

11 Help yourself

Planning remedial work reference

IELTS troubleshooting guide

Problem

Suggested solution

Reading

I don't have enough time to read all of the texts.

If you don't understand a word or phrase, ignore it. It might not be important or might not relate to any questions.

I normally run out of time.

If you find a question very difficult, move on. You can return to it later.

You have approximately 20 minutes for each passage, so try not to spend more than this amount of time on each.

Practise reading outside class. This will widen your vocabulary, improve your reading speed, and make it easier to understand the structure of each passage.

I find matching paragraph headings especially difficult.

Practice summarizing the paragraphs in your own words before you look at the headings.

Even if I understand the text, I find it difficult to locate the answers.

When you read, try to identify the overall structure of the passage, for example, it may consist of three major sections. Draw lines or make notes on the passage to divide it up.

Look for linking words that indicate the progression of the passage, especially at the start of paragraphs. These may indicate the transition between major sections.

Identify key words in the questions and in the passage as you read.

I find *true / false / not given* questions especially difficult.

Practise this task more to identify the difference between false and not given. To be false, a statement must be contradicted in the text. To be not given, the statement will be neither affirmed nor contradicted.

Practise critical thinking, especially by reading technical or scientific material.

I get lower marks than I think I deserve.

You might be spelling words incorrectly in short-answer question types. Make sure you copy answers from the passage carefully.

Listening

I find it difficult to concentrate on the recording and the questions at the same time.

Always use the time allowed to read the questions before you begin.

Underline key words in the questions so that you have an idea what to listen for.

Predict what kinds of answers will be required, such as number or dates.

The questions follow the order of the recording, so use the organization of diagrams or headings in notes to predict what you are going to hear.

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I get confused when I'm listening. I'm not used to hearing people speak English that quickly.

You probably need to listen to more 'real' English in order to improve. Find native speakers with whom you can have conversations.

Watch TV or films in English. Try to listen without subtitles.

Listen to English-speaking radio. Podcasts are widely available on the Internet.

I think I can understand it all, but I get lower marks than I expect.

You might be spelling words incorrectly in short-answer question types. Make sure you write the answers carefully, paying special attention to spelling.

Speaking

I run out of things to say in Part 2 when I have to speak for a long time.

Make good use of the 30 seconds you have to make notes. Do not write much, but think of some words to prompt you.

If you run out of ideas, you can re-emphasize what you have said already in different words to give you time to think of something new.

I feel that I generally lack confidence in speaking.

Try to find some native speakers with whom you can practise speaking. Speak English some of the time with friends from your own country.

Writing

I have general problems with writing, not just in relation to a specific exam task.

One of the best ways to improve writing is through reading. Read more.

Reading more serious or academic material will be more useful for IELTS. Try to copy this style. Consider studying more basic grammar and vocabulary. You will make fewer mistakes and feel more confident about expressing yourself.

I normally run out of time, and when I write quickly my essay is confusing.

Remember to spend only 20 minutes on Task 1 and 40 minutes on Task 2.

Practise planning your answers. This saves time in the long run and helps you write coherently.

In Task 1, make sure you understand the data and identify the main points before you start writing.

In Task 2, make sure you understand the question and make a note of your main arguments before you start writing.

I find it hard to think up ideas to write in my answers.

Reading newspapers and watching TV or radio news will give you ideas you can use in your essays. Make sure that ideas you use are relevant to the question in either part of this paper.