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Secret Key #1 – Time is your greatest enemy.

To succeed on the IELTS, you must use your time wisely. Many students do not finish at least one module. The table below shows the time challenge you are faced with:

Module	Total amount of time allotted	Number of questions	Time to answer each question
Listening	30 min	40	1.34 min
Reading	60 min	40	.67 min
Writing	60 min	2	30 min
Speaking	11-14 min	N/A	N/A

As you can see, the time constraints are brutal. To succeed, you must ration your time properly. The reason that time is so critical is that every question counts the same toward your final score. If you run out of time on any passage, the questions that you do not answer will hurt your score far more than earlier questions that you spent extra time on and feel certain are correct.

On the Reading Module, the test is separated into passages. The reason that time is so critical is that 1) every question counts the same toward your final score, and 2) the passages are not in order of difficulty. If you have to rush during the last passage, then you will miss out on answering easier questions correctly. It is natural to want to pause and figure out the hardest questions, but you must resist the temptation and move quickly.

Success Strategy #1

Pace Yourself

Wear a watch to the IELTS Test. At the beginning of the test, check the time (or start a chronometer on your watch to count the minutes), and check the time after each passage or every few questions to make sure you are “on schedule.”

Remember that on the Listening and Reading Modules you have a little over half a minute for each question. If you can work quickly, you can pace yourself at half a minute per question, which makes it easy to keep track of your time.

If you find that you are falling behind time during the test, you must speed up. Even though a rushed answer is more likely to be incorrect, it is better to miss a couple of questions by being rushed, than to completely miss later questions by not having enough time. It is better to end with more time than you need than to run out of time.

If you are forced to speed up, do it efficiently. Usually one or more answer choices can be eliminated without too much difficulty. Above all, don’t panic. Don’t speed up and just begin guessing at random choices. By pacing yourself, and continually monitoring your progress against the clock or your watch, you will always know exactly how far ahead or behind you are with your available time. If you find that you are a few minutes behind on a module, don’t skip questions without spending any time on it, just to catch back up. Spend perhaps a little less than half a minute per question and after a few questions, you will have caught back up more gradually. Once you catch back up, you can continue working each problem at your normal pace. If you have time at the end, go back then and finish the questions that you left behind.

Furthermore, don’t dwell on the problems that you were rushed on. If a problem was taking up too much time and you made a hurried guess, it must have been

difficult. The difficult questions are the ones you are most likely to miss anyway, so it isn't a big loss. If you have time left over, as you review the skipped questions, start at the earliest skipped question, spend at most another half a minute, and then move on to the next skipped question.

Lastly, sometimes it is beneficial to slow down if you are constantly getting ahead of time. You are always more likely to catch a careless mistake by working more slowly than quickly, and among very high-scoring test takers (those who are likely to have lots of time left over), careless errors affect the score more than mastery of material.

Scanning

For Reading passages, don't waste time reading, enjoying, and completely understanding the passage. Simply scan the passage to get a rough idea of what it is about. You will return to the passage for each question, so there is no need to memorize it. Only spend as much time scanning as is necessary to get a vague impression of its overall subject content.

Secret Key #2 – Guessing is not guesswork.

You probably know that guessing is a good idea on the IELTS- unlike other standardized tests, there is no penalty for getting a wrong answer. Even if you have no idea about a question, you still have a 20-25% chance of getting it right.

Most students do not understand the impact that proper guessing can have on their score. Unless you score extremely high, guessing will significantly contribute to your final score.

Monkeys Take the IELTS

What most students don't realize is that to insure that 20-25% chance, you have to guess randomly. If you put 20 monkeys in a room to take the IELTS, assuming they answered once per question and behaved themselves, on average they would get 20-25% of the questions correct on a five choice multiple choice problem. Put 20 students in the room, and the average will be much lower among guessed questions. Why?

1. IELTS intentionally writes deceptive answer choices that “look” right. A student has no idea about a question, so picks the “best looking” answer, which is often wrong. The monkey has no idea what looks good and what doesn’t, so will consistently be lucky about 20-25% of the time.
2. Students will eliminate answer choices from the guessing pool based on a hunch or intuition. Simple but correct answers often get excluded, leaving a 0% chance of being correct. The monkey has no clue, and often gets lucky with the best choice.

This is why the process of elimination endorsed by most test courses is flawed and detrimental to your performance- students don't guess, they make an ignorant stab in the dark that is usually worse than random.

Success Strategy #2

Let me introduce one of the most valuable ideas of this course- the \$5 challenge:

You only mark your “best guess” if you are willing to bet \$5 on it.

You only eliminate choices from guessing if you are willing to bet \$5 on it.

Why \$5? Five dollars is an amount of money that is small yet not insignificant, and can really add up fast (20 questions could cost you \$100). Likewise, each answer choice on one question of the IELTS will have a small impact on your overall score, but it can really add up to a lot of points in the end.

The process of elimination IS valuable. The following shows your chance of guessing it right:

If you eliminate this many choices on a 3 choice multiple choice problem:	0	1	2
Chance of getting it correct	33%	50%	100%

However, if you accidentally eliminate the right answer or go on a hunch for an incorrect answer, your chances drop dramatically: to 0%. By guessing among all the answer choices, you are GUARANTEED to have a shot at the right answer.

That's why the \$5 test is so valuable- if you give up the advantage and safety of a pure guess, it had better be worth the risk.

What we still haven't covered is how to be sure that whatever guess you make is truly random. Here's the easiest way:

Always pick the first answer choice among those remaining.

Such a technique means that you have decided, **before you see a single test question**, exactly how you are going to guess- and since the order of choices

tells you nothing about which one is correct, this guessing technique is perfectly random.

Let's try an example-

A student encounters the following problem on the Listening Module in a conversation about the chemical term “amine,” a derivative of ammonia:

In the reaction, the amine will be?

- A. neutralized
- B. protonated
- C. deprotonated

The student has a small idea about this question- he is pretty sure that the amine will be deprotonated, but he wouldn't bet \$5 on it. He knows that the amine is either protonated or deprotonated, so he is willing to bet \$5 on choice A not being correct. Now he is down to B and C. At this point, he guesses B, since B is the first choice remaining.

The student is correct by choosing B, since the amine will be protonated. He only eliminated those choices he was willing to bet money on, AND he did not let his stale memories (often things not known definitely will get mixed up in the exact opposite arrangement in one's head) about protonation and deprotonation influence his guess. He blindly chose the first remaining choice, and was rewarded with the fruits of a random guess.

This section is not meant to scare you away from making educated guesses or eliminating choices- you just need to define when a choice is worth eliminating. The \$5 test, along with a pre-defined random guessing strategy, is the best way to make sure you reap all of the benefits of guessing.

Specific Guessing Techniques

Slang

Scientific sounding answers are better than slang ones. In the answer choices below, choice B is much less scientific and is incorrect, while choice A is a scientific analytical choice and is correct.

Example:

- A.) To compare the outcomes of the two different kinds of treatment.
- B.) Because some subjects insisted on getting one or the other of the treatments.

Extreme Statements

Avoid wild answers that throw out highly controversial ideas that are proclaimed as established fact. Choice A is a radical idea and is incorrect. Choice B is a calm rational statement. Notice that Choice B does not make a definitive, uncompromising stance, using a hedge word “if” to provide wiggle room.

Example:

- A.) Bypass surgery should be discontinued completely.
- B.) Medication should be used instead of surgery for patients who have not had a heart attack if they suffer from mild chest pain and mild coronary artery blockage.

Similar Answer Choices

When you have two answer choices that are direct opposites, one of them is usually the correct answer.

Example:

- A.) described the author’s reasoning about the influence of his *childhood* on his adult life.
- B.) described the author’s reasoning about the influence of his *parents* on his adult life.

These two answer choices are very similar and fall into the same family of answer choices. A family of answer choices is when two or three answer choices are very similar. Often two will be opposites and one may show an equality.

Example:

- A.) Plan I or Plan II can be conducted at equal cost
- B.) Plan I would be less expensive than Plan II
- C.) Plan II would be less expensive than Plan I
- D.) Neither Plan I nor Plan II would be effective

Note how the first three choices are all related. They all ask about a cost comparison. Beware of immediately recognizing choices B and C as opposites and choosing one of those two. Choice A is in the same family of questions and should be considered as well. However, choice D is not in the same family of questions. It has nothing to do with cost and can be discounted in most cases.

Hedging

When asked for a conclusion that may be drawn, look for critical “hedge” phrases, such as likely, may, can, will often, sometimes, etc, often, almost, mostly, usually, generally, rarely, sometimes. Question writers insert these hedge phrases to cover every possibility. Often an answer will be wrong simply because it leaves no room for exception. Avoid answer choices that have definitive words like “exactly,” and “always”.

Summary of Guessing Techniques

1. Eliminate as many choices as you can by using the \$5 test. Use the common guessing strategies to help in the elimination process, but only eliminate choices that pass the \$5 test.
2. Among the remaining choices, only pick your “best guess” if it passes the \$5 test.
3. Otherwise, guess randomly by picking the first remaining choice.

