A close-up photograph of an open book. The left page is visible on the left, and the right page is visible on the right. The book is bound in the center, and the pages appear slightly aged or yellowed. A large, semi-transparent blue rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the book, containing the title text.

The Complete A to Z Guide to IELTS Listening

Introduction

How can this book help you with your listening?

Listening and reading are considered the 'easy' parts of the IELTS test, but this does not mean that they do not require preparation.

This book provides you with the means of preparing fully for the listening test. It is designed as a complete A-to-Z guide and should be read in its entirety.

If you are reading this book, you already have the required level of English to do well in both tests. What you are probably lacking is a sound knowledge of the strategies needed to get very high marks.

This book will take you step by step through the different sub skills that are required and the different strategies I suggest for dealing with all of the different question types.

The book will show you:

- The format of the test
- General tips and common mistakes
- Strategies for all question types
- The listening sub-skills that are tested
- How to improve your listening skills
- How to improve your vocabulary

The Listening Test

Key Facts

- The test is divided into four distinct sections
- Each section contains 10 questions
- The questions get more difficult as the test progresses
- The test lasts approximately 30 minutes
- Each recording is played only once
- You will have 10 minutes at the end to transfer answers

Section 1

A conversation between two people within a social/everyday context.

Section 2

One person speaking in a social/everyday context.

Section 3

A conversation between two or more people within an education context.

Section 4

A lecture, normally on an academic subject.

Listening Tips

How to use these...

These tips are simply to give you an introduction to IELTS listening.

They are not intended to be the only document you look at.

Many IELTS students think that 'tips' are the only things they need to get a good score. They are not.

Make sure you use these as an introduction and use the rest of the document to really progress.



Practise listening to both one person and multiple people speaking.



Use the short breaks to move on to the next part of the test.



If your answers are not grammatically correct, they will be marked as incorrect.



Improve your vocabulary and you'll improve your listening score.



Be careful with your spelling.



Try to predict the answer before you hear the recording.



Read the instructions VERY carefully.



Get used to listening to things only once.

Question Type #1: Summary Completion

When you get to university or start working, two of the key skills you will have to use are summarising and paraphrasing.

These skills are tested in summary completion questions.

What to expect

- You'll be given a list of sentences that summarise the clip you'll hear.
- The text will be a paraphrase of the recording.
- They have also summarised the listening.
- You should be able to read the text before listening and know what you're going to hear.

Summary Completion Strategy

-  **Read instructions carefully**

Note the word limit for your answers.
-  **Read the sentences**

Understand the general meaning of the summary.
-  **Predict what you'll hear**

Form expectations about the content of the recording.
-  **Think about paraphrasing**

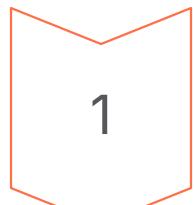
Consider how the sentences have been changed through paraphrasing.
-  **Look at the gaps**

Predict what type of words might fill them (nouns, verbs, etc.).
-  **Listen and fill in gaps**

Write the correct answers as you hear them.

Question Type #2: Multiple Choice

Three different kinds of multiple choice listening questions:



Short Answer



Sentence completion



Matching picture

Common problems:

- Often all of the choices will be mentioned, not just the correct answer. Don't pick the first one you hear.
- The answers will normally be synonyms or paraphrases.
- The three choices often look similar in meaning.
- You must read a lot of information and listen at the same time.

Tips for Multiple Choice

- 1** Don't check your answers from the previous section when you have a break. It is important that you read the next multiple choice questions and try to understand them.
- 2** Highlight keywords. The keyword in the question will help you answer the question correctly. The keywords in the different options are those that differentiate meaning between the choices.
- 3** Don't write the first answer you hear. Remember that they will try and trick you.
- 4** Don't spend too much time on one question. If you didn't get the answer or you are unsure, make an educated guess and move on.
- 5** Be careful if you hear words like 'but' or 'however'. This often means that the speaker is going to qualify or alter a previous statement.
- 6** Practice makes perfect.
- 7** Your answer will often be a letter and not a word. Read the instructions to make sure, and be careful when transferring your answers at the end.

