

# **IELTS HINTS AND TIPS**

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## NOTE TO READERS

While reading this EBOOK, please keep in your mind that none of the information was written by me. The pronouns (we, I) do not refer to me – they just refer to the original authors of the hints and tips. Hence, some information might not match all the conditions of the test in Myanmar. Read this information for only purposes of understanding the test better – do NOT trust every thing it says.

Moreover, do not distribute this EBOOK for commercial purposes. I reformat everything and work hard to bring out this EBOOK just to help those who wish to sit for the test. If you want to post it on any other website, you are freely permitted to do so.

It wasn't me who collected all the huge information in this EBOOK. It was Mr. Ian Carter (former IELTS examiner) who surfed the Internet thoroughly and copied valuable information. He copied all the stuff to me on a CD and I just reformat them and convert them into PDF format. Thanks, Sayagyi (Mr. Ian Carter).

You can visit my website at [www.freewebs.com/aungmyomin](http://www.freewebs.com/aungmyomin).

The Sayagyi Website is [www.freewebs.com/sayagyi](http://www.freewebs.com/sayagyi).

# PART 1

## A LOOK AT IELTS

## ----- A LOOK AT IELTS -----

### IELTS

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is recognized as an entrance requirement by British, Australian, New Zealand and Canadian universities and for secondary, vocational and training programs. Now increasingly American universities have started accepting valid scores in this exam.

IELTS is designed to assess the language ability of candidates who need to study or work where English is used as the language of communication. Tests are administered at accredited Test Centers throughout the world - there are currently more than 300 Centers, in over 120 countries.

### ACADEMIC AND GENERAL TRAINING CANDIDATES

Candidates must select either the Academic or General Training Reading and Writing Modules depending on the stated requirement of their sponsor or receiving institution. The Academic Reading and Writing Modules assess whether a candidate is ready to study or train in the medium of English at an Undergraduate or Postgraduate level. The emphasis of General Training is on basic survival skills in a broad social and educational context. It is suitable for candidates who are going to English speaking countries to complete their Secondary Education, to undertake work experience or training programs not at degree level, or for immigration purposes.

### TEST FORMAT

All candidates are tested in **listening, reading, writing** and **speaking**. All candidates take the same Listening and Speaking Modules. There is a choice of Reading and Writing Modules. The first three modules- Listening, Reading and Writing must be completed in one day. The Speaking may be taken, at the discretion of the test center, on the same day or up to two days later. Candidates in some test centers are required to take additional pretest sections of up to 20 minutes. Performance on these pretests does not affect a candidate's results in any way but pre-testing is an essential part of IELTS question paper production.

### IELTS BAND SCALES

This exam provides a profile of your ability to use English. Your score in each of the subtests and an overall (average) score are recorded as levels of ability, called Bands. There are 9 bands for each of the four language macro skills - Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking. The above information is listed on the Test Report Form. The nine bands of language ability are described in general terms as follows:

#### **Band 9 - Expert User**

Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.

#### **Band 8 - Very Good User**

Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.

#### **Band 7 - Good User**

Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.

#### **Band 6 - Competent User**