

# **AVOID THE 10 MOST COMMON MISTAKES IN IELTS SPEAKING**

A SIMPLE WAY TO GET A HIGHER SCORE



**BY KEITH O'HARE**

## Contents:

1. Letting your nerves control your test
2. Giving memorised answers
3. Giving short answers
4. Not listening to the question
5. Going off topic
6. Rambling (talking without structure)
7. Using too many long, memorised connectives
8. Not using the 1-minute preparation time well
9. Not understanding what the examiner is evaluating
10. Trying to have a conversation with the examiner

My name is Keith O'Hare and I run the website, online courses and classes at **Keith Speaking Academy**.



This book presents some of the most common mistakes students make when taking IELTS speaking.

Find out WHY these mistakes are made, and HOW you can avoid them to ensure you will get a higher score in your speaking test.

Enjoy reading and if you would like more tips and resources to help you succeed in the IELTS Speaking test, pop over to my website.

**<https://keithspeakingacademy.com>**

# 1. Letting your nerves destroy your test

This affects so many people.

Many candidates get too nervous and it affects their performance.

It is natural, but you need to keep your nerves under control.

## So what to do?

### ***When preparing for the test***

Do lots of practice spoken tests, under timed exam conditions.

### ***On the test day***

Feel your nerves, and let them be.

Decide you are going to **enjoy** the test.

Visualise the test. Close your eyes and see yourself...

- *entering the room smiling*
- *greeting the examiner*
- *answering questions confidently*
- *walking out of the room smiling and confident.*

### ***During the test***

At the beginning, keep your language **simple**.

Focus on **communicating** with the examiner, **not** on using complex language.

Pause and breathe deeply before answering each question.

Smile and enjoy the test.

## 2. Giving memorised answers

**Examiner:** *So what is the climate like where you live?*

**Candidate:** *Where I live there are 4 seasons, spring, summer, autumn, and winter. In spring, the weather is temperate and mild. In summer, the weather is hot, humid and rainy. In autumn,...*

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Memorising words and phrases is good.

**However**, reciting **whole** memorised **answers** is not good for IELTS.

The examiner wants to see you use language **flexibly**.

### So what to do?

**Yes**, memorise chunks, phrases and collocations.

**Don't** memorise whole sentences or stories.

**Don't** practice **reading out** full sentences

Practice **speaking from bullet points**

Practice being **flexible**

For example, speak out a simple phrase and practice changing the tense (past, present, future), to build flexibility. For instance,

*I live in Vietnam*

*I have lived in Vietnam for many years*

*I will live here for one more year*

Get a speaking partner and practice asking each other new questions

### 3. Giving short answers

**Examiner:** *Do you like shopping for clothes?*

**Candidate:** *No, not really.*

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This is a common mistake for both high and low level students.

Short answers

- have low levels of vocabulary
- have simple structures
- do not let you show good levels of fluency
- do not let you show intonation across longer sentences

So, all 4 skills (vocabulary, grammar, fluency and pronunciation) will be marked low.

#### So what to do?

You need a **balance** of long and short answers in the test.

#### For part 1

You should say 3 to 4 sentences.

For the shopping question above, you can say **why** you *do* or *do not* like shopping and give an **example**.

#### For part 3

- Show off a bit
- Take a few risks
- Try complex sentences

**BUT**, don't use language **far** above your actual level. Use words you are comfortable with.

## 4. Not listening to the question

**Examiner:** *So tell me about your **neighbourhood**, what's it like?*

**Candidate:** *Yes, I like my **neighbours** a lot, we get on well.*

---

This is often the result of **nerves**, or an examiner's **unfamiliar accent**.

You listen for a key word, and then give a general answer on that topic.

If you are **off-topic**, this may,

- Affect your range of vocabulary score
- Give a bad first impression

### So what to do?

First, follow the advice in mistake number one about **nerves**.

If you are unsure, ask the examiner to **repeat** the question.

In part 3, you **can** ask the examiner to **re-phrase** the question.

You can say,

*'Can you re-phrase the question?'*

Or you can check your understanding

*'Do you mean....?'*

## 5. Going off topic

**Examiner:** *Are unemployed people given enough support in your country?*

**Candidate:** *Yes, most companies have training programmes for staff, including health and safety, leadership, team-building and so on.*

---

This may happen...

- because a candidate **misunderstood** the question,
- because they try to **fit** a memorised answer to a question

Going off topic will limit your score on the range of vocabulary.