Secret Key #3 – Practice Smarter, Not Harder

Many students delay the test preparation process because they dread the awful amounts of practice time they think necessary to succeed on the test. We have refined an effective method that will take you only a fraction of the time.

There are a number of “obstacles” in your way on the IELTS. Among these are answering questions, finishing in time, and mastering test-taking strategies. All must be executed on the day of the test at peak performance, or your score will suffer. The IELTS is a mental marathon that has a large impact on your future.

Just like a marathon runner, it is important to work your way up to the full challenge. So first you just worry about questions, and then time, and finally strategy:

Success Strategy #3

1. Find a good source for IELTS practice tests. **These must be OFFICIAL IELTS tests, or they will be of little use.** The best source for these is official practice tests from IELTS. A link to a source of official practice tests is included in the appendix.
2. If you are willing to make a larger time investment (or if you want to really “learn” the material, a time consuming but ultimately valuable endeavor), consider buying one of the better study guides on the market. Again, do NOT use their practice tests, just the study guide.
3. Take a practice test with no time constraints, with all study helps “open book.” Take your time with questions and focus on applying the strategies.
4. Take another test, this time with time constraints, with all study helps “open book.”
5. Take a final practice test with no open material and time limits.

If you have time to take more practice tests, just repeat step 5. By gradually exposing yourself to the full rigors of the test environment, you will condition your mind to the stress of test day and maximize your success.

Secret Key #4 – Prepare, Don’t Procrastinate

Let me state an obvious fact: if you take the IELTS three times, you will get three different scores. This is due to the way you feel on test day, the level of preparedness you have, and, despite IELTS’s claims to the contrary, some tests WILL be easier for you than others.

Since so much depends on your score, you should maximize your chances of success. In order to maximize the likelihood of success, you’ve got to prepare in advance. This means taking official practice tests and spending time learning the information and test taking strategies you will need to succeed.

You can always retake the test more than once, but remember that you will have to wait a minimum of three months before retaking the test. Don’t get into a situation where you need a higher score and can’t afford to wait, so don’t take the IELTS as a “practice” test. Feel free to take sample tests on your own, but when you go to take the IELTS, be prepared, be focused, and do your best the first time!

The Listening Module

The Listening module of the IELTS consists of a total of 40 questions.

There are four sections:

1. Social Needs – Conversation between two speakers
2. Social Needs – Speech by one speaker
3. Educational or Training – Conversation between up to four speakers
4. Educational or Training – Speech by one speaker

Main Ideas

Important words and main ideas in conversation are ones that will come up again and again. Listen carefully for any word or words that come up repeatedly. What words come up in nearly every statement made? These words with high frequency are likely to be in the main idea of the conversation. For example, in a conversation about class size in the business department of a college, the term “class size” is likely to appear in nearly every statement made by either speaker in the discussion.

Voice Changes

IELTS expects you to be able to recognize and interpret nuances of speech. Be on the alert for any changes in voice, which might register surprise, excitement, or another emotion. If a speaker is talking in a normal monotone voice and suddenly raises their voice to a high pitch, that is a huge clue that something critical is being stated. Listen for a speaker to change their voice and understand the meaning of what they are saying.

Example:

Man: Let's go to Wal-mart.

Woman: *There's a Wal-mart in this small town?*

If the woman's statement was higher pitched, indicating surprise and shock, then she probably did not expect there to be a Wal-mart in that town.

Specifics

Listen carefully for specific pieces of information. Adjectives are commonly asked about in IELTS questions. Try to remember any main adjectives that are mentioned. Pick out adjectives such as numbers, colors, or sizes.

Example:

Man: Let's go to the store and get some apples to make the pie.

Woman: How many do we need?

Man: We'll need **five** apples to make the pie.

A typical question might be about how many apples were needed.

Interpret

As you are listening to the conversation, put yourself in the person's shoes.

Think about why someone would make a statement. You'll need to do more than just regurgitate the spoken words but also interpret them.

Example:

Woman: I think I'm sick with the flu.

Man: Why don't you go see the campus doctor?

Sample Question: Why did the man mention the campus doctor?

Answer: The campus doctor would be able to determine if the woman had the flu.

Find the Hidden Meaning

Look for the meaning behind a statement. When a speaker answers a question with a statement that doesn't immediately seem to answer the question, the response probably contained a hidden meaning that you will need to recognize and explain.

Man: Are you going to be ready for your presentation?

Woman: I've only got half of it finished and it's taken me five hours just to do this much. There's only an hour left before the presentation is due.

At first, the woman did not seem to answer the question the man presented. She responded with a statement that only seemed loosely related. Once you look deeper, then you can find the true meaning of what she said. If it took the woman five hours to do the first half of the presentation, then it would logically take her another five hours to do the second half. Since she only has one hour until her presentation is due, she would probably NOT be able to be ready for the presentation. So, while an answer was not immediately visible to the man's question, when you applied some logic to her response, you could find the hidden meaning beneath.

Memory Enhancers

You have scratch paper provided to you while taking the test. This can be a huge help. While you listen, you are free to make notes. If different people are talking, use short hand to describe the main characteristics of each speaker. As you hear main adjectives that you think might be hard to remember, jot them down quickly in order that you can refer to them later during the question stage. Use your notes to help you remember those hard to remember facts. Don't end your test without making use of your scratch paper ally.

Example:

Speaker 1: I'm Bob Thomas, and I'm majoring in business development.

Speaker 2: I'm Matt Smith, and I'm majoring in chemical engineering.

Speaker 3: I'm John Douglass, and I'm majoring in speech therapy.

Your short hand might read:

Bob – Bus.

Matt – Chem. E

John – Sp. Th.

On subsequent questions about the characters, you'll be able to remember these basic facts and answer more accurately. However, don't spend so much time

making notes that you miss something on the tape. You won't be able to rewind it and catch what you miss. The idea is that the notes should only supplement your memory, not replace it.

The Reading Module

The Reading module of the IELTS consists of a total of 40 questions.

There are three passages, with a total of 2,000 to 2,750 words.

Skimming

Your first task when you begin reading is to answer the question “What is the topic of the selection?” This can best be answered by quickly skimming the passage for the general idea, stopping to read only the first sentence of each paragraph. A paragraph’s first sentence is usually the main topic sentence, and it gives you a summary of the content of the paragraph.

Once you’ve skimmed the passage, stopping to read only the first sentences, you will have a general idea about what it is about, as well as what is the expected topic in each paragraph.

Each question will contain clues as to where to find the answer in the passage. Do not just randomly search through the passage for the correct answer to each question. Search scientifically. Find key word(s) or ideas in the question that are going to either contain or be near the correct answer. These are typically nouns, verbs, numbers, or phrases in the question that will probably be duplicated in the passage. Once you have identified those key word(s) or idea, skim the passage quickly to find where those key word(s) or idea appears. The correct answer choice will be nearby.

Example: What caused Martin to suddenly return to Paris?

The key word is Paris. Skim the passage quickly to find where this word appears. The answer will be close by that word.

However, sometimes key words in the question are not repeated in the passage. In those cases, search for the general idea of the question.

Example: Which of the following was the psychological impact of the author's childhood upon the remainder of his life?

Key words are "childhood" or "psychology". While searching for those words, be alert for other words or phrases that have similar meaning, such as "emotional effect" or "mentally" which could be used in the passage, rather than the exact word "psychology".

Numbers or years can be particularly good key words to skim for, as they stand out from the rest of the text.

Example: Which of the following best describes the influence of Monet's work in the 20th century?

20th contains numbers and will easily stand out from the rest of the text. Use 20th as the key word to skim for in the passage.

Once you've quickly found the correct section of the passage to find the answer, focus upon the answer choices. Sometimes a choice will repeat word for word a portion of the passage near the answer. However, beware of such duplication – it may be a trap! More than likely, the correct choice will paraphrase or summarize the related portion of the passage, rather than being exactly the same wording.

For the answers that you think are correct, read them carefully and make sure that they answer the question. An answer can be factually correct, but it MUST answer the question asked. Additionally, two answers can both be seemingly

correct, so be sure to read all of the answer choices, and make sure that you get the one that BEST answers the question.

Some questions will not have a key word.

Example: Which of the following would the author of this passage likely agree with?

In these cases, look for key words in the answer choices. Then skim the passage to find where the answer choice occurs. By skimming to find where to look, you can minimize the time required.

Sometimes it may be difficult to identify a good key word in the question to skim for in the passage. In those cases, look for a key word in one of the answer choices to skim for. Often the answer choices can all be found in the same paragraph, which can quickly narrow your search.

Paragraph Focus

Focus upon the first sentence of each paragraph, which is the most important. The main topic of the paragraph is usually there.

Once you've read the first sentence in the paragraph, you have a general idea about what each paragraph will be about. As you read the questions, try to determine which paragraph will have the answer. Paragraphs have a concise topic. The answer should either obviously be there or obviously not. It will save time if you can jump straight to the paragraph, so try to remember what you learned from the first sentences.