Strategy for Multiple Choice

Read instructions carefully

Make sure you understand what is required.

Read the questions

Identify what is actually being asked. Highlight the keyword in the question.

Analyze options

Look at the different options and underline any keywords that will help you tell the difference in meaning.

Think of synonyms

Consider any synonyms or paraphrases you might hear.

Predict the answer

Form an expectation of what you might hear.

Listen for keywords

When listening, focus on any keywords and synonyms.

Don't rush

Don't write the first answer you hear. Wait until all options are discussed.

Mark potential answers

If you think an answer is correct, put a tick beside it and keep listening to confirm.

Manage your time

Don't spend more time than necessary. If you miss an answer, make a guess and move on.

Question Type #3: Table Completion

In this task, you will be given a table and asked to fill in gaps in that table.

This type of question could appear in any section of the test.

The answers will all come in order.

Tips for Table Completion

- Predict the type of word required based on the information on the table e.g. date, name etc.
- Understand the table before the listening begins.
- Always note the word limit.
- You may hear all the answers in one or two sentences, so don't wait for the next answer. Keep listening.

Table Completion Strategy

Read instructions carefully

Note the word limit for your answers.

Predict what you'll hear

Try to predict the type of word you will hear, based on the information provided in the table.

Analyze the table

Look at the table and try to understand it using the information already provided. Pay particular attention to the headings.

Listen and complete

Listen and fill in the gap with the correct answer.

Question Type #4: Sentence Completion

This is another type of gap fill question.

You will be given a number of sentences with gaps in them and you will be required to fill in these gaps.

Tips for sentence completion

- Always read and understand the sentences before you listen. This will make your job much easier.
- Predict the type of word(s) that might be needed to complete the sentence.
- Try to guess the word if you can. The listening will then confirm your guess.
- Write the answers exactly as you hear them.

Sentence Completion Strategy

Read instructions carefully

Note the word limit for your answers.

Understand the sentences

Look at the sentences and understand their meaning.

Predict word types

Predict the type of word you will hear e.g. noun, verb, adjective, name, phone number etc.

Make educated guesses

Try to guess the word, if you can, before you hear the recording.

Listen and complete

Listen and fill in the gaps with the correct answers exactly as you hear them.

Check spelling

Ensure your spelling is correct.

Verify grammar

Make sure each sentence is grammatically correct.

Question Type #5: Matching

For this type of question, you will be required to match a list of options from the listening test to a number of options on the test paper.

Variations of matching questions include:

Words

Phrases

Sentences

Pictures

This type of task tests your ability to listen for detail.

You will often have to follow a detailed conversation between two or more people.

The list will always be in the same order as you hear it in the recording.

The list might be expressed differently in the recording through synonyms or paraphrasing.

Strategy for Matching

1. Read the instructions carefully and note the word limit.
2. Look at the list of options and questions to understand them.
3. Try to predict which ones match, based on what is on the test paper before listening.
4. Predict how the list of options could be expressed differently in the recording.
5. Listen and match the options to the correct questions as you hear them.
6. Eliminate options that can't be correct, in order to narrow down the list of options as you complete the questions.

Question Type #6: Labelling a Map or Plan

This type of question could appear in any of the four listening sections, but it is most likely to appear in section 2.

In section 2, you will listen to just one person talking about a non-academic topic. It is often someone giving information to an audience about an event, or showing them around a building, such as a university or hotel.

What to expect

- You have to identify the different parts of a map or plan by listening to and understanding a description, or by following directions.
- You might be asked to select the answers from a list, or take them from the recording directly.
- An awareness of language for directions is essential.
- The information you need to answer the questions is in the same order as it is on the recording.

Common Problems

1. Not being familiar with the vocabulary and functional language used to describe locations and directions.
2. Too much information. This question requires you not only to listen, but also to follow a description or directions, understand the map or diagram and write short notes, all at the same time.
3. Spelling. This is a common problem in all IELTS listening questions, but particularly in this type, because you have to do so many things at the same time.
4. Visualisation. This refers to your ability to form mental visual images. You will be sitting in an exam room and the person talking will be describing a plan you have never seen before. Unless you can imagine what it looks like, it is very difficult to answer these questions.

