

IELTS Grammar: easy sentences speaking part 1 Here are five simple rules for Speaking Part 1:

1. Keep your answers short, then stop with confidence.
2. Answer the questions using full sentences.
3. Use words from the examiner's question in your answer.
4. If possible, give a reason for your answer.
5. Don't forget to say "yes" or "no" when necessary.

Here's an example to illustrate these points:

Do you like parks?

Yes, I like parks because they are great places to relax. If you live in a city, a park is often the only place where you can escape from the noise and the traffic.

Here are my suggestions for the sentences in [Friday's lesson](#). Remember, the aim was to make the sentences as easy as possible.

1. I like learning languages because they help me to communicate with people from other countries.
2. I do lots of reading in my spare time.
3. If you can speak the local language, it's easier to make friends.
4. Knowing a foreign language can help you to get a better job.
5. The best time to learn another language is when you are young.
6. Learning a foreign language opens your mind and expands your horizons.
7. The more you practise, the easier it becomes to communicate in a new language.

There was some good vocabulary in yesterday's [speaking lesson](#). Here's a list of the phrases that I think would impress an examiner:

Describe a positive experience that you had as a teenager. You should say

- ***what the positive experience was***
- ***where you were***
- ***who you were with***
- ***and explain why you found the experience positive.***

- it was great to share that experience

- The positive experience wasn't confined to one particular place
- As far as I remember
- visits to various tourist attractions
- one of my first memories was
- a group of close friends
- which made the experience more enjoyable
- What really struck me about London was
- historic but modern and thriving at the same time
- a lively, fashionable and cosmopolitan place
- Coming from a relatively small town
- the experience made me keen to visit more capital cities

Describe a positive experience that you had as a teenager. You should say

- *what the positive experience was*
- *where you were*
- *who you were with*
- *and explain why you found the experience positive.*

Here's my sample answer, taking some of the ideas from [this lesson](#).

- I'm going to describe the first time I visited England's capital city, London, on a school trip when I was a teenager. I had never been to London before, and it was great to share that experience with my school friends.
- The positive experience wasn't confined to one particular place in London. As far as I remember, I enjoyed the whole trip, from the coach journey to the visits to various tourist attractions. We got off the coach near the Houses of Parliament, and so one of my first memories was seeing the famous 'Big Ben' clock tower. We also visited the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace and Trafalgar Square.
- As I said earlier, it was a school trip, and I think there were around thirty of us, including two teachers. I was with a group of close friends, which made the experience more enjoyable.
- What really struck me about London was that it was historic but modern and thriving at the same time. It seemed to me to be a lively, fashionable and cosmopolitan place. Coming from a relatively small town, the experience made me keen to visit more capital cities in the future.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: home town

Here are some part 1 questions and answers on the topic of 'home town'. Try changing the answers to similar ones about your own town or city. Keep your answers short, simple and direct.

1. Where are you from?

I'm from Manchester, which is a city in the north west of England.

2. Do you like your home town? (Why?)

Yes, I like living in Manchester because it's where most of my friends live, and because there are plenty of things to do there. The only thing I don't like is the weather.

3. Would you prefer to live somewhere else? (Why?)

For the moment I'm happy living here, but at some point I'd like to live in a country with a warmer climate, and I'd like to live near a beach!

4. Do you think your home town is a good place for young people? (Why?)

Yes, Manchester has lots of things for young people, such as sports facilities, music and cinemas.

IELTS Speaking: if you don't know what to say

In Sunday's [lesson](#) I suggested answering in the following way if you don't know what to say:

"Well, I don't really know much about... because..., but I suppose..."

In other words, you admit that you don't really know what to say, you explain why, then you invent an answer anyway. Let's try using the formula above with an example.

Question:

What kinds of jobs might stop when the season changes?

Answer:

Well, I don't really know much about seasonal jobs because everyone works all year round where I live, but I suppose that some jobs related to tourism must stop at the end of the summer holiday period.

IELTS Speaking: a tip for each part

Here are three tips, one for each part of the speaking test.

Part 1: stop and smile

For part 1 of the speaking test, you need to get used to giving short answers. Many students find it difficult to stop speaking, and the examiner is forced to interrupt. My tip is to give your answer then stop and smile, showing the examiner that you are ready for the next question.

Part 2: tell a story

In the context of speaking part 2, a story is simply a long example to illustrate a point that you have made. If you're describing a person, for example, you could tell a story to illustrate why you like him/her. People find it easy to keep speaking for longer when they have a story to tell.

Part 3: include an 'if...' sentence

Look at technique number 2 in [this lesson](#). The 'alternatives' technique helps you to say more, and it also encourages you to add a conditional 'if...' sentence, which might help your grammar score.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: longer answers

Here are 3 techniques to help you give longer, more detailed answers:

1. Keep asking yourself "why?"
2. Explain the alternatives
3. Give an example

Question:

Do you think that school children should be encouraged to have their own ideas, or is it more important for them to learn what their teachers give them?

Answer:

I think that we should definitely allow children to be creative and have their own ideas. (why?) Children need to develop the ability to think for themselves and solve problems (why?) because as adults they will not always have somebody to guide them or tell them what to do. (alternatives?) If we don't allow children to have their own ideas, they will be less successful in the adult world; they will be too reliant on others. (example?) A doctor, for example, might encounter a situation that he or she hasn't been trained for, but will still be expected to make a decision that could save someone's life.

IELTS Speaking: 'hospitality' topic

1. In your country, how do people treat visitors from abroad?

I think we treat visitors well. People in the UK are very open-minded and welcoming, and we enjoy the mix of cultures that immigration and tourism bring. Most UK cities, for example, are really cosmopolitan, and you can meet visitors from every part of the world.

2. Do you think hospitality towards visitors is less important than it was in the past?

In my city, maybe it's true that hospitality is less important nowadays, but that's only because we are so used to seeing visitors from different countries, so we treat it as a normal part of life and nothing too special.

3. What are the advantages of staying with a friend compared to staying in a hotel when visiting a foreign country?

If you stay with a friend, you benefit from someone with local knowledge of the best places to visit. You can also get to know the character and customs of the local people, and for me, this is one of the most interesting aspects of a visit to another country. On the other hand, if you stay in a hotel, you are forced to discover the new place on your own, so it's more of an adventure.