Example: The first paragraph is about poets; the second is about poetry. If a question asks about poetry, where will the answer be? The second paragraph.

The main idea of a passage is typically spread across all or most of its paragraphs. Whereas the main idea of a paragraph may be completely different than the main idea of the very next paragraph, a main idea for a passage affects all of the paragraphs in one form or another.

Example: What is the main idea of the passage?

For each answer choice, try to see how many paragraphs are related. It can help to count how many sentences are affected by each choice, but it is best to see how many paragraphs are affected by the choice. Typically the answer choices will include incorrect choices that are main ideas of individual paragraphs, but not the entire passage. That is why it is crucial to choose ideas that are supported by the most paragraphs possible.

Eliminate Choices

Some choices can quickly be eliminated. “Andy Warhol lived there.” Is Andy Warhol even mentioned in the article? If not, quickly eliminate it.

When trying to answer a question such as “the passage indicates all of the following EXCEPT” quickly skim the paragraph searching for references to each choice. If the reference exists, scratch it off as a choice. Similar choices may be crossed off simultaneously if they are close enough.

In choices that ask you to choose “which answer choice does NOT describe?” or “all of the following answer choices are identifiable characteristics, EXCEPT which?” look for answers that are similarly worded. Since only one answer can be correct, if there are two answers that appear to mean the same thing, they must BOTH be incorrect, and can be eliminated.

Example:

- A.) changing values and attitudes
- B.) a large population of mobile or uprooted people

These answer choices are similar; they both describe a fluid culture. Because of their similarity, they can be linked together. Since the answer can have only one choice, they can also be eliminated together.

Contextual Clues

Look for contextual clues. An answer can be right but not correct. The contextual clues will help you find the answer that is most right and is correct. Understand the context in which a phrase is stated.

When asked for the implied meaning of a statement made in the passage, immediately go find the statement and read the context it was made in. Also, look for an answer choice that has a similar phrase to the statement in question. Example: In the passage, what is implied by the phrase “Churches have become more or less part of the furniture”?

Find an answer choice that is similar or describes the phrase “part of the furniture” as that is the key phrase in the question. “Part of the furniture” is a saying that means something is fixed, immovable, or set in their ways. Those are all similar ways of saying “part of the furniture.” As such, the correct answer choice will probably include a similar rewording of the expression.

Example: Why was John described as “morally desperate”.

The answer will probably have some sort of definition of morals in it. “Morals” refers to a code of right and wrong behavior, so the correct answer choice will likely have words that mean something like that.

Fact/Opinion

When asked about which statement is a fact or opinion, remember that answer choices that are facts will typically have no ambiguous words. For example, how long is a long time? What defines an ordinary person? These ambiguous words

of “long” and “ordinary” should not be in a factual statement. However, if all of the choices have ambiguous words, go to the context of the passage. Often a factual statement may be set out as a research finding.

Example: “The scientist found that the eye reacts quickly to change in light.”

Opinions may be set out in the context of words like thought, believed, understood, or wished.

Example: “He thought the Yankees should win the World Series.”

Opposites

Answer choices that are direct opposites are usually correct. The paragraph will often contain established relationships (when this goes up, that goes down). The question may ask you to draw conclusions for this and will give two similar answer choices that are opposites.

Example:

- A.) if other factors are held constant, then increasing the interest rate will lead to a decrease in housing starts
- B.) if other factors are held constant, then increasing the interest rate will lead to an increase in housing starts

Often these opposites will not be so clearly recognized. Don’t be thrown off by different wording, look for the meaning beneath. Notice how these two answer choices are really opposites, with just a slight change in the wording shown above. Once you realize these are opposites, you should examine them closely. One of these two is likely to be the correct answer.

Example:

- A.) if other factors are held constant, then increasing the interest rate will lead to a decrease in housing starts
- B.) when there is an increase in housing starts, and other things remaining equal, it is often the result of an increase in interest rates

Make Predictions

As you read and understand the passage and then the question, try to guess what the answer will be. Remember that most of the answer choices are wrong, and once you are reading them, your mind will immediately become cluttered with answer choices designed to throw you off. Your mind is typically the most focused immediately after you have read the passage and question and digested its contents. If you can, try to predict what the correct answer will be. You may be surprised at what you can predict.

Quickly scan the choices and see if your prediction is in the listed answer choices. If it is, then you can be quite confident that you have the right answer. It still won't hurt to check the other answer choices, but most of the time, you've got it!

Answer the Question

It may seem obvious to only pick answer choices that answer the question, but IELTS can create some excellent answer choices that are wrong. Don't pick an answer just because it sounds right, or you believe it to be true. It MUST answer the question. Once you've made your selection, always go back and check it against the question and make sure that you didn't misread the question, and the answer choice does answer the question posed.

Benchmark

After you read the first answer choice, decide if you think it sounds correct or not. If it doesn't, move on to the next answer choice. If it does, make a mental note about that choice. This doesn't mean that you've definitely selected it as your answer choice, it just means that it's the best you've seen thus far. Go ahead and read the next choice. If the next choice is worse than the one you've already selected, keep going to the next answer choice. If the next choice is better than the choice you've already selected, then make a mental note about that answer choice.

As you read through the list, you are mentally noting the choice you think is right. That is your new standard. Every other answer choice must be benchmarked against that standard. That choice is correct until proven otherwise by another answer choice beating it out. Once you've decided that no other answer choice seems as good, do one final check to ensure that it answers the question posed.

New Information

Correct answers will usually contain the information listed in the paragraph and question. Rarely will completely new information be inserted into a correct answer choice. Occasionally the new information may be related in a manner than IELTS is asking for you to interpret, but seldom.

Example:

The argument above is dependent upon which of the following assumptions?

- A.) Scientists have used Charles's Law to interpret the relationship.

If Charles's Law is not mentioned at all in the referenced paragraph and argument, then it is unlikely that this choice is correct. All of the information needed to answer the question is provided for you, and so you should not have to make guesses that are unsupported or choose answer choices that have unknown information that cannot be reasoned.

Key Words

Look for answer choices that have the same key words in them as the question.

Example:

Which of the following, if true, would best explain the reluctance of politicians since 1980 to support this funding?

Look for the key words "since 1980" to be referenced in the correct answer choice. Most valid answer choices would probably include a phrase such as "since 1980, politicians have..."

Valid Information

Don't discount any of the information provided in the passage, particularly shorter ones. Every piece of information may be necessary to determine the correct answer. None of the information in the passage is there to throw you off (while the answer choices will certainly have information to throw you off). If two seemingly unrelated topics are discussed, don't ignore either. You can be confident there is a relationship, or it wouldn't be included in the passage, and you are probably going to have to determine what is that relationship for the answer.

Time Management

In technical passages, do not get lost on the technical terms. Skip them and move on. You want a general understanding of what is going on, not a mastery of the passage.

When you encounter material in the selection that seems difficult to understand, it often may not be necessary and can be skipped. Only spend time trying to understand it if it is going to be relevant for a question. Understand difficult phrases only as a last resort.

Identify each question by type. Usually the wording of a question will tell you whether you can find the answer by referring directly to the passage or by using your reasoning powers. You alone know which question types you customarily handle with ease and which give you trouble and will require more time.

Final Warnings

Hedge Phrases Revisited

Once again, watch out for critical "hedge" phrases, such as likely, may, can, will often, sometimes, etc, often, almost, mostly, usually, generally, rarely, sometimes. Question writers insert these hedge phrases, to cover every

possibility. Often an answer will be wrong simply because it leaves no room for exception.

Example: Animals live longer in cold places than animals in warm places.

This answer choice is wrong, because there are exceptions in which certain warm climate animals live longer. This answer choice leaves no possibility of exception. It states that every animal species in cold places live longer than animal species in warm places. Correct answer choices will typically have a key hedge word to leave room for exceptions.

Example: In severe cold, a polar bear cub is likely to survive longer than an adult polar bear.

This answer choice is correct, because not only does the passage imply that younger animals survive better in the cold, it also allows for exceptions to exist. The use of the word “likely” leaves room for cases in which a polar bear cub might not survive longer than the adult polar bear.

Word Usage Questions

When asked how a word is used in the passage, don’t use your existing knowledge of the word. The question is being asked precisely because there is some strange or unusual usage of the word in the passage. Go to the passage and use contextual clues to determine the answer. Don’t simply use the popular definition you already know.

Switchback Words

Stay alert for “switchbacks”. These are the words and phrases frequently used to alert you to shifts in thought. The most common switchback word is “but”. Others include although, however, nevertheless, on the other hand, even though, while, in spite of, despite, regardless of.

Avoid “Fact Traps”

Once you know which paragraph the answer will be in, focus on that paragraph. However, don’t get distracted by a choice that is factually true about the paragraph. Your search is for the answer that answers the question, which may be about a tiny aspect in the paragraph. Stay focused and don’t fall for an answer that describes the larger picture of the paragraph. Always go back to the question and make sure you’re choosing an answer that actually answers the question and is not just a true statement.

