?
- Where is it located?
- Why do you think it is important?

4. Describe a party

- What is the party?
- Why was the party held?
- Describe the party
- Who attended the party?
- What did you do for that party?

5. Describe a subject taught in your school?

- Who teaches it?
- How is it taught?
- What did you learn from the class?
- How was your experience?

6. What is the important invention before the age of computer?

- What is the invention?
- Why do you think it is very important?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the invention?

7. Describe a foreign country you have never been to

- Where is the country?
- When will you go there?
- Mention the places you might want you visit
- Why would you like to go there?

8. **Describe your favorite movie**
 - What is the name of the film?
 - What is the theme of the film?
 - Describe the story briefly
 - Why do you like it?

9. **Describe a newspaper or magazine**
 - What is the name of magazine or newspaper?
 - When did you first read it?
 - Which sections of the paper/magazine are you most interested in?

10. **Describe a children's game (sports not suggested)**
 - How is it played?
 - What can you learn from the game?
 - What impact does it bring on your growth?

11. **Describe a happy event in your life**
 - When did it happen?
 - Where did it happen?
 - Describe the event
 - Why was it a happy event?

12. **Describe a thing which is important to you**
 - Who gave it to you?
 - What is the thing?
 - Describe the item
 - What does the thing mean to you?

13. **Describe one of your neighbours**
 - When did you become neighbours?
 - Do you often meet?
 - Talk about him/her
 - State whether your neighbour is a good one

14. **Describe one of the shopping centers you often go to**
 - Where is the shopping center?
 - How often do you go to the center?
 - Describe the place
 - Why do you often go to it?

15. **Describe your favourite animal**
 - What kind of animal is it?
 - Describe it briefly
 - Why do you like the animal?

16. **Describe a friend who is also a good leader.**
- Who is he/she?
 - When did you meet him/her?
 - Describe his/her personality.
 - Why do you think he/she is a good leader?
17. **An advertisement you like**
- Which advertisement is it?
 - Describe the advertisement
 - How has this advertisement influenced you?
 - Do you find it useful?
16. **Describe an important letter**
- When did you receive the letter?
 - From whom did you receive the letter?
 - Explain the reasons why it is important
17. **Describe the best present you have received**
- Who gave/sent it to you?
 - When did you receive it?
 - Describe the present
 - How did you feel afterwards?
18. **Describe your holidays**
- Where do you like to go for during holidays?
 - How long do these holidays last?
 - Who do you go with?
 - How important are these holidays for you?
19. **Talk about a time when you complained about something**
- When was it?
 - What was it about?
 - Describe the incident
 - What happened afterwards?
20. **Talk about something important that you lost in the past**
- What was it?
 - How did you lose it?
 - Why was it important to you?
 - How did you feel when you lost it?