Describe a subject that you think should be removed from school education programmes. You should say

- what the subject is***
- why you think it is unnecessary for children to study it***
- and explain what you would replace it with.***

Here's my sample answer with band 7-9 vocabulary underlined:

- I'm going to suggest that art could be taken out of the school curriculum. In my experience, art lessons at school tend to include drawing, painting, and the making of collages using paper, fabric and other household materials.
- There are a few reasons why I think that school art lessons are unnecessary. Firstly, I don't believe that drawing and painting are essential skills that children will need when they leave school. Children might find these activities enjoyable, but it's unlikely that they will need them in the working world. Secondly, children can draw, paint and make collages in their own time at home; parents can encourage this, and they can even join in. Finally, remembering my own art lessons at school, I don't think we learnt any real art skills; the teachers left us to draw or create things, but they didn't provide much technical instruction.
- Instead of art lessons, children could do more work on core subjects like maths, science or language. These subjects are more likely to help children in later life when they enter the job market, and I think both children and their teachers would benefit if more time were devoted to them.
- Here are some recent part 1 questions, with my example answers.
- ***1. Do you like cooking? Why / why not?***
- Sometimes. I like preparing a special meal for family or friends who visit, but everyday cooking is a bit boring; it's something that has to be done, but it's not really fun.
- ***2. Who did the cooking in your family when you were a child?***

- My mother almost always did the cooking when I was young. I don't think she trusted my father to make a nice meal.
- **3. Do you think that it's important to know how to cook well?**
- I'm not sure whether it's important to cook *well*, but I do think that everyone should know the basics. It definitely isn't healthy to rely on pre-prepared meals or fast food.
- **4. Do you think that children should be taught cookery at school?**
- Yes, that's probably a good idea. If all children knew how to cook a few basic, healthy meals, that would surely be a good thing.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'walking' topic

Remember to keep your part 1 answers short and 'to the point'. Here are my example answers for some questions about walking:

1. Do you like walking?

I'm not one for going on really long walks in the countryside, but I don't mind walking when I'm in a town or city, for example when I'm sightseeing in a new place.

2. Do you think walking is important?

Yes, I think it's important to be active, and walking is the most basic physical activity that we can do.

3. Do you think walking in the countryside is better than walking in the city?

Personally, no. As I said before, I like walking in the city, especially if it's somewhere with a lot of history like London or Paris. I've done quite a lot of walking in those cities.

4. What could be done to improve the experience of walking in cities?

I suppose the main issues are space and safety. Pavements need to be wide enough to accommodate lots of pedestrians, and we need safe places to cross the street.

Describe an interesting conversation you had with someone you didn't know. You should say

- who the person was
- where the conversation took place
- what you talked about
- and explain why you found the conversation interesting.

Here's my sample (band 9) answer:

- I'm going to talk about an interesting conversation that I had a couple of weeks ago in a music shop. I was walking along one of the main shopping streets in the city centre, when a large window displaying all sorts of musical instruments caught my eye. Out of curiosity, I decided to go in and have a look around.
- The person I ended up speaking to was a shop assistant on the second floor, in the area of the shop dedicated to acoustic guitars. I hadn't intended to speak to anyone, but the assistant approached me in a friendly way and asked whether I had any questions.
- I explained to the assistant that I hadn't played the guitar for years, but that I wondered what the differences were between the various acoustic guitars on show. He talked to me about the different makes and models, whether they were factory or hand made, the woods and varnishes used, the variation in sound quality, and of course the price range.
- I found the conversation fascinating because the shop assistant was so knowledgeable. It was obvious that he had a passion for the guitar, and he didn't mind talking to me even though I had made it clear that I didn't intend to buy anything. He even picked up and played three or four of the instruments to demonstrate the differences in their sound.

IELTS Vocabulary: good phrases

Looking back at [yesterday's lesson](#), I'm surprised to see how many good phrases I used. Try making your own sentences with the phrases below. Check to see how I used them before you write anything.

- caught my eye
- out of curiosity
- I ended up (+ing)
- dedicated to
- I hadn't intended to.....
- approached me
- I wondered what..... were
- the various..... on show
- I found..... fascinating
- he had a passion for.....
- he didn't mind (+ing)
- I had made it clear that.....

IELTS Speaking Part 1: giving negative answers

It's fine to give negative answers in part 1 of the speaking test. Here are some example negative answers for people who don't like sport:

1. What sports or physical activities do you regularly do?

Unfortunately I don't have time to do any sports or physical activities because of my work commitments. I'd like to find more time for regular exercise.

2. Which sport or game would you like to be good at?

I'd like to be good at tennis. It must be great to be able to hit the ball as hard as you can and watch it land exactly where you wanted it to.

3. Do you prefer watching or playing sports?

I don't watch much sport on TV and I'm not a big sports fan, so I think I would probably enjoy doing sports more than watching them.

4. Do you think children should be encouraged to do more sport?

Yes, I think that sport is really important for children. Sports and games teach children to play together and try their best.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: 'future plans' answer

Here's my answer to the [future plans](#) question:

- I'm going to talk about a future plan that I have, which is to buy a good camera and to become a better photographer. At the moment I'm just using the camera on my mobile phone, but I've realised that it has its limitations.

- I thought of this plan when I was at a friend's wedding a few weeks ago. I got some great pictures of the bride and groom and their guests celebrating, but I did notice that with my phone camera I wasn't able to capture longer range photos, or photos in darker conditions; the phone's zoom and flash aren't very good. Next time I'd like to be able to capture a special occasion in higher quality images.

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- Obviously this plan depends on whether I can save enough money to buy the camera I'd like. Also, before making a decision about which camera to get, I'll probably talk to a friend who knows more about photography than I do.
- In terms of buying a camera, I'll achieve this plan if I can save some money! In terms of becoming a better photographer, I think I'll achieve that goal by experimenting with my new camera and by learning as I go along.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'shopping' topic

Here are some questions and sample answers for the 'shopping' topic. Remember that part 1 answers need to be short, direct and simple.