The Writing Module

The Writing module of the IELTS consists of a 60 minute module with two tasks.

Task 1: A diagram or table will be presented to you and you must write out approximately a 150 word discussion on it within approximately 20 minutes. You must evaluate the diagram or table, organize your ideas, and develop them into a cohesive and coherent explanation.

Task 2: A topic will be presented to you and you must write out approximately a 250 word discussion on it within approximately 40 minutes. There is not a “correct” answer to the topic. You must evaluate the topic, organize your ideas, and develop them into a cohesive and coherent response.

You will be scored on how well you are able to utilize standard written English, organize and explain your thoughts, and support those thoughts with reasons and examples.

Brainstorm

Spend the first three to five minutes brainstorming out ideas. Write down any ideas you might have on the topic or table. The purpose is to extract from the recesses of your memory any relevant information. In this stage, anything goes down. Write down any idea, regardless of how good it may initially seem. You can use either the scratch paper provided or the word processor to quickly jot down your thoughts and ideas. The word processor is highly recommended though, particularly if you are a fast typist.

Strength through Diversity

The best papers will contain diversity of examples and reasoning. As you brainstorm consider different perspectives. Not only are there two sides to every issue, but there are also countless perspectives that can be considered. On any

issue, different groups are impacted, with many reaching the same conclusion or position, but through vastly different paths. Try to “see” the issue through as many different eyes as you can. Look at it from every angle and from every vantage point. The more diverse the reasoning used, the more balanced the paper will become and the better the score.

Example:

The issue of free trade is not just two sided. It impacts politicians, domestic (US) manufacturers, foreign manufacturers, the US economy, the world economy, strategic alliances, retailers, wholesalers, consumers, unions, workers, and the exchange of more than just goods, but also of ideas, beliefs, and cultures. The more of these angles that you can approach the issue from, the more solid your reasoning and the stronger your position.

Furthermore, don’t just use information as to how the issue impacts other people. Draw liberally from your own experience and your own observations. Explain a personal experience that you have had and your own emotions from that moment. Anything that you’ve seen in your community or observed in society can be expanded upon to further round out your position on the issue.

Pick a Main Idea

Once you have finished with your creative flow, stop and review it. Which idea were you able to come up with the most supporting information? It’s extremely important that you pick an angle that will allow you to have a thorough and comprehensive coverage of the topic or table. This is not about your personal convictions, but about writing a concise rational discussion of an idea.

Weed the Garden

Every garden of ideas gets weeds in it. The ideas that you brainstormed over are going to be random pieces of information of mixed value. Go through it methodically and pick out the ones that are the best. The best ideas are strong points that it will be easy to write a few sentences or a paragraph about.

Create a Logical Flow

Now that you know which ideas you are going to use and focus upon, organize them. Put your writing points in a logical order. You have your main ideas that you will focus on, and must align them in a sequence that will flow in a smooth, sensible path from point to point, so that the reader will go smoothly from one idea to the next in a logical path. Readers must have a sense of continuity as they read your paper. You don't want to have a paper that rambles back and forth.

Start Your Engines

You have a logical flow of main ideas with which to start writing. Begin expanding on the issues in the sequence that you have set for yourself. Pace yourself. Don't spend too much time on any one of the ideas that you are expanding upon. You want to have time for all of them. Make sure you watch your time. If you have twenty minutes left to write out your ideas and you have ten ideas, then you can only use two minutes per idea. It can be a daunting task to cram a lot of information down in words in a short amount of time, but if you pace yourself, you can get through it all. If you find that you are falling behind, speed up. Move through each idea more quickly, spending less time to expand upon the idea in order to catch back up.

Once you finish expanding on each idea, go back to your brainstorming session up above, where you wrote out your ideas. Go ahead and erase the ideas as you write about them. This will let you see what you need to write about next, and also allow you to pace yourself and see what you have left to cover.

First Paragraph

Your first paragraph should have several easily identifiable features. First, it should have a quick description or paraphrasing of the topic or table. Use your own words to briefly explain what the topic or table is about.

Second, you should explain your opinion of the topic or table and give an explanation of why you feel that way. What is your decision or conclusion on the topic or table?

Third, you should list your “writing points”. What are the main ideas that you came up with earlier? This is your opportunity to outline the rest of your paper. Have a sentence explaining each idea that you will go intend further depth in additional paragraphs. If someone was to only read this paragraph, they should be able to get an “executive summary” of the entire paper.

Body Paragraph

Each of your successive paragraphs should expand upon one of the points listed in the main paragraph. Use your personal experience and knowledge to support each of your points. Examples should back up everything.

Conclusion Paragraph

Once you have finished expanding upon each of your main points, wrap it up. Summarize what you have said and covered in a conclusion paragraph. Explain once more your opinion of the topic or table and quickly review why you feel that way. At this stage, you have already backed up your statements, so there is no need to do that again. All you are doing is refreshing in the mind of the reader the main points that you have made.

Don't Panic

Panicking will not put down any more words on paper for you. Therefore, it isn't helpful. When you first see the topic or table, if your mind goes as blank as the page on which you have to write your paper, take a deep breath. Force yourself to mechanically go through the steps listed above.

Secondly, don't get clock fever. It's easy to be overwhelmed when you're looking at a page that doesn't seem to have much text, there is a lot of blank space further down, your mind is full of random thoughts and feeling confused, and the clock is ticking down faster than you would like. You brainstormed first so that

you don't have to keep coming up with ideas. If you're running out of time and you have a lot of ideas that you haven't expanded upon, don't be afraid to make some cuts. Start picking the best ideas that you have left and expand on those few. Don't feel like you have to write down and expand all of your ideas.

Check Your Work

It is more important to have a shorter paper that is well written and well organized, than a longer paper that is poorly written and poorly organized. Remember though that you will be penalized for answers shorter than the required minimum limit. Don't keep writing about a subject just to add words and sentences, and certainly don't start repeating yourself. Expand on the ideas that you identified in the brainstorming session and make sure that you save yourself a few minutes at the end to go back and check your work.

Leave time at the end, at least three minutes, to go back and check over your work. Reread and make sure that everything you've written makes sense and flows. Clean up any spelling or grammar mistakes that you might have made. If you see anything that needs to be moved around, such as a paragraph that would fit in better somewhere else, cut and paste it to that new location. Also, go ahead and erase any brainstorming ideas that you weren't able to expand upon and clean up any other extraneous information that you might have written that doesn't fit into your paper.

As you proofread, make sure there aren't any fragments or run-ons. Check for sentences that are too short or too long. If the sentence is too short, look to see if you have an identifiable subject and verb. If it is too long, break it up into two separate sentences. Watch out for any "big" words you may have used. It's good to use difficult vocabulary words, but only if you are positive that you are using them correctly. Your paper has to be correct, it doesn't have to be fancy. You're not trying to impress anyone with your vocabulary, just your ability to develop and express ideas.

Shortcut Keys

If you're taking the IELTS on the computer, spend some time on your keyboard getting familiar with the shortcut keys to cut, copy, and paste. It will help you to quickly move text around on your paper. First highlight the text you wish to move or copy and then type:

Ctrl+C = copy

Ctrl+X = cut

Ctrl+V = paste

You must hold down the ctrl key and then tap the "c", "x", or "v" key to perform the desired function.

Final Note

Depending on your test taking preferences and personality, the essay writing will probably be your hardest or your easiest section. You are required to go through the entire process of writing a paper very quickly, which can be quite a challenge.

Focus upon each of the steps listed above. Go through the process of creative flow first, generating ideas and thoughts about the topic or table. Then organize those ideas into a smooth logical flow. Pick out the ones that are best from the list you have created. Decide which main idea or angle of the topic or table you will discuss.

Create a recognizable structure in your paper, with an introductory paragraph explaining what you have decided upon, and what your main points will be. Use the body paragraphs to expand on those main points and have a conclusion that wraps up the topic or table.

Save a few moments to go back and review what you have written. Clean up any minor mistakes that you might have had and give it those last few critical

touches that can make a huge difference. Finally, be proud and confident of what you have written!

The Speaking Module

The Speaking Module of the IELTS consists of a 60 minute module with three parts.

Part 1

You will need to answer general questions about yourself, your homes/families, your jobs/studies, your interests, and a range of familiar topic areas in four to five minutes.

Part 2

You will be given a verbal prompt on a card and asked to speak about a particular topic (listed on the card). You will have one minute to prepare before speaking at length, and will need to speak between one and two minutes. Then the examiner will ask you one or two follow up questions.

Part 3

You and the examiner will engage in a discussion of more abstract concepts and issues which will be linked to the topic you discussed in Part 2. The discussion will last between four and five minutes.

You will be scored on how well you are able to communicate effectively in English.

Of all the test modules on IELTS, this is the easiest to prepare for. This is the test module that you can practice anywhere, in your car, in your room, on the phone, by yourself or with someone else. After you successfully pass IELTS, you will be speaking English a lot, so you might as well prepare by speaking it at every opportunity beforehand.