Useful Language

- 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

Strategy for Labelling a Map or Plan (Part 1)

Read the question carefully

Understand the map or plan and its features.

Analyze spatial relationships

Ask yourself where things are in relation to the questions. This should help you predict the answers and follow the talk.

Identify starting points

Think about where the person might begin their talk from. What is to their right and left? What is in front of and behind them?

Study major landmarks

Look at the major parts of the map or plan to help you understand and navigate your way around.

Predict answer types

Predict which type of words might be the answer i.e. will it be a place, room, street, building etc.?

Strategy for Labelling a Map or Plan (Part 2)

Listen to the introduction

Listen to the beginning of the talk carefully, because this will help you understand the context and help you follow the talk more easily.

Listen for signposts

Listen for signposting language like 'The next room we are about to see is...', or 'If you now follow me to....', to help you understand each stage of the talk.

Visualize the space

Visualise the place they are describing whilst the person is talking. Note down any possible answers, but be careful with distractors e.g. 'this was the library but we decided to move it down to the end of the corridor'.

Take notes

Make short notes on the question paper and then transfer your answers at the end, using correct spelling.

Question Type #7: Short Answer Questions

These questions are similar to the classic listening comprehension questions you might have been asked to do in English class, or even in your own language.

They ask you a number of questions about the recording and you must give short answers in response.

Tips for short answer questions

- Read the instructions very carefully, especially regarding the word count.
- Read the questions in order to fully understand them before you listen.
- Try to predict what the answer will be before you listen.
- Be aware of synonyms and paraphrasing.

Short Answer Questions Strategy

Read instructions carefully

Note the word limit for your answers.

Understand the questions

Look at the list of questions to understand them.

Predict information types

Try to predict the type of information required.

Consider paraphrasing

Be aware of how synonyms and paraphrasing might be used.

Listen and write answers

Listen and write the answers in the form that you hear them.

Check spelling

Check spelling when you are finished.

Question Type #8: Completing Forms/Notes

This type of question often appears in the first section of the test.

Normally the answers will be one or two words long and will be factual information, such as phone numbers, dates and times.

These questions may seem relatively simple, but it would surprise you how many students throw away easy marks in this section.

Tips for completing forms/notes

- They will try to trick you by giving you a number of different pieces of information when only one of them is correct.
- One common trick is for the person to give one piece of information and then correct it later in the recording.
- Prediction will allow you to anticipate the type or form of the word(s) required.
- Be aware of synonyms and paraphrasing.

Completing Forms/Notes Strategy

Read instructions carefully

Note the word limit for your answers.

Predict what you'll hear

Try to predict the type of word you will hear, based on the information provided in the table.

Understand the form

Look at the form/note and try to understand it, using the information already provided.

Listen and complete

Listen and fill in the gaps with the correct answers.

Prediction

Prediction is the most tested of the listening sub-skills, and crucially important to getting a high score in the test.

Predicting enables you to not only focus your brain on the part that you will hear, but more importantly, not focus on any other areas.

Example:

Name: Shaun Rodgers

Room no. _____

Number of occupants: 1

Check out time: _____

In this example, we can accurately predict that we are going to hear a room number and time. That means we can completely focus on those two items, making it much easier for us to get the correct answer.

How to Predict

In the IELTS listening test, there will be between 30-45 seconds of silence before the section of the recording begins. Use this time wisely by predicting what you are going to hear.

You should think about the following....

- **Grammar:** noun, verb, adjective, adverb etc.. Often it will be obvious which word form we need to use. If we use a different form of the word, we will get the question wrong.
- **Subject:** phone number, address, date, business name etc.. This will help us focus on the correct part of the recording and find the correct information more easily.
- **Function:** list, question, label, instruction etc..

Synonyms and Paraphrasing

You should always be aware of how synonyms and paraphrasing are used.