1) Who does most of the shopping in your household?

There isn't one person who does most of the shopping. I'd say it's a shared responsibility because we tend to go shopping together as a family.

2) What kind of shopping do you like doing?

I quite like shopping for presents for people's birthdays or for Christmas. My favourite type of shop would have to be a bookshop.

3) Is shopping a popular activity in your country?

Yes, it's very popular. Saturday is the busiest shopping day, and lots of people treat shopping as a kind of leisure activity, rather than something practical.

4) What types of shops do teenagers like best in your country?

I'm not an expert on teenage behaviour, but I guess they like buying clothes, music, gadgets... that kind of thing.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: strange questions

In part 1 of the speaking test, the examiner will ask around 10 easy questions. However, students have reported some strange questions, such as:

1. Do you like parks?
2. Do you think different colours can change our moods?
3. When do people give flowers in your country?

Don't be shocked by these questions. Just give a simple answer with a reason. Don't worry about using fantastic grammar or vocabulary; just try to answer without hesitating. For example:

1. Yes, I like parks because they are great places to relax. I think all cities need green areas.
2. Yes, I think bright colours, like red, can make you feel energetic. Some greens and blues can be more relaxing.
3. People give flowers on special occasions like birthdays or on Valentine's Day. In my country, giving flowers is seen as romantic.

4. IELTS Speaking: avoid these phrases

5. In the speaking test, examiners don't like it when students use phrases like:
6.
 - That's a very interesting question...
 - It is my personal opinion that...
 - Personally, I would have to say that...
 - I am of the opinion that it depends on...
 - To be honest, I personally believe that...
7. These phrases sound unnatural, and it is obvious to the examiner that the student has memorised them.

8. So what should you do instead? My advice: just answer the question directly. Stop using memorised phrases, and just get straight to the point.

9.

10. IELTS Speaking Part 3: "it depends"

11. Many students answer questions in IELTS speaking part 3 by saying "it depends".

12. "It depends" is not a full answer. What does it depend on, and why?

13. Example question:

Do you think it's important to find a job that you love, or is it more important to earn a good salary?

14. Don't say:

"It depends. Some people prefer to find a job they love, but other people want to earn a good salary." (This answer just repeats the question)

15. Do say:

"Personally, I'd prefer to do a job that I really enjoy; as long as I earn enough to live comfortably, the salary is less important. However, I can see the benefits of doing a job that you don't like if it pays well. With a good salary, you can probably do more enjoyable things in your free time."

16.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'toys' topic

I've already done lessons about 'toys' for [part 2](#) and [part 3](#) of the speaking test, so let's try some part 1 questions about this topic. Notice that my part 1 answers are always short and direct.

1) Did you play with toys when you were a child?

Yes, of course. I loved playing with toys when I was a child; I think all children do.

2) What kinds of toys did you like?

As far as I remember, I mostly played with toy cars, planes and action figures from films or cartoons. I also liked building things with Lego.

3) In your country, do boys and girls play with the same types of toys?

Not really. I think boys like the kinds of toys that I mentioned before, whereas girls play with dolls. My niece, for example, doesn't like toy cars; she prefers dressing dolls in different outfits.

4) Do you think that toys help children to learn?

Yes, I do. All toys encourage children to use their imagination and creativity. Even with simple toys, children imagine situations and invent games and rules.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a market

Describe an open-air or street market which you enjoyed visiting. You should say:

- where the market is***
- what the market sells***
- how big the market is***
- and explain why you enjoyed visiting it.***

Here's my description. It includes several examples of 'band 7-9' vocabulary that I took from the websites I listed in last week's lesson.

- I'm going to describe a street market that I've enjoyed visiting many times in Manchester. It's the Manchester Christmas Market, and it comes to the city for about a month from the end of November every year. The market stalls are spread across several sites in the city centre, but the centrepiece is the large European market in Albert Square next to the Town Hall.
- The Christmas Market stalls sell an array of Christmas gifts and mouth-watering food and drink from all over Europe. It's a great place to find handmade crafts such as jewellery, ornaments, wooden toys and other souvenirs, but it's the food and drink that seem to be most popular. Probably the biggest seller is the 'Gluhwein', a hot, sweet wine which is sold in a souvenir mug.
- The market was originally quite small, occupying just one of the central squares in Manchester, but it's grown quickly in recent years, spilling over into maybe five other pedestrian streets and a few other squares. Apparently there are over 200 stalls now, so it's become a really big event attracting thousands of visitors.
- The main reason I've always enjoyed visiting the Christmas Market is the fantastic atmosphere. When I went there last December, it didn't matter how cold or wet the weather was, Manchester seemed to come alive when the market opened; the streets were bustling with people and there was a real festive feel to the city.
- **IELTS Speaking Part 3: make it personal**
- In part 3 of IELTS speaking, it really helps if you give personal examples:
- **1. Do you think it's important for people to have hobbies? Why?**
- Yes, I think people need to have hobbies because we all need to do things we enjoy in our spare time. In my case, I find that playing football

once a week with some friends helps me to relax, keep fit and forget about work. I think it's the same for everyone.

- **2. Can hobbies have any negative effects?**
- Yes, if you spend too much time on your hobby, it can affect other parts of your life. I remember that one of my friends spent most of his time at university playing computer games instead of studying. In the end, he failed most of his exams.
- Although this is a speaking test, a good way to prepare and practise is by writing your answers down. Here's a quick example:

- **Describe a recent journey.**

- I'm going to talk about a recent journey to London. It was a couple of weekends ago, and I decided to visit the capital with some friends. I had never been before, so I wanted to go there to do some sightseeing. I don't have a car, but my friend does, so he volunteered to drive. He had done the trip a few times before, so he knew the way. Maybe it was a bad idea to travel by car because the traffic between Manchester and London was terrible. We spent a lot of time sitting in traffic jams, which were due to roadworks and minor accidents, and it took us the best part of an afternoon to get there... 旅行开车还是坐车
- **Note:**
The description above is easy to understand, but it contains enough 'less common vocabulary' (underlined) to impress the examiner.
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IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'friends' topic

In part 1 of the IELTS speaking test, remember to keep your answers short and simple. Here are some example questions and short answers:

1. Are your friends mostly your age or different ages?

Most of my friends are about the same age as me because we met at school or university. I've got one or two friends who are older or younger that I met through work.