Exhausting the Possibilities

Part 1 will ask basic questions. There are only so many possible basic questions that can be asked about someone. You can easily be prepared for every possibility. Go through and write down all the possibilities and a good answer for each. When you're asked about your family, don't have to struggle to come up with descriptions for your family members. Practice ahead of time and know what you're going to say. Right now as you're reading this, stop and take a minute to answer each of these following questions. If you were asked these in an interview, what would you say?

1. Please describe yourself.
2. Please describe your family.
3. Please describe your home.
4. Please describe some of your interests.
5. Please describe your job.
6. Please describe your studies

This is important practice. Make sure that you can spend a minute or so answering each of these questions without having to take time to think of a good response. These are basic questions and you should have your basic answers ready.

Tell a Story

Movie making is a multi-billion dollar industry. Why? It's because everyone likes to hear a good story, and the best movies contain great stories. The Speaking Module interview can be a big aggravation for both sides. Usually, it is tense, uncomfortable, and boring for both the interviewer and the test taker.

Think about your favorite relatives. In many cases, they are your favorite because they are such raconteurs, or good storytellers. These are your aunts and uncles that can turn a simple trip to the grocery store into high adventure and will keep you captivated and entertained. Even if you're not a natural storyteller,

with a little thought and practice, even you can turn your dull past experiences into exciting exploits.

Stories are your strongest weapon for captivating the interviewer and demonstrating your mastery of speaking English. The questions in Part 2 of the Speaking Module literally beg for stories to be told. These need to be compelling stories, real time drama, and you're the hero. You want the interviewer begging for more, asking follow-up questions, eager to hear how it ends. Once you begin a quick exciting story, you set the tone of the interview, and you will determine what will be the follow-up questions.

The easiest way to prepare for these Part 2 questions is to scour your memory for any exciting instance in your past. Perhaps where you played a leadership role or accomplished a goal. These can be from any part of your past, during your education, at home with your family, projects at work, or anything that you might have had a part in. Identify the main characteristics of the story, you want to have things straight. Make sure you know the basics of what happened, who was involved, why it occurred, and how the events unfolded sequentially. You certainly don't want to stumble over the facts and repeat yourself during the interview.

One Size Fits All

These basic stories are building blocks. Just as a piece of lumber can be cut into many different shapes and have many completely unique uses, each of your stories does not only answer one unique question. Your stories are one size fits all. With practice you will find that you can use the same story to answer two seemingly unrelated questions.

For example, a question about teamwork and working under pressure can both be answered by a story about your experience playing intramural basketball. The story could describe how you had to work as a team in order to get into the

playoffs, spending time practicing together, coordinating plays, whatever was necessary for the team to advance. Alternatively, the story could focus upon the clutch shots that you made that season in order to win the game in the last few seconds of play under enormous pressure. The basic story is the same: your experiences playing basketball.

The questions were different, but you customized the story to fit the question. With practice you should be able to answer almost any question with just a few stock stories that can be customized.

Find the Bridges

Some questions will lend themselves more readily to a story than others. You must have a set of basic stories ready that can be modified to fit the occasion. You must “find the bridges” in the questions offered to make sure your stories get told.

In WWII, the US Army used Bailey bridges. Bailey bridges were bridges made of prefabricated steel sections that were carried around and could be thrown together at a moment’s notice, allowing the army to move quickly across any obstacle and get to where they wanted to go.

You need to find bridges, i.e. opportunities to tell your stories. Look for any chance to turn a standard question about anything, into a bridge to begin telling your story. For example, “What is your job title?”

On the surface that might not seem like the ideal bridge, but with a little insight your response might become:

“My job title is Product Line Manager. I was responsible for everything from the development of new products, to the obsolescence of old products. Marketing, sales, engineering, and production of the entire product line fell under my

responsibility. One of the products was even my own idea based on feedback I received from my interactions with our customers. In the first year, it alone had achieved a sales level of over..."

The key to remember is that just because a question is asked as a closed ended question (yes/no, or one word answers), doesn't mean that you have to answer it as a closed ended question. Answer the question asked, but then find a way to develop your answer and a bridge to a good story of yours. With an open mind, the most closed ended of questions can become a launch pad into a story.

Pregnant Pause

A good story can usually wind its way down a long path. There is always a danger that you will begin to bore the interviewer, who may wonder if an end is in sight. Some interviewers may get worried that they won't be able to get through the fifteen questions on their list during the allotted time. Therefore, find natural breaks in your story and pause for a second. If the interviewer maintains eye contact or asks continuation questions, then keep going. But this will give them a chance to stop the story and ask a different question if they are getting bored and want to move on.

Taking the Final Step

By trying to answer each of your Part 2 questions with a basic story, you will be able to transition nicely into the final step, Part 3. Part 3 questions are based upon your answers to Part 2 questions and will be asked at the interviewer's discretion. By using the story techniques listed above, you will have already determined the path that the interviewer will take with his follow-up Part 3 questions. The interviewer will naturally ask questions that tie into your story and you will already be prepared for those questions and will ace Part 3 as easily as the others.

Practice Makes Perfect

Don't try to answer every question by shooting from the hip. You'll spend most of your time trying to think of what happened and repeating yourself. Think of the classic stories that you could tell and then practice going over them with your friends, explaining how you successfully achieved the goal, or took charge and gave leadership to your group project. You don't want to have the story memorized, because it will become stale in the telling, but you want it to be smooth. This story must be live and in living color, where the interviewer can see himself taking part on the sidelines and watching the situation take place. Have your friends and family members quiz you by asking you random questions and see how well you can adapt to the question and give a lucid response.

Special Report: How Your IELTS Score is Viewed, and What This Means for You

For your IELTS score, you will be grouped in one of nine bands.

Band	Description	Meaning
9	Expert User	Fluent with complete understanding
8	Very Good User	Full operational command, occasional inaccuracies
7	Good User	Operational command, occasional inaccuracies
6	Competent User	Effective command, inaccuracies
5	Modest User	Partial command, many mistakes
4	Limited User	Limited command, frequent problems
3	Extremely Limited User	Only general understanding
2	Intermittent User	Only basic understanding with difficulty
1	Non User	No language ability
0	Did Not Take Test	N/A

If you are on the upper edge of one of these bands, it is definitely profitable to work your way into the next one by studying and practicing.

Special Report: What Jobs Require Which IELTS Scores

Below is a list of different jobs and what each IELTS score band means to that occupation. If you have a lower IELTS score, you might want to consider either studying more and trying to increase your score, or a less linguistically demanding position.

	Linguistically demanding academic courses	Linguistically less demanding academic courses	Linguistically demanding training courses	Linguistically less demanding training courses
Band	(Medicine, Law, Linguistics, Journalism, Library Studies)	(Agriculture, Pure Mathematics, Technology, Computer-based work, Telecommunications)	(Air Traffic Control, Engineering, Pure Applied Sciences, Industrial Safety)	(Animal Husbandry, Catering, Fire Services)
9.0-7.5	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
7.0	Probably Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.5	English Study Needed	Probably Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
6.0	English Study Needed	English Study Needed	Probably Acceptable	Acceptable
5.5	English Study Needed	English Study Needed	English Study Needed	Probably Acceptable

Special Report: Which IELTS Study Guides and Practice Tests Are Worth Your Time

We believe the following guides present uncommon value to our customers who wish to “really study” for the IELTS. While our manual teaches some valuable tricks and tips that no one else covers, learning the basic coursework tested on the IELTS is also helpful, though more time consuming.

Practice Tests

IELTS Practice Tests

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0521497671/actsecrets-20>

(Click above to order)

This is the ONLY source for REAL IELTS tests. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED only for the practice tests- disregard their advice.

Study Guide

Cambridge IELTS 3

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0521013364/actsecrets-20>

Cabridge IELTS 3 is THE best comprehensive coursework guide to the IELTS. If you want to spend a couple months in preparation to squeeze every last drop out of your score, buy this book!

Appendix: Common Idioms and Expressions

Here is a list of the most common idioms that you could expect to encounter on the Listening Module.

ace: make an "A" on a test, homework assignment, project, etc.

"Somebody said you aced the test, Dave. That's great!"

all right (1): expression of reluctant agreement.

A: "Come to the party with me. Please!"

B: "Oh, **all right**. I don't want to, but I will."

all right (2): fair; not particularly good.

A: "How's your chemistry class?"

B: "It's **all right**, I guess, but it's not the best class I've ever had."

all right (3): unharmed; in satisfactory condition.

A: "You don't look normal. Are you **all right?**"

B: "Yes, but I have a headache."

and then some: and much more besides.

A: "I'd guess your new computer cost about \$2,000. "

B: "It cost that much **and then some** because I also bought extra RAM and VRAM."

antsy: restless; impatient and tired of waiting.

"I hope Katy calls soon. Just sitting around and waiting is making me **antsy**."

as easy as pie: very easy.