### So what to do?

Work on your **listening skills**

Ask the examiner to **repeat** the question

Get familiar with the most **common questions**

Expand your vocabulary for less familiar topics

Get lots of ideas for less familiar topics



## 6. Rambling (talking without structure)

**Examiner:** *So do you work or are you a student?*

**Candidate:** *I am working, well, not exactly a job, not working but, I have worked for a while, kind of, more of a part time job, I like to study but work most time, but evenings I study if I have time.*

---

This often happens when candidates get nervous.

It affects your **fluency** mark, and gives a **bad impression** of you as a communicator.

You need to show yourself as a clear and confident communicator.

You don't want to make the examiner work hard to understand you.

### So what to do?

#### In Part 2

Use your 1 minute preparation time really carefully.

Think about the **structure** of your answers.

Use **connector** and **signposts** to make it clear what you are talking about. For example,

*When it comes to my family... / First of all... / On top of that... / Finally....*

Use **time-fillers** to give yourself time to think before answering, e.g.

*'let me think' / 'let me see' / 'that's a good question'*

Learn how to develop topics.

## 7. Using too many long, memorised connectives

Having just told you to use more structure, connectors and time fillers, you may find this one strange.

Also, lots of schools teach you plenty of cohesive devices, or connectives, and tell you to use them.

Ok!

But...

Let's look at this more closely.

Connectives can be **simple**

*So, and, but, then, first, in the end....*

Connectives can be **complex**

*First of all,*

*Progressing to the next point...*

*let me now move on to talk about...*

*If I were to talk about one sport, I'd have to choose...*

The mistake is to use **TOO many**.

It sounds unnatural.

Use some short, some long.

In one answer don't use more than two.

Don't always use the same ones.

## 8. Not using the 1-minute preparation time well

Sometimes you can't focus, you get nervous.

Sometimes, you think you are ready to answer straight away.

But, students rarely do well by starting right away without using the 1 minute preparation time.

### So what to do?

#### ***Preparing for the test***

Use 1 minute to practice preparing a question you have just looked at.

Practice with as many part 2 questions as possible

Practice preparing for them and giving an answer for them.

Do this under timed conditions, as though you were in an exam.

#### ***During the test***

Read the question really carefully.

Identify the **key words** and **topic**. Make sure you follow that.

Get an **idea** as quickly as possible.

Think about...

...the *structure* of your answer

...words or *idioms* you might use

...making your answer sound like a *story*

Prepare your first sentence, so you know exactly how you will start. This will give you confidence.

Take a deep breathe and remind yourself to take your time

## 9. Not understanding what the examiner is evaluating

**Examiner:** *Good afternoon, can you tell me your full name please?*

**Candidate:** *Hey, what's up? Sure. My name is Alistair, a-k-a Ali, although my dearest acquaintances refer to me as Al.*

---

So some candidates use **slang**, colloquial expressions, or even formal academic expressions.

Some candidates try to speak **too fast** to impress. Others **ignore grammar** thinking only fancy vocabulary is important.

Some candidates work hard trying to get a British accent.

All of these are mistakes.

### So what to do?

Be sure you know how the exam is evaluated - check the **IELTS Band Descriptors**.

**Don't** use **slang** and **colloquialisms**.

**Yes**, you can use **informal** language and **idiomatic expressions**.

Speak at a speed that you are **comfortable** with.

Try to use a **mix** of structures, both simple and complex.

Try to get a **balance** of complex but accurate language.

The examiner does not evaluate your **accent**.

The important thing is that you pronounce words and phrase correctly and with awareness of stress and intonation.

## 10. Trying to have a conversation with the examiner.

**Examiner:** *Do you like your hometown?*

**Candidate:** *Yes, Madrid is lovely, it has beautiful buildings and there is plenty to do. Have you been there?*

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Some candidates try to make the interview into a conversation by asking questions.

They realise very quickly that this doesn't work.

The examiner will not answer the questions.

It's not a big problem, but it's better to be clear at the start of the test.

**It's an interview**, and you only need to answer questions; **not** ask them.

Although IELTS is a communicative test, its focus is on your speaking ability, not how well you engage and interact with others.

### So what to do?

Don't ask any questions!

Thank you for reading this e-book. I hope it can be useful.

Now you know what key mistakes to avoid,  
all you need to do now is **PRACTICE speaking lots.**

A perfect place to practice is in my online course

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