2. Do you usually see your friends during the week or at weekends?

I tend to meet up with my friends at weekends because everyone's too busy during the week.

3. The last time you saw your friends, what did you do together?

It was one of my friends' birthday last weekend. Six of us went out for a meal to celebrate.

4. In what ways are your friends important to you?

I think it's important to have friends that you can talk to and share experiences with. My friends make me laugh, but I know I can also rely on them whenever I need help or support.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: more long answers

Here are two more answers using the techniques I explained [last week](#):

What do you think are the most important qualities for friends to have?

Maybe the most important things are that friends need to share common interests and be honest with each other. **(why?)** Friends are people we spend a lot of time with, so it definitely helps if they enjoy doing the same activities or talking about the same topics as we do, and of course we need to be able to trust our friends, so honesty is vital for a good friendship. **(alternatives / example?)** I think I would struggle to become friends with someone who didn't have anything in common with me, or who wasn't reliable or trustworthy.

How important do you think it is for a person to spend some time alone?

I'd say that it's essential to spend a bit of time alone, even if it's just a few minutes a day. **(why?)** When you have a few minutes to yourself, it's a chance to take stock and reflect on things. **(why?)** Most of us live such busy lives that our brains need time to catch up every now and then. **(example / alternatives?)** Personally, I try to have a bit of "me time" every day; I'll go for a coffee or find a quiet place to sit and read the newspaper. If I never had any time alone, I think I'd go mad!

IELTS Speaking Part 2: team project

Describe a team project that you worked on. You should say:

- ***what it was***
- ***what you did***
- ***and how you felt about it.***

Example answer (band 9):

I'd like to talk about a team project that I was involved in during my final term at business school. There were four of us on the team, and our task was to work with a local company to research a new market, in a European country, for one of their products or services. Our objective was to produce a report and give a presentation.

The first thing we did was split into two groups of two. We had been assigned a company that produced a range of bicycle accessories, so two of us spent some time getting to know the company while the other two researched the market and the competitors in the target country, which was Germany. In the

end, I think it was a successful project because we managed to identify a possible gap in the market in Germany for one of the company's products. Our group presentation also went really well.

Until that point, the course had been all about business theory, **so it was quite a learning experience to** work with a real company. I felt a real sense of accomplishment when we handed in our report and delivered our presentation, and I think all of us were proud of what we had done.

IELTS Speaking: if you don't know the answer

How do you answer a question when you don't know anything about the topic? There are 2 things you can do:

1. Be honest and explain why you don't know
2. Guess, and tell the examiner that you are guessing

Example question:

How has technology affected the kinds of music that young people listen to?

My answer, using both tips above:

(1) To be honest I don't really know the answer to that because I'm completely out of touch with what young people are listening to, and I'm not a fan of pop music.

(2) However, I suppose that technology must have affected music. Maybe young people are listening to music that has been made using computer software instead of real musical instruments like the piano or guitar.

IELTS Speaking: a preparation technique

A good way to prepare for IELTS speaking is to take one topic area and practise possible questions for all 3 parts. Here are some examples:

'Home' topic

Part 1 - give short answers

1. Do you live in a house or a flat?
2. What's your favourite room in your home? Why?
3. What would you like to change about your home? Why?
4. Would you like to move house in the future?

Part 2 - speak for 2 minutes

Describe an interesting home that you have visited.

Part 3 - give longer answers

1. What factors do you think are important when choosing where to live?
2. Compare life in a city with life in the countryside.
3. How do you think the design of homes will change in the future?

IELTS Speaking Part 1: musical instruments

For IELTS speaking part 1, remember to give short, simple answers. Answer the question with a full sentence and give a reason for your answer. Here are some example questions and answers about musical instruments (from Cambridge IELTS book 6):

1. Which musical instrument do you like listening to most? (Why?)

My favourite musical instrument to listen to is the guitar. I like the fact that there are different types of guitar, like classical, acoustic and electric. I love the variety of sounds a guitar can make.

2. Have you ever learned to play a musical instrument?

I took some guitar lessons when I was younger and still have a guitar at home. I don't play it much nowadays. I wish I had more time to practise.

3. Do you think children should learn to play an instrument at school?

Yes, I think it's a great skill and it's really enjoyable to be able to play a musical instrument. All children should be given this opportunity.

4. How easy would it be to learn to play an instrument without a teacher?

It would probably be more difficult without a teacher. You need someone to show you what to do and correct your mistakes. You need a lot of discipline to teach yourself.

IELTS Advice: speaking strategies

Here are some of the strategies that I used in [yesterday's description](#):

1. Try to develop each bullet point in detail. If you don't say enough for the first two or three points, you'll find yourself with too much time for the last point.
2. Tell a story! My second point tells the story of how I was given the chair by a friend, and I could probably speak for 2 minutes about this point alone. When you tell a story about something real that happened, you'll find it easy to keep talking. Stories are also interesting for the listener (the examiner).
3. Add examples. In point 3, you can see that I added an example at the end ("last night I fell asleep in my armchair while I was watching a film"). I could easily take this example and develop it into another short story.
4. When describing an object, don't forget the simple things like size, colour (I forgot that one!), shape, material, position ("just under my living room window").

5. IELTS Speaking Part 1: clothes

6. **1. Are clothes and clothing fashions important to you? (Why/Why not?)**

7. No, clothes and fashions are not really important to me. I tend to wear clothes that are comfortable and practical rather than fashionable.
8. **2. What different clothes do you wear for different situations?**
9. Well, I have to dress quite formally for work, so I wear a shirt and trousers. At home I prefer to wear jeans and a T-shirt, and on special occasions I might wear a suit.
10. **3. Do you wear different styles of clothes now compared to 10 years ago?**
11. No, not really, because I don't follow fashion. I think I have dressed in a similar way for the last 10 years.
12. **4. Do you think the clothes we wear say something about who we are?**
13. Yes, they probably do. Some people are really careful about what they wear because they want to be seen as stylish. Other people wear clothes that show wealth or status, such as clothes by famous designers.
- 14.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'communication' topic

Here are some more examples for IELTS speaking part 1. Remember to give short, easy, direct answers.