"I thought you said this was a difficult problem. It isn't. In fact, it's **as easy as pie**."

at the eleventh hour: at the last minute; almost too late.

"Yes, I got the work done in time. I finished it **at the eleventh hour**, but I wasn't late.

bad-mouth: say unkind, unflattering, embarrassing (and probably untrue) things about someone.

A: "I don't believe what Bob said. Why is he bad-mouthing me?"

B: "He's probably jealous of your success."

be a piece of cake: be very easy.

A: "Bob said the test was difficult, but I thought it was **a piece of cake**."

be all ears: be eager to hear what someone has to say.

A: "I just got an e-mail message from our old friend Sally."

B: "Tell me what she said. I'm **all ears!**"

be broke: be without money.

"No, I can't lend you ten dollars. I'm completely **broke** until payday."

be fed up with (with someone or something): be out of patience (with someone or something);
be very tired of someone or something.

"Bill, you're too careless with your work. I'm **fed up with** apologizing for your mistakes!"

be in and out: be at and away from a place during a particular time.

"Could we postpone our meeting until tomorrow? I expect to **be in and out** of the office most of the day today."

be on the go: be very busy (going from one thing or project to another).

"I'm really tired. I've **been on the go** all week long."

be on the road: be traveling.

"You won't be able to contact me tomorrow because I'll **be on the road.**"

be over: be finished; end.

"I can't see you until around 4 o'clock. My meetings won't **be over** until then."

be up and running: (for a technological process) be operational; be ready to use .

"Dave's ESL Cafe on the Web has **been up and running** since December 1995."

be used to (+Ving/noun): be accustomed to; not uncomfortable with.

"It won't be hard to get up at 5:00 AM. I'm **used to** getting up early."

beat: exhausted; very tired (adj.).

"This has been a long day. I'm **beat!**"

beat around the bush: evade an issue; avoid giving a direct answer.

"Quit **beating around the bush!** If you don't want to go with me, just tell me!"

beat one's brains out: try very hard to understand or do something.

"Can you help me with this problem? I've been **beating my brains out** with it, but I just can't solve it."

Beats me: I have no idea.

A: "What time's the party?"

B: "**Beats me!**"

before long: soon.

A: "I'm really tired of working."

B: "Just be patient. The weekend will be here **before long.**"

bent out of shape: needlessly worried about something.

"I know you're worried about your job interview, but don't get **bent out of shape**. You'll do just fine."

bite off more than one can chew: take responsibility for more than one can manage.

"I'm really behind with my project. Can you help me? I'm afraid I **bit off more than I could chew!**"

blabbermouth: a very talkative person--especially one who says things that should be kept secret.

"Don't say anything to Bob unless you want the whole office to know. Bob's quite a **blabbermouth**."

blow one's top: become extremely angry.

A: "Was your father upset when you came home at 3 AM?"
B: "He was *more than* upset. He **blew his top!**"

boom box: portable cassette/CD player.

"Don't forget to bring your **boom box** to the picnic!"

the bottom line: the most essential information.

"The discussion lasted many hours. **The bottom line** was that the XYZ Company isn't for sale."

Break a leg!: Good luck!

"I understand you have a job interview tomorrow. **Break a leg!**"

break someone's heart: make someone feel very disappointed/discouraged/sad.

"Joe **broke his mother's heart** when he dropped out of school."

broke: without money.

A: "Can you lend me 10 dollars?"
B: "I'm afraid not. I'm **broke**."

buck(s): dollar(s).

"The cheapest tickets for the concert cost 25 **bucks**. Do you still want to go?"

bug: annoy; bother.

"I'm trying to concentrate! Don't **bug** me!"

bull-headed: stubborn; inflexible.

"Don't be so **bull-headed**. Why can't you admit that others' opinions are just as good as yours?"

a bundle: a lot of money.

A: "Your new car is really nice."
B: "It should be. It cost me **a bundle!**"

burn the midnight oil: study/work all night or until very, very late at night.

"I'm not ready for the test tomorrow. I guess I'll have to
burn the the midnight oil."

bushed: very tired; exhausted.

"I'm going to lie down for a while. I'm really **bushed.**"

by oneself: alone and without help.

"I can't do this **by myself**. Can you help me?"

by the skin of one's teeth: barely succeed in doing something.

"I'll have to start earlier the next time. This time I only finished **by the skin of my teeth.**"

call it a day: stop work for the day.

"It's late and you've accomplished a lot. Why don't you **call it a day?**"

can't make heads or tails of something: can't understand something at all; find something confusing and illogical.

"I **can't make heads or tails of** your e-mail. Were you having problems with your computer?"

catch one's eye: attract one's attention/interest.

"This brochure about Tahiti **caught my eye** when I was at the travel agency."

catch some Zs: sleep for a while; take a nap.

"You look tired, Dave. Why don't you **catch some Zs?**"

change one's mind: decide to do something different from what had been decided earlier.

A: "Why are you working this week? I thought you were going to be on vacation."
B: "I changed my mind. I'm taking my vacation next month."

chicken (adjective or noun): cowardly.

"Fred will never ask Lucy for a date. He's **chicken / a chicken.**"

chow: food.

"How's the **chow** in the university cafeteria?"

chow down: eat.

"It's almost 6:00. Are you ready to **chow down?**"

a cinch: something that's very easy to do.

A: How was the test?

B: It was **a cinch**. I finished it quickly and I know that all my answers were correct."

cool (also *kewl*): neat, special, wonderful.

"The ESL Cafe on the Web is really **cool!**"

Cool it!: calm down.

"There's no need to be so upset. Just **cool it!**"

cost (someone) an arm and a leg: cost a lot; be very expensive.

A: "Your new car is really nice."

B: "It should be. It **cost (me) an arm and a leg!**"

couch potato: someone who spends too much time watching TV.

"You're a real **couch potato**, Jay. You need to get more exercise!"

cram: try to learn as much as possible in a very short time.

"Sidney did well on the test because he crammed for it. However, he probably won't remember any of the information a couple of days from now."

crash course: short course designed to give a lot of knowledge/information in a very short time.

"Tom's company is sending him to a business meeting in Istanbul. Should he take a **crash course** in Turkish?"

Cut it out!: stop doing something (that's annoying).

"You kids are making too much noise. **Cut it out!**"

Don't count your chickens until (before) they hatch (they've hatched).: Don't assume that something will happen until it *has* happened.

A: I'm sure that I'm going to win a lot of money in Las Vegas."

B: "**Don't count your chickens until they hatch!**"

dicey: uncertain; taking too much of a chance.

A: A friend of mine says I can make a lot of money if I buy stock in the XYZ company. Should I do it?

B: I wouldn't if I were you. The chances for success are too **dicey**."

ditch class: skip class/play hookey.

"You shouldn't have **ditched class** yesterday. We had an unannounced test."

do a bang-up job: do a very good job; do very well at something.

"Have you seen Frank's home page? He **did a bang-up job** with it."

down in the dumps: depressed; "blue."

A: "Is something wrong?"

B: "Not really, but I feel kind of **down in the dumps**."

drop someone a line: write to someone.

"I haven't written to my parents for a long time. I'd better **drop them a line** today or tomorrow."

drag one's feet: delay; take longer than necessary to do something.

"Joe should have finished his project a week ago. Why is he **dragging his feet?**"

an eager beaver: a person who is always willing to volunteer or do extra work.

"Jan is certainly **an eager beaver**. Any time there's work to be done, she's the first to say she'll help."

Easy does it!: Be very careful! / Don't do anything too fast or too hard!

A: "I'm going to move the table just a little further from the window."

B: "**Easy does it!** If you move too fast, you might knock over the plant!"

an egghead: a very intelligent person.

"Jake didn't make very good grades in school, but his sister was a real **egghead**."

elbow grease: hard work; effort.

"Yes, the car is pretty dirty, but it'll look nice again with a little **elbow grease**."

every other _____ : alternately; omitting the second one in each group of two.

"In your essays, please write on **every other line**. That will make the essays much easier to read."

far-fetched: difficult to accept; difficult to believe.

"That story's pretty **far-fetched**. Nobody's going to believe it."

feel blue: feel sad and depressed.

"I'm **feeling blue** because I haven't had any mail except bills for a long, long time."

fire someone: dismiss someone from a job because of poor performance.

"If you continue to be late for work, the company will **fire you**."

feel puny: feel unwell, ill.

"Ted was **feeling puny** yesterday, so he decided not to go to work."

fender-bender: automobile accident.

"Traffic was really slow on the freeway this morning because of a **fender-bender** in one of the westbound lanes."

for ages: for a very long time.

"Where's Marie? I haven't seen her **for ages**."

get going: leave.

"Look at the time! I'd better **get going**!"

get it: understand something (often negative).

"I don't **get it**. What do you mean?"

get a kick out of something: find something amusing.

"I really **get a kick out of** listening to children talk. They say some very funny things."

get lost!: go away

"I wish he'd **get lost** and stop bothering me. I don't want to talk to him!"

get on one's nerves: irritate someone; make someone upset.