In the IELTS listening test, it is normal for you to read one word but hear another word with the same meaning. For example, you may read 'cost' but hear 'price'. This is called a synonym and the IELTS listening test has lots of them.

A common mistake is to read a certain word and try to listen for that word, but then not hear it. That is because the recording used a synonym. For example, you might hear someone making a hotel reservation and you have to note down their details.

The form might say 'Arrival Date', but you will hear 'day you arrive'. Similarly, you may read 'Departure Date', but you might hear 'day you leave'.

Make sure you think about the type of information you might hear in the form of synonyms, not just what you read.

Synonyms and Paraphrasing Practice

Practising this skill allows you to improve your listening and vocabulary at the same time.

A good listening resource to help you improve your vocabulary whilst listening is FluentU. This website has a huge range of English videos and bilingual subtitles for most of them. It also has a 'hover-over' dictionary for any words you don't know. Finally, it has a "learning centre" where you can study and review the vocabulary that came up in the video.

My suggestion for FluentU would be to listen to any videos you like and note down any words you don't know. Try to guess the meaning from the context of the listening first, because this is a useful skill to develop for the IELTS test. Then use the 'hover-over' tool to confirm the meaning. Even if you just watch one video a day, your vocabulary will expand quickly.

A good way to practise synonyms and paraphrasing is to listen to a short video and think about how each sentence or phrase could be paraphrased. If you do this regularly, over time you will get used to common synonyms and this will really help you in all parts of the IELTS test.

Word Limit

What does it mean?

This is often one of the most confusing aspects of the test.

It is essential that you know the word limit for each question and you stick to it.

"NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS"

Means that you may write one OR two words, but no more.

"NOT MORE THAN ONE WORD AND/OR A NUMBER"

Means that if you write more than one word your answer will be incorrect.

"NOT MORE THAN ONE WORD AND/OR A NUMBER" means that you can write:

- One word
- One number
- One word and a number

Numbers

You should familiarise yourself with how numbers sound in a range of different accents.

The numbers that often come up are:



13 / 30



14 / 40



15 / 50



16 / 60



17 / 70



18 / 80



19 / 90

These numbers are difficult for many non-native speakers, which is why IELTS like to use them. Practise listening and saying these numbers.

Letters

Some letters are more difficult to distinguish than others. The test will normally have the difficult letters.

If there is a word, such as a surname or address, that is unfamiliar to most people, the recording will spell it out.

Make sure you familiarise yourself with how all the letters sound.

You could also categorise them by similar sound.

For example, B, D, E, T, G, P and C all have a similar final sound and may be used to try and trick you.

Addresses

Each country has a different address format. IELTS will normally use UK or Australian addresses.

It is normally:

House/Flat Number → Street Name → Town/City Name

Finally, you might have to write down a post code. These always start and end with one or two letters first (normally the same as the city) and then a series of numbers in between. Make sure you write down both the letters and numbers. Example: M1 4JH

For example:

22 South Street

Bristol

BS1 5TW

Dates

Make sure you know how to spell all the difficult days and months.

Make sure you are aware of the spelling of all the days of the week, especially difficult ones like Wednesday. This is also true for months like February. Also, if you don't put a capital letter at the beginning of these words, you will be incorrect.

Also be aware of some synonyms such as, 'weekend' for Saturday and Sunday or 'fortnight' for two weeks.

There are also different ways of saying and writing dates, for example:

'The eleventh of September 2002' could be written as '11 September 2002.'

Again, pay attention to the word limit in the question and only write under this limit.

Connected Speech

It is essential that you get used to how 'real' English speakers talk.

Many English teachers speak clearly and slowly to their students, and this can actually harm their progress.

When you hear how native speakers actually talk, it is often very difficult to hear what is being said. This is mainly to do with connected speech.

Connected speech is the linking of words and sounds together in a sentence. For example, 'I have to go to the doctor, I have an ear ache.', might sound more like 'I've got to the doctor, I've got a headache.'

Other sounds may appear 'weak' or change when put into a sentence. For instance 'Do you want to go?' might sound more like 'Do you want to go?'

Connected Speech Practice

Start off by listening to very short recordings and then build up to longer conversations.