1. How do you usually keep in touch with members of your family?

I mostly keep in touch with my family by phone, and I've started using the Internet to make video calls. I also try to visit members of my family in person as often as I can.

2. Do you prefer to speak to people by phone or by writing emails?

It depends on the situation. I use email and text messages to communicate with friends, but my parents prefer it if I phone them.

3. Do you ever write letters by hand? (Why / Why not?)

No, I don't write letters by hand because it's so much easier to send an email that will arrive immediately.

4. Is there anything you dislike about mobile phones?

Well, I don't like listening to other people's conversations in public places, and I don't like it when someone's phone rings in the cinema or during a lesson.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'history' topic

Questions in part 3 of the speaking test follow on from the topic you were given in part 2. So, after last week's [historic event](#) question, you might be asked some further questions about history and events. For example:

1. What do you think we can learn by studying events of the past?

I think we can learn a lot by studying history. **Just as individual people learn from their mistakes,** societies can learn from the mistakes made by previous governments or leaders. For example, from what I've read in the newspapers, many economists are looking back to the time of the Great Depression, around 80 years ago, in order to understand the financial crisis that is currently affecting many countries around the world. Even if we don't always learn from mistakes, I think it's fascinating to study history because it gives us an insight into who we are and where we come from.

2. What important events do you think might take place in the future?

It's really difficult to predict what will happen in the future; most of the big, historic events of the past would have been impossible to foresee. For example, I don't think that anyone living 100 years ago could have imagined that people would one day walk on the moon! If I had to guess what might happen in the future, I'd like to think that scientists will invent cures for diseases like cancer, and we'll all live longer.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: event in history

A student sent me this question from a recent IELTS test:

Describe an important event in history. You should say

- ***when it happened***
- ***what the event was***
- ***and what effect you think this event had.***

I think this is a really nice question. If you choose the right event, it should be easy to talk for 2 minutes. Here are some suggestions:

- Don't talk about a personal event - that would be considered 'off topic'.
- Choose something that you know about - a recent event might be easier. For example, you could choose the invention of the [World Wide Web](#) or the election of [Barack Obama](#).
- Prepare this topic before your exam. If you like the two examples mentioned above, click on the links and do some research.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: old building description

Describe an old building that you like. You should say:

- ***where it is***
- ***what it is used for***

- ***and why you like it.***

The answer below is adapted from the [modern building](#) description I wrote last year. Can you spot some of the vocabulary that I've recycled?

1. I'm going to describe a very famous building in New York: the Empire State Building. People might not think of it as an old building, but the Empire State Building was built in 1931, so I don't think it can be classed as new. It's located on Manhattan island and it's probably the most distinctive and recognisable building when you look at New York's skyline.
2. As far as I know, the Empire State Building is an office building, but visitors can go up to an observation deck on the top floor, which is the 102nd floor. There's also a 360-degree observation area on the 86th floor. Apparently, the building makes more money from the sale of tickets to the observation floors than it does from office rentals.
3. I think the Empire State Building is still one of the most impressive skyscrapers in the world. It's such an iconic structure, and it's amazing to think that it was built around 80 years ago. The best thing about the building is the viewing deck on the top floor, which offers spectacular views of the city; it's definitely the best vantage point in New York. I'd recommend anyone who visits the city to go there and experience the view.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: 'difficult' questions

Students tend to worry about 'difficult questions', but questions are often much easier than they seem. For example:

Describe a law in your country.

Many students think they don't know anything about laws. However, there are some easy examples that they could choose:

1. In many countries it is now illegal to use a mobile phone while driving. You could start by talking about the popularity and benefits of mobile phones, and explain that people want to be able to answer calls wherever they are. Then you could explain the dangers of being distracted while driving; this law could reduce the number of road accidents, and therefore save lives.
2. If you feel confident talking about the 'education' topic, you could choose the 'compulsory education' law. This is the legal requirement that children up to a certain age must attend school. In the UK, for example, children are required by law to continue in education until they are 16 years old. This is a good topic because you can talk about the benefits of education.

Of course, you could choose a more obvious law (it is illegal to steal, carry a gun etc.) but you might have more ideas and good vocabulary if you choose a typical IELTS topic like number 2 above.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: negative answers

How do you answer questions about a topic that you are not interested in? For example, many people have no interest in dancing, so what should they say?

My advice: just tell the truth. It's fine to say you don't like something. Read my examples below:

1. Do you like dancing?

No, I don't like dancing. I'm not a big music fan, and dancing just makes me feel uncomfortable and self-conscious.

2. Has anyone ever taught you to dance?

No, I've never been interested in learning to dance, so I've never taken any lessons or asked anyone to show me how to do it.

3. Do you think that traditional dancing will be popular in the future?

I'm afraid I have no idea because I don't follow what's happening in the dancing world! I suppose it will always be popular with some people.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: main topics

For part 2 of IELTS speaking, I encourage my students in Manchester to prepare ideas for 6 main topic areas:

1. Describe an object (a gift, something you use etc.)
2. Describe a person (someone you admire, a family member etc.)
3. Describe an event (a festival, celebration etc.)
4. Describe an activity (e.g. a hobby)
5. Describe a place (somewhere you visited, a holiday etc.)
6. Describe your favourite (book/film/advertisement/website)

Most questions fit into one of these topics. For example, **"Describe a river, lake or sea which you like"** is number 5 - you could describe a holiday by the sea, or a city with a river.

Don't take the test without preparing some ideas for these topics first!

IELTS Speaking Part 2: TV channel

Last week we looked at this question:

Describe a TV programme or channel that you enjoy watching regularly.