"I know you like that song, but it's **getting on my nerves**. Can you play something else?"

get a move on: hurry

"If you don't want to be late, you'd better **get a move on**."

get one's wires crossed: be confused or mistaken about something.

A: "Bill said there was a meeting this morning. Don't we have one?"

B: "No. The meeting's tomorrow. I guess Bill **got his wires crossed.**"

get out of hand: become out of control; become badly managed.

"Your absences are **getting out of hand**, Bob. You'd better do something quickly to improve the situation if you want to keep your job."

Get real!: Be realistic! / Don't be naive.

A: "I'm going to Las Vegas. I know I'll win a lot of money!"

B: "Get real! You'll probably *lose* a lot of money!"

get up and go: energy.

"I'm really tired. I don't have any **get up and go.**"

give someone a hand (1): help someone.

"I can't do this alone. Can you **give me a hand?**"

give someone a hand (2): applaud (to show respect or appreciation for someone/something).

"Dave's done a wonderful job with The ESL Café on the Web.
Let's **give him a hand!**"

a (real) go-getter: a (very) ambitious, hard-working person.

"I'm not surprised that Jean finished before anyone else. She's **a real go-getter.**"

go with the flow: take things as they come.

"There's no need to worry. Everything will be OK if you just **go with the flow.**"

grab a bite: get something to eat.

"I'm really hungry. Would you like to **grab a bite** with me?"

green: inexperienced.

"I don't think you can depend on Jack to do that job by himself. He's too **green**."

had ('d) better: be obliged to; should (strong).

"You'd **better** leave soon. If you don't, you'll miss your bus."

hassle (noun): a troublesome situation; something troublesome that interrupts one's normal routine.

"I know it's a **hassle** to complete this form now, but Mr. Rogers needs it in his office by the end of the day."

hard feelings: anger; animosity; bitter feelings.

A: "I'm sorry that Jim got the job instead of you."

B: "I have no **hard feelings** toward him; I know that he had stronger qualifications."

hard-headed: stubborn; inflexible; unwilling to change.

"I don't think Julie will change her mind. She's pretty **hard-headed**."

hassle (verb): annoy; bother; interrupt one's normal routine.

"If you'd stop **hassling** me, I might get this finished on time!"

have one's hands full: be extremely busy.

A: "Will you be able to help us this afternoon?"

B: "I'm afraid not. I'll **have my hands full** trying to finish my research paper."

have/has ('ve/"s) got: have/has.

"Dave's **got** a son whose name is Benjamin and a daughter whose name is Shannon."

have something down pat: know/understand something completely and thoroughly.

"I know I did well on the test. I **had** all the material **down pat**."

head honcho: person in charge; top boss.

"Dave's the **head honcho** of the ESL Cafe on the Web."

hit the books: study.

"I wish I could go to the movies, but I've got to **hit the books**."

hit the hay: go to bed; go to sleep.

"It's late, so I guess I'll **hit the hay**."

hit the sack: go to bed.

"I'm really tired. I think I'll **hit the sack**."

How come?: Why? (statement word order).

"**How come** you weren't at the party?"

if I had my druthers: if I could do what I wanted/preferred.

"**If I had my druthers**, I'd stay home from work today."

in over one's head: in a situation that is too much / too difficult for one to manage.

"Do you have time to help me? I thought I could do this myself, but I'm afraid I'm **in over my head**. I just can't handle things alone."

inside out: with the inner part on the outside and the outer part on the inside.

"Why are you wearing your tee shirt **inside out**?"

in stock: in supply and available to buy / sell.

"I'm sorry, but we just sold our last pair of hiking boots. If you come back at the end of the week, however, we should have some more **in stock**.

in the black: profitable; not showing a financial loss.

"What did you do to increase profit and eliminate losses?
We've been **in the black** for two months in a row."

in the red: unprofitable; showing a financial loss.

"We have to do something to increase profit and decrease losses.
We've been **in the red** for two months in a row."

in time: not late.

"I thought I was going to be late for my flight, but it was delayed, so I was still **in time**."

jump all over someone: severely criticize / find fault with someone.

A: "What's wrong with Joe?"
B: "He's feeling bad because his boss **jumped all over him** this morning."

jump the gun: do something before it's time to do it.

A: "How did Marsha know about the party? It was supposed to be a surprise."

B: "Chuck **jumped the gun**. Without thinking, he said, 'I'm bringing the cake at your party;
I hope you like it!'

jump to conclusions: decide something too quickly and without thinking about it or considering all the facts.

A: "Angela just doesn't like me. She won't even say hello."
B: "You're **jumping to conclusions**. Actually, she's very shy."

junk mail: unsolicited mail (usually advertisements for something you're not interested in).

"I didn't have any letters today--only **junk mail**."

keep an eye on: check something regularly.

"You're busy, so you'll need to **keep an eye on** the time.
Remember that we have to leave at 4:30."

keep an eye out for: watch for.

"I'll **keep an eye out for** John. If I see him, I'll tell him you want to talk to him."

keep one's chin up: remain brave and confident in a difficult situation;
don't despair or worry too much.

"I know that things have been difficult for you recently,
but **keep your chin up**. Everything will be better soon."

keep one's nose to the grindstone: stay diligent; steadily work hard,
without breaks or an uneven pace.

"If I **keep my nose to the grindstone**, I should be finished by the end of the day."

keep/stay in touch (with someone): remain informed (about someone) / in contact
(with someone) by writing, calling, sending e-mail, etc. on a regular basis.

"I haven't seen Frank for two or three years but we **keep** (stay) **in touch** by e-mail."

keep one's fingers crossed: hope for the best.

A: "How did you do on the test?"

B: "I think I passed, but I won't know until tomorrow.
I'm **keeping my fingers crossed!**"

kid (noun): child.

A: "You have three **kids**, don't you?"

B: "That's right. I have two girls and a boy."

kid (verb): playfully say something that isn't true.

"I was **kidding** when I said my teacher was a monster. She's strict, but she's actually a very nice person."

kind of: rather; more or less; a little.

"I'm feeling **kind of** hungry. I think I'll make myself a sandwich."

a klutz: an awkward, uncoordinated person.

"Don't ask Jeff to dance with you. He's a real **klutz** and will probably step on your feet!"

a know-it-all: someone who acts as if he/she knows everything--as if no one can tell him/her anything that he/she doesn't already know.

"Don't try to make any suggestions to Bob. He's a **know-it-all** and won't pay attention to anything you say."

know something backwards and forwards: know/understand something completely and thoroughly.

"If you have a question about html tags, ask Susan. She knows html **backwards and forwards.**"

know something inside out: know/understand something thoroughly.

"If you have a question about grammar, ask Dr. Martin. She **knows** grammar **inside out.**"

lend someone a hand: help someone.

"I can't do this alone. Can you **lend me a hand?**"

leave well enough alone: do nothing (because doing something would make things worse).

"Don't tell Jim how to discipline his children. **Leave well enough alone.**"

a let-down: a disappointment; something that's very disappointing.

"It must've been quite a **let-down** not to be chosen for that job.
I know you really hoped you would get it."

Let sleeping dogs lie.: Don't cause problems by doing something when it isn't necessary.

"I know that what Julie said made you angry, but **let sleeping dogs lie.**
If you say or do anything, you'll only make things worse."

live from hand to mouth: survive on very little money; have only enough money to pay for basic needs.

"Chuck and Alice are **living from hand to mouth** since Chuck lost his job."

live and let live: don't unnecessarily make things difficult;
do as you wish and let others do as they wish.

"I'm not going to criticize Alice's family just because their habits
are a little strange. My motto is '**Live and let live.**'"

a low blow: a big disappointment.

A: "Fred seems depressed. Is he OK?"
B: "He's OK, but not good. It was **a low blow** for him to be laid off from his job."

lousy: terrible; very bad.

"Why did you speak so rudely to your grandmother? That was a **lousy** thing to do!"

macho: super masculine / masculine to an extreme (in appearance and behavior).

"Her husband would never agree to help with the housework;
he's too **macho** to do that."

make a mountain out of a molehill: make something seem much more important than

it really is.

"Calm down. There's really nothing to worry about.
You're **making a mountain out of a molehill**."

make up one's mind: decide what to do.

A: Where are you going on your vacation?
B: Maybe Canada, maybe Mexico. I can't **make up my mind**."

No way!: Absolutely not! / Definitely not!

A: "You didn't open this letter addressed to me, did you?"
B: "**No way!** I'd *never* read look at else's mail!"

nosh: snack.

"There's plenty in the refrigerator if you want something to **nosh** on."

Not on your life!: Absolutely not! (a strong "no").

A: "Someone said you cheated on the test. Did you?"
B: "**Not on your life!**"

now and then: occasionally; from time to time.

A: "Do you see Jennifer often?"
B: "No, not really. I see her **now and then**, but not regularly."

nuke: heat in a microwave.