We can practise this by doing something called 'micro-listening'. It involves pausing a sentence you don't understand and replaying it until you have understood all the words. Don't worry about how many times you have to do this, focus on hearing every word and breaking down connected speech into individual words.

Over time, you will get used to how words link together, so listening to native speakers will become much easier.

Podcasts are perfect for this because you can pause them and replay them easily. Podcasts are like individual radio shows that you can download and listen to whenever you like. I personally listen to them every day because there are literally millions of them on every topic you can think of. Whatever your interest; there will be a podcast about it.

Signposting Language

Signposting allows the speaker to tell you where their talk is going and allows you to follow them.

In two of the four parts of the IELTS listening test, you will have to listen to someone speaking by themselves, one in a social context and one in a lecture style.

When someone talks in this way they often use what is referred to as 'sign posting'. For example, when you give a lecture you might say 'This lecture is divided into three parts' and then you will say things like 'First of all...', 'Secondly...', 'After that...' and 'Finally...'.

These phrases tell the listener what stage of the talk they are listening to and what is going to be said next. If we know how to interpret these signals, we are more likely to understand and follow the whole thing.

Signposting Language Practice

To practise this you can listen to a lecture and simply try to find any signposting language. When you hear some, pause and think about the meaning of the language and predict what you are going to hear next. Continue this until you get to the end of the recording.

The IELTS listening test is very long and it is impossible, even for native speakers, to concentrate fully 100% of the time. Recognising sign posting allows you to prioritise and focus on the important parts of the listening which contain the answers.

There are several great sources that have thousands of online lectures including:

- MIT
- University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Ignite
- VideoLectures.net
- RSA Animates

Vocabulary Building

It's a vocabulary test. The reading and listening tests are as much vocabulary tests, as they are skills tests. It is much easier to get a good score when you have a wide-ranging vocabulary.

Read and Listen

Studies have shown that the number one way for learners to improve their vocabulary is through reading and listening to genuine sources of English.

Record

You must record any new words you hear or read. There are lots of ways to do this, so that you will remember them effectively.

Review

It is essential that you regularly review these new words and phrases in order to retain them in your memory.

Online Resources

It's all free

You do not need to spend any money to improve your listening skills. All of the resources you need are freely available on the internet.

Here is a list of my favourite sites, but there are millions more that will help you. Simply use Google to find something that interests you.



BBC News

All of the common IELTS topics are covered on a daily basis. They have lots of videos and podcasts.



The Guardian

They have a great selection of videos and podcasts.



Ted Talks

These are great for listening to monologues and very interesting. They cover many of the common IELTS topics.



Memrise

Nice app for recording and reviewing vocabulary. Makes reviewing vocab. fun.



Podcasts

There are hundreds of thousands of podcasts for you to listen to. Use an app like Stitcher to listen on your phone.



YouTube

Millions of hours of video. This is a great way to listen to how native speakers talk.



Radio

Many radio shows just feature people talking with one another. News or sports radio is a great way to hear real conversations.



TV and Movies

Listen to whatever you enjoy. You are more likely to improve your skills if you actually like what you are listening to.

Practice

Practice makes perfect

Remember that listening is a skill. You should not just practise past exam papers. Listening to anything in English will help you improve your chances of getting the score you need. Here are some sources:



Cambridge Past Papers



British Council, Cambridge and IDP
Websites



Online newspapers, YouTube and
podcasts



Google It! Search for whatever you're interested in and read it to expand your vocabulary and knowledge.

Filling Out the Answer Sheet

This is not a skill, but is crucially important.

Stop! I know you think this is 'easy' and you know how to do this, but you would not believe the number of good students that throw away marks because they don't fill out the answer sheet properly.

Read the instructions very carefully for ALL questions. Use any examples to help you. If you don't understand the example or instructions, don't move on until you do.

You can delete your answer with a single line and then write your new answer beside it.

Grammar and spelling are crucially important. One small mistake and the answer will be wrong.

Leave no blanks. If you have no idea, guess.

THANK YOU

For Your Precious Time

www.ieltsadvantage.com

