

IELTS Listening: Multiple Choice & Map Questions Made Simple

Look, I'm going to be straight with you. Multiple choice and map questions are where most students lose points. Not because they can't hear the audio. But because they don't understand how these questions actually work. The test makers aren't just checking if you can hear words. They're testing whether you can think while you listen.

 by Chris Pell

Why These Questions Trip Students Up

Today, I'm going to show you exactly how to master both question types.

The Truth About Multiple Choice

Here's what most teachers won't tell you:

You will hear ALL three answer choices mentioned.

This isn't an accident. It's designed to confuse you.

The correct answer won't be the first thing you hear. Or the loudest. It'll be the one that actually answers the question being asked.

What Goes Wrong (And How to Fix It)

Problem 1: You choose the first answer you hear

This is the biggest mistake. IELTS knows you'll do this. That's why they mention the wrong answers first.

Solution: Wait. Listen to everything. Then choose.

Problem 2: You're looking for exact word matches

The correct answer will almost never use the exact same words as the audio. They'll use synonyms and paraphrases.

Solution: Think about different ways to say the same thing.

Problem 3: You can't tell the difference between similar options

When answers look similar, most students panic. But there are always keywords that separate them.

Solution: Find the one word in each option that makes it different from the others.

Step-by-Step Multiple Choice Strategy

1

Before the audio starts

1. Read the question. What exactly are they asking?
2. Highlight the main keyword in the question
3. Look at each answer choice
4. Underline the word in each choice that makes it different
5. Think of synonyms you might hear for each option

2

While listening

1. Don't write anything when you first hear an answer mentioned
2. Keep listening for all options to be discussed
3. Pay attention to words like "but" and "however" - they signal changes
4. If you think you know the answer, put a small tick and keep listening
5. Choose your answer only after hearing the complete discussion

Remember: The speakers will talk about multiple options. Your job is to identify which one actually answers the question.

Why Maps Feel Impossible

You're sitting in a quiet exam room. Someone is describing a place you've never seen. You have to follow their directions, understand a diagram, and write answers. All at the same time. No wonder students struggle. But once you understand the system, maps become predictable.

What Trips Students Up

Problem 1: You don't know direction vocabulary

If you don't understand "slightly west of" or "just past," you're lost before you start.

Problem 2: Too much happening at once

You're trying to listen, read, follow directions, and write. Your brain gets overloaded.

Problem 3: You can't visualize what they're describing

Without a mental picture, you can't follow the journey.

Essential Direction Language You Must Know

Learn these phrases until they're automatic:

- at the top/at the bottom
- on the left/on the right/on the far side
- North/South/East/West
- to the north/to the west
- slightly west of
- in the southwest/in the northeast
- in the middle of/in the centre of
- above/below
- inside/outside
- opposite/in front of
- left-hand side/right-hand side
- clockwise/anticlockwise
- a little beyond
- just past
- before you get to
- adjoining
- enter via
- runs alongside

If any of these confuse you, stop reading and look them up. This vocabulary is non-negotiable.

Map Strategy

Before listening:

1. Study the map for 30 seconds
2. Notice the major landmarks and features
3. Think about where the speaker might start their description
4. Look at what you need to label - rooms? buildings? streets?
5. Predict what types of words you'll hear as answers

While listening:

1. Listen to the opening carefully - this sets up everything
2. Create a mental picture of where the speaker is standing
3. Follow their journey step by step
4. Use signpost language like "Next, we'll move to..." to track progress
5. Write brief notes, don't worry about perfect spelling yet
6. Watch for distractors: "This used to be the library, but we moved it"

Key insight: The speaker is taking you on a journey. Your job is to follow that journey mentally while marking your map.

The Visualization Trick and Final Thoughts

The Visualization Trick

Here's something most students miss:

You need to put yourself IN the map.

Don't look at it like you're above it. Imagine you're standing where the speaker is standing. What's to your left? Your right? What's ahead of you?

This mental shift makes everything clearer.

Final Thoughts

These question types aren't about perfect hearing.

They're about strategy.

Multiple choice tests your ability to wait and think. Map questions test your ability to follow and visualize.

Master the strategy, and the points follow.

Practice these approaches with real IELTS tests. Not random online quizzes. Use official materials so you get used to how IELTS actually sounds and flows.

Remember: The test makers are smart, but they're predictable. Once you understand their patterns, you can beat them consistently.

Ready to guarantee your IELTS score? Our [VIP Course](#) includes comprehensive training on every question type, plus unlimited practice with expert feedback.