"If your coffee's cold, just **nuke** it for about a minute."

nuts: crazy.

A: "Stuart says some really strange things sometimes."
B: "Sometimes? All the time! He's **nuts**!"

OK: (1) yes (to show agreement--often reluctant agreement).

A: "Come on, Al. We really need your help!"
B: "Oh, **OK**; I may be crazy, but I'll help you."

OK: (2) neither good nor bad; so-so.

A: "How was the movie?"
B: "**OK**, I guess, but I've seen better ones."

OK: (3) in satisfactory condition; well.

A: "You look awfully pale. Are you **OK**?"
B: "Actually, I'm not. I have a terrible headache."

OK: (4) approve (verb).

A: "Did your boss **OK** your vacation plans?"
B: "No, but he said that taking them two weeks later would be all right."

on the dot: exactly at a given time.

"We're leaving at 9:00 **on the dot**. If you're late, we'll go without you."

on time: at the scheduled time.

"It's getting late. You'd better hurry if you want to get to work **on time**."

(on the) cutting edge: using the most recent technology.

"The university's computer lab is **(on the) cutting edge**. It has all the latest hardware and software."

once in a while: occasionally; from time to time.

A: "Would you like coffee or tea?"
B: "Coffee, please. I drink tea **once in a while**, but I generally drink coffee."

over one's head: too difficult or complicated for someone to understand.

"This explanation of cgi scripting is **over my head**.
Can you explain it in a less technical way?"

pay the piper: face the consequences for something you've done.

"I stayed up too late tonight. Tomorrow I'll have to **pay the piper**."

plastic: credit card(s).

"Oh, no! I forgot to get any cash! I hope this restaurant accepts **plastic**!"

pooped: very tired; exhausted.

"I went to bed really early last night. I was **pooped**!"

pop quiz: unannounced short test.

"You shouldn't have missed class yesterday. We had a **pop quiz**."

pretty (adv.): rather; somewhat.

"That car's **pretty** expensive. Are you sure you can afford it?"

pull an all-nighter: study or work all night without getting any sleep.

A: "You look really tired."

B: "I am. I **pulled an all-nighter** to get ready for the meeting this morning."

pull someone's leg: tease someone by trying to make her/him believe something that's exaggerated or untrue.

A: "Wow! Carl has done some really amazing things!"

B: "Don't believe everything he tells you. He was probably **pulling your leg**."

quite a few: several; numerous.

"I don't think I can meet you after work. I have **quite a few** errands that I have to do."

a quick study: someone who learns new things quickly and easily.

A: "Annie seems to be doing well at her new job."

B: "I'm not surprised. She's **a quick study.**"

R and R: rest and relaxation (a vacation).

"I think you're working too hard, Dave. You need some **R and R.**"

rain or shine: (describing something scheduled) no matter what the weather is.

"We're leaving tomorrow, **rain or shine.**"

rain cats and dogs: rain very hard.

"You can't leave just now! It's **raining cats and dogs** and you don't have an umbrella or raincoat!"

read someone's mind: know what someone is thinking.

A: "I'll be you're thinking of what you're going to have for dinner."

B: "Hey, did you **read my mind?**"

A: "No. I just know that you're always hungry and lunch was several hours ago!"

rub someone the wrong way: irritate someone; bother or annoy someone.

"All my little brother says is 'Why?' Usually I'm patient with him, but sometimes all his questions **rub me the wrong way.**"

run-down: (1) not well; weak; fatigued.

"Are you eating regularly and getting enough sleep? You look **run-down.**"

run-down: (2) in poor condition; needing repair.

"This must be a poor neighborhood. All the buildings look really **run-down**."

__ -savvy: knowledgeable about ___. .

"If you're having problems with your hard disk, talk to Jim.
He's very **computer-savvy**. "

schmooze: make relaxed, casual conversation.

"No, we weren't talking about anything important.
We were just **schmoozing**."

shoot the breeze: make relaxed, casual conversation.

"No, we weren't talking about anything important.
We were just **shooting the breeze**."

sleep on it: take at least a day to think about something before making a decision.

"The job that you're offering me sounds really good, but I'd like
to **sleep on it** before giving you my final decision."

a snap: something that's very easy to do.

A: "Is your job difficult?"

B: "No, actually it's **a snap**. In fact, it's so easy that it's a little bit boring."

Someone's made his/her own bed; now let him/her lie in it.: Someone has caused his/her own problems; he/she will have to solve them himself/herself.

A: Jim upset everyone when he got angry at the meeting. Can we do anything to make the situation better?

B: No. **He's made his own bed; now let him lie in it.**"

sooner or later: eventually.

"You've been working too hard for too long. If you don't relax a little,
sooner or later you're going to get sick."

sort of: rather; somewhat.

"I think I'll lie down. I feel **sort of** dizzy."

so-so: fair; not particularly good.

A: "How're you doing?"

B: "**So-so.** I've been better, but I've also been worse."

state of the art: using the latest technology.

"The company is very proud of the equipment in its computer room. It's **state of the art.**"

Step on it!: Hurry up!

"**Step on it!** The taxi will be here at any time and you're not even dressed!"

take it easy: relax.

"I don't have any special vacation plans. I'm just going to **take it easy.**"

tell a white lie: say something that isn't true in order not to hurt or offend someone.

"The cake that Susan made tasted terrible, but I knew that she made it because she wanted to please me, so when she asked if I liked it, I **told a white lie** and said it was good."

toss something: throw something away; put something in the trash.

"These shoes are worn out. I guess I'll have to **toss them.**"

tough: difficult.

"Question number three is a **tough** one. Do you know the answer?"

There, there.: expression of comfort.

"**There, there**. Everything's going to be OK."

tight-fisted: very frugal; unwilling to spend money unnecessarily.

A: Do you think Charlie will donate any money to the activities fund?
B: No way! He's too **tight-fisted**!

a tightwad: someone who is very frugal and unwilling to spend money unnecessarily.

A: Will Charlie donate any money to the activities fund?
B: Absolutely not! He's a real **tightwad**!"

tricky: easily confused or misunderstood.

"This problem is **tricky**. I don't really understand it."

two-faced: deceitful; disloyal; someone who pretends to be a friend but isn't.

"I thought he was my friend, but he's **two-faced**. He says nice things to me when we're together, but makes jokes about me when we aren't."

under the weather: ill; sick; unwell.

"Ted was feeling **under the weather** yesterday, so he decided not to go to work."

until hell freezes over: forever.

"Chris can practice the piano **until hell freezes over**, but he'll never play well because he's tone-deaf."

Note: This expression is used to describe something that will not change, no matter how long or how often it's done.

until you're blue in the face: forever.

"You can talk **until you're blue in the face**, but I won't change my mind."

Note: This expression is used in the same way as "until hell freezes over."

update: make current; add information to show what has happened recently.

"I need to **update** my résumé. It doesn't show what I've done during the last year."

upside down: with the bottom part on top and the top part on bottom.

"Put the glasses **upside down** in the dishwasher. If you don't do that, they'll fill with water and you'll have to dry them by hand."

used to (+ V): an action that was true in the past but is not true now.

"Jane **used to** live in Austin, Texas. She lives in San Francisco now."

Was my face red!: I was very embarrassed.

"When I got to the meeting I noticed that I was wearing one black sock and one brown one. **Was my face red!**"

wear out one's welcome: make someone uncomfortable by visiting too long.

A: "Can't you stay two or three more days?"

B: "No. I don't want to **wear out my welcome.**"

wet behind the ears: inexperienced and naive.

"Don't include Fred as part of the bargaining team. He's just started working here and is still too **wet behind the ears.**"

What for?: Why?

A: "Come here for a minute. I need you."

B: "What for?"

Note: "What" and "for" can be separated--with "for" at the end of the question:

B: "What do you need me for?"

What's up?: What's new? What's happening?

"Hi, Dave. **What's up?**"

a white lie: a lie that is told to avoid offending someone or hurting his / her feelings.

"The cake that Susan made tasted terrible, but I knew that she made it because she wanted to please me, so when she asked if I liked it, I told a white lie and said it was good."

wishy-washy: uncommitted; without an opinion of one's own.

"Don't be so **wishy-washy**. Tell us how you really feel."

with bells on: very eagerly; with the feeling that one will have a very good time.

A: "Are you going to Sandra's party?"
B: "I'll be there **with bells on!**"

would ('d) just as soon: would ('d) rather; prefer.

"I know we have a lot of work to do, but I'm tired. **I'd just as soon** leave and finish tomorrow. Is that OK with you?"

a yes-man: someone who tries to get approval by agreeing with everyone.

A: "Why does the boss think Arnold is so intelligent?"
B: "Because Arnold is **a yes-man**. He agrees with everything the boss says!"

You don't say!: Really? / Is that really true?

A: "Have you heard the news? Jessica got married!"
B: "**You don't say!**"

You've got to be kidding!: You can't be serious! (What you said can't be true. What you said is very surprising/hard to believe.) "

A: "Did you know that Bob quit his job?"