- ***What it is called and what is it about?***
- ***When do you usually watch it?***
- ***Why do you prefer it to other programmes or channels?***

Here's a sample description with the best vocabulary underlined:

- I rarely watch traditional television channels nowadays; I much prefer searching for interesting programmes or videos online. So, although it's not a normal TV channel or programme, I'd like to talk about a website which I think is kind of a modern version of a TV channel. It's called TED, which stands for 'Technology, Entertainment, Design', and it's a great place to watch short talks and presentations about all sorts of interesting topics.
- The good thing about the videos on TED is that I can watch them whenever I want. I have ted.com saved as one of my favourites on my laptop, and I tend to visit the website every few days to check whether there is anything new. I often watch TED videos on my phone while I'm travelling to work on the train.
- The reason I like watching online videos on TED is that I learn something new every time I watch one. The tagline for the TED website is 'ideas worth spreading', and this really sums up the appeal of the site for me. Instead of watching meaningless soap operas and talk shows on TV, I'd much rather spend 10 minutes watching someone talk about a breakthrough in technology, science or healthcare.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'politeness' topic

Two weeks ago I showed you a part 2 question about [a situation in which you were polite](#). Let's have a look at some related questions for part 3 of the test:

In your country's culture, how do you show that you are being polite?

We really value politeness and good manners in the UK, and there are many types of polite behaviour. One of the first things we learn as children is to say "please" and "thank you". As adults, I think we are careful not to be too direct in the language we use. For example, we would never say "Bring me the bill" in a restaurant because this kind of direct instruction would sound rude. It would be much more polite to say "Could we have the bill, please?".

Are we less polite with members of our families than with people we don't know?

I suppose it's normal to be a bit more relaxed about politeness with family members. Most people tend to speak in a more informal way at home; in the UK, we still say "please" and "thanks", but it's fine to use colloquial language

and things like nicknames that you would never use with someone you didn't know.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: comparing past and present

In part 3 of IELTS speaking, you might be asked to compare the past with the present. The examiner will be listening to your use of tenses. For example:

Are there any differences between the types of people who were seen as celebrities in the past and those who are celebrities nowadays?

Yes, I think there have been some big changes in the types of people who become famous. In the past, before the invention of television, I suppose there were very few national or international celebrities; maybe kings and queens, military, political and religious leaders were the only household names. With the advent of TV and radio, performers such as actors and musicians became more well-known. However, we now seem to have a completely new breed of celebrity as a result of 'reality' television programmes; these are people who don't really have any special skills as performers, but who are famous for just being themselves.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'work' topic

Here are some example questions with short, direct answers. Remember that part 1 is like a warm-up; you are not expected to give long, complex answers for this part.

1. Do you work or are you a student?

I'm a qualified doctor, but at the moment I'm studying English so that I can work in this country.

2. Do you enjoy your job?

Yes, I really enjoy my job. Ever since I was a child I have always wanted to be a doctor; I've always wanted to be able to help people.

3. What's the best thing about your job?

The best thing about my job is that I can make a difference in people's lives. It's a great feeling to see someone recover after an illness because my colleagues and I were able to help.

4. Do you prefer working alone or with others? Why?

In a hospital you have to work as part of a team. I've got used to working with others, and I think you can achieve a lot more as a team than you would alone.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: foreign culture

Here are some ideas for [last week's question](#).

1. Which culture and how I know about it

I'm going to talk about France and French culture. I know France quite well because it was the first foreign country that I visited as a child. I've been on several family holidays there, and I lived and worked in Paris for a while after finishing university.

2. Cultural differences

The first thing that comes to mind when I think about France is the bread! I love the fact that French people buy fresh baguettes every morning, usually from small local bakeries or 'patisseries'; it makes a change from the loaves of sliced bread that most of us buy from the supermarket here in the UK. One slightly negative difference I noticed in Paris is that Parisians don't seem to make friends with their work colleagues to the same extent as we do here.

3. What I like about it

I really like the café culture in France. You can always find somewhere interesting to sit and have a coffee and chat to friends or just watch the world go by. I actually put on a bit of weight when I lived in France because I got into a habit of having a croissant or a cake in every nice café that I found. Another thing I could mention is that the last time I went to France on holiday, I played a game called 'boules' every day. The game consists in throwing metal balls as close to a target ball as possible. It's the perfect game for a relaxing afternoon when the weather's hot.

Tip:

Notice that I included personal examples or experiences in my answers. It's easy to talk for 2 minutes if you can tell a story or two.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: 'accommodation' topic

Here are some questions that I found on the official IELTS website, ielts.org. The answers below are my examples. Remember to keep your part 1 answers short and simple. You don't need to show off in part 1.

1. Tell me about the kind of accommodation you live in.

I live in a house that has a living room, a kitchen, two bedrooms, a bathroom and a small garden. It's not a very big house, but it's just right for me.

2. How long have you lived there?

I've lived there for about five years. It's the first house that I've owned; before that I was renting an apartment.

3. What do you like about living there?

I like living there because I think the house reflects my personality: I decorated it myself, I chose all the furniture, and everything is where I want it to be.

4. What sort of accommodation would you most like to live in?

If I could, I'd buy a bigger house near a beach or in the mountains, preferably somewhere with a warm climate.

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a website

In Part 2 of IELTS Speaking, you might be asked to describe a website that you use:

Describe a website that you often use. You should say:

- ***what type of website it is***
- ***how you found out about it***
- ***what it allows you to do, and why you find it useful.***

Here are some ideas, with some of the band 7-9 vocabulary underlined:

1. Facebook is a social networking website. It's a free website that allows you to keep in contact with friends or find people you've lost touch with. It's one of the most popular websites in the world, with millions of users in different countries.
2. All of my friends use Facebook. One of my friends sent me an email inviting me to join. I signed up and I've been using it ever since.
3. Facebook allows you to keep up to date with what friends are doing. You have a profile page with information and status updates so that you can tell everyone what you're doing. You can post messages to other people's pages. You can upload photos and videos. I find Facebook most useful for organising my life, keeping in touch with friends and storing photos. I think social networking websites have become part of everyday life.

IELTS Speaking Part 3: common question types

Here are 3 common question types that the examiner could ask you:

1. Compare and contrast.
2. Give an opinion.
3. Imagine.

If the topic is 'cities', the examiner could ask:

1. How is life different in cities compared to rural areas?
2. How do you think life in big cities could be made easier?
3. What do you think cities will be like in 50 years time?

In my answers below I've underlined a few 'markers' that show comparisons, opinions and future predictions.

1. Firstly, the cost of living in cities is much higher. Housing is much more expensive in cities compared to rural areas; everything costs more. I

think life in cities is more difficult. There are more people, so there's more competition for jobs. Life is a lot slower in rural areas, everyone knows each other and there's a sense of community. I don't think rural areas experience the social problems that you find in cities, like crime and homelessness.

2. In my opinion cities need to be well-planned. Good public transport can definitely make life easier because there are so many people and it can be really stressful just to move around. Public areas like parks are also important because people need space to relax, and I think cities should be made into healthier places to live and work.

3. I imagine cities will be less polluted because we'll have electric cars and better public transport. More people might work from home so maybe cities won't be so busy. But I think there will probably still be problems because more and more people are migrating to cities. So I'm not so optimistic about issues like crime, homelessness and unemployment.

IELTS Speaking Part 1: short, simple answers

The first part of the IELTS Speaking Test lasts around 4 to 5 minutes. The examiner asks about 10 questions related to you, your daily life and your interests. Common topics are hobbies, family, friends, food, music etc.

Part 1 questions are supposed to be easy, and the examiner must get through all of the questions in 5 minutes or less. That's only about 30 seconds per question. If you try to give long answers, the examiner will interrupt you. My advice is to keep Part 1 answers very simple:

Do you prefer home-cooked food or food from restaurants?

I prefer home-cooked food because I think it's healthier and you know exactly what you're eating. I also enjoy cooking for family and friends.

You don't need to say any more than this. Just answer the question with a full sentence, give a reason, and maybe add one extra piece of information. Then stop speaking. *Stop with confidence and look at the examiner, ready for the next question.*

Posted by [Simon](#) in [IELTS Speaking](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(17\)](#)

Friday, March 02, 2012

IELTS Speaking: how to talk for 2 minutes

Students often ask whether it's necessary to speak for the full 2 minutes in part 2 of the speaking test. The instruction is: **speak for between 1 and 2 minutes**, so it's not strictly necessary to speak for the full 2 minutes. However, my advice is that you should **try** to keep speaking until the examiner stops you.

Here are some tips to help you keep talking:

1. Go through the bullet points on the task card in order.
2. Try to develop each point, even easy ones. For example, if the first bullet point for the topic "describe a person" is "who is it?", don't just say "I'm going to describe my father". Add more information, such as your father's name, age, what he looks like, where he is now, how often you speak to him...
3. Give examples and tell stories ([click here](#) for more advice about this).

Posted by [Simon](#) in [IELTS Speaking](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(26\)](#)

Friday, February 24, 2012

IELTS Speaking Part 2: easier than you think

Sometimes a question seems difficult, but you might be able to turn it into a different topic. Take these questions for example:

1. Describe a photo that you like.
2. Describe an important letter you received.

Many students panic when I ask them these two questions, but they are much easier than you think. Here are some ideas:

1. You could describe a photo of your family on a special occasion (e.g. a birthday party). This would allow you to talk about the members of your family and tell the story of what happened at the party when the photo was taken. Alternatively, you could describe a holiday photo of a place you visited. Then you can talk about the place and what you did there.
2. If you have a job, you could describe the letter you received telling you that you got the job. You could talk about the job interview, how you felt when you received the letter, and what you now do in your job. On the other hand, if you are a student, you could say that you received a letter confirming your place on your degree course.

Posted by [Simon](#) in [IELTS Speaking](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(26\)](#)

Saturday, February 18, 2012

IELTS Speaking Advice: tell stories

At the end of yesterday's lesson I mentioned that you could prepare some examples or stories to make your descriptions more interesting (for speaking part 2, and maybe part 3).

When speaking in our own languages, we tell stories all the time. For example, you might tell a member of your family about what happened at work today, or you might tell your friends about a film you saw last night.

The ability to tell a story in English is a sign that you are becoming a proficient user of the language. Test yourself: try telling a story in English now! Start with something easy, like "what I did yesterday".

Posted by [Simon](#) in [IELTS Speaking](#), [Questions/Advice](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(21\)](#)

Friday, February 17, 2012

IELTS Speaking Part 2: essential preparation

It's impossible to prepare for **every** question that you might get in the speaking test, but what are the **essential** things to prepare for?

Here's my list of essentials:

1. **Favourites:** Don't go into the test without knowing what your favourites are. Prepare to talk about your favourite **book, film, music, and website.**
2. **People:** Be ready to talk about a famous person and a member of your family.
3. **Activities:** Have you prepared some ideas about a hobby? Can you describe a typical day in your life? Try to remember some special moments in your life, **such as birthdays, festivals and weddings.**
4. **Places:** You need to be able to talk about **where** you live. Also, think about the places you have visited, what you did there, and why you liked or didn't like them.
5. **Things:** Can you talk about the things you use every day, something you would like to buy, or a present that you received?

Remember that in part 2 you are always asked to **"describe"**. Make sure you prepare some good adjectives for each topic, make sure you can talk about your opinions and feelings, and think about some examples or stories to make your descriptions more interesting.

IELTS Speaking part 3: rivers, lakes, sea

1. What do you think are the functions of rivers nowadays?

Rivers have various functions. In the UK, they were probably more important in the past because they were used for the transportation of goods, but I suppose this is still the case in many parts of the world. Rivers can be used as a source of renewable energy in the production of hydro-electric power, and they are also a source of fresh water for drinking and irrigation. Leisure activities are another function: fishing, canoeing, swimming, bathing... I'm sure there are many other things I haven't thought of.

2. What do you think of boats and ships as forms of transportation?

I'm not really a fan of boats and ships. If I'm going abroad, I like to get to my destination quickly, so I prefer travelling by plane. Of course, ships are vital for the transportation of oil and other heavy cargo.

3. Why do some people like to live near rivers, lakes or the sea?

Well, the view is probably a major factor; most people like to look out to sea, or across a river or lake. I'd much prefer to look out of my window onto a natural landscape than an apartment building in a city. Then there's the lifestyle: if you live by the sea, for example, you can lie on the beach, go for a swim, or do water sports like surfing or waterskiing. I definitely wouldn't mind living near a beach at some point in my life!

Note:

These answers are less formal than the essays I write for the writing test, and I say things like "probably" or "I suppose" when I'm not sure about the facts.

IELTS Speaking: another garden description

Last week I described a famous garden. Martin, an IELTS teacher who often contributes to the comments on this site, sent me a description of his own garden. You might find it more useful than my famous garden description!

Martin's description:

1. Today I'd like to describe my home garden, which I think is a beautiful one and which I like very much. The garden is part of my home's backyard, and my house is located in the suburbs, about a 1-hour drive from the city of San Francisco. **There is a big tree right in the middle of my garden, which is surrounded by a hot tub, a small water fountain, several bushes, a section for vegetables, and different kinds of flowers.**
2. This garden was actually one of the reasons why my wife and I chose to buy our house because it had been beautifully maintained by the previous owner's gardener and landscaper. It's been only 1 year since we bought the house and now we are taking care of the garden ourselves. Even though we are not experts in gardening, we still try our best to plant things that we like, such as roses and tulips, and we even grow our own tomatoes.
3. Whenever family and friends come to visit us, we invite them to have a relaxing time in our hot tub, and enjoy the view. So in other words, our garden has also become a kind of resort! It definitely requires lots of hard work to properly maintain the garden, but it gives us a great sense of accomplishment to "decorate" it the way we like.

4. All in all, the garden is one of the best features of my home and it is a place where I can relax after a long day of work or during the weekends.

Posted by [Simon](#) in [IELTS Speaking](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(32\)](#)

Friday, January 06, 2012

IELTS Speaking Part 2: describe a garden

Describe a beautiful garden that you like. You should say

- where it is

- what you can see there

- what people do there

and explain why you like it.

Here are some ideas:



5. The garden I'm going to describe is famous because it belonged to the French painter Claude Monet. It's in a place called Giverny, which is in northern France, about an hour away from Paris in the province of Normandy.
6. There are actually two gardens at the Monet house in Giverny: a flower garden, and a Japanese inspired water garden. Apparently, Monet designed the gardens himself; he even had the pond and the famous Japanese bridge made. After creating the gardens, Monet painted some of the most well-known paintings in the world, such as those of the waterlilies below the bridge on his pond.
7. Thousands of people visit the gardens at Giverny to see the magnificent scenes that inspired Monet's paintings. Visitors can walk around the gardens and take pictures, which is what I did when I went there.
8. I like Monet's gardens because they are such beautiful creations, and it's amazing to see the 'real thing' having seen the famous paintings so many times.

To learn more about Monet's gardens, have a look at [this site](#).

IELTS Speaking Part 3: competitions

The following questions come from Cambridge IELTS 7. I've underlined some of the good words and phrases in my answers.

1. Why do you think some school teachers use competitions as class activities?

I think teachers use competitions to motivate the children in their classes. I'm sure that teachers try all kinds of activities to engage their pupils, and competitions might be one of the best ways to keep children interested or get them excited. Children love winning things.

2. Is it a good thing to give prizes to children who do well at school? Why?

It might be a good idea to encourage children to do well in games or sports, but I don't think we should give children prizes for their academic work. Children need to learn that the reason for studying is to learn useful things that will help them in their lives. I don't like the idea of children thinking that they will only work hard if there is a prize.

3. Would you say that schools for young children have become more or less competitive since you were that age? Why?

I'd say that they have become more competitive since I was young. Children now have to take exams from a much younger age, so I think there is more of a focus on doing well in tests. Parents also seem to be getting more competitive; I think that many parents push their children to do extra homework rather than letting them play with friends.

IELTS Vocabulary: nice bits of language!

There were a few nice bits of language that you might have noticed in yesterday's speaking lesson:

- all sorts of things
- a certain amount of
- I pick up a newspaper most days
- I usually have a book on the go
- I couldn't put it down
- opens the door to all aspects of education

These phrases made my answers sound very natural and "native-speaker-like". Try using them in your own sentences.

IELTS Vocabulary: band 7-9 phrases

Let's review the vocabulary that I used in yesterday's speaking lesson. Here are the phrases that I think would impress an examiner:

- volunteer to run activity clubs
- help out (phrasal verb)
- residential homes for elderly people
- support people living below the poverty line
- there isn't a scale of importance when it comes to helping others
- all forms of help are positive
- experience difficult times
- run the risk of losing our jobs
- people help others because they empathise with them
- It's impossible to generalise about...
- from one generation to the next
- judge or compare how altruistic people are

SIGNATURE

Posted by [Simon](#) in [IELTS Speaking](#), [Vocabulary/Grammar](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)

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Friday, November 28, 2014

IELTS Speaking Part 3: 'community' answers

Here are my sample answers for the part 3 'community' topic:

1) What are some of the ways people can help others in the community? Which is the most important?

I think there are many ways to help others in our local communities. For example, where I live, some people volunteer to run activity clubs for children, or they help out in residential homes for elderly people. Others give money, food or clothes to organisations that support people living below the poverty line. In my opinion, there isn't a scale of importance when it comes to helping others; all forms of help are positive.

2) Why do you think some people like to help other people?

Most people get a good feeling when they help others, and they understand that we can all experience difficult times in our lives when we might need support. For example, we all grow old, and we all run the risk of losing our jobs or having a health problem that affects our ability to look after ourselves. So, I think people help others because they empathise with them.

3) Some people say that people help others in the community more now than they did in the past. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

I disagree with that kind of opinion. It's impossible to generalise about how much people help in their communities from one generation to the next, so I

don't think we should try to judge or compare how altruistic people are now or were in the past. There have always been those who help others and those who don't.

Here is some 'less common' vocabulary from yesterday's lesson:

- defeat the other player
- trapping his King... checkmate
- portable chess set
- the chance to hone my skills
- I made it onto the school team
- the challenge of thinking ahead
- trying to outwit my opponent
- a very mysterious and intellectual game
- taught me to learn from my losses
- to congratulate the person who had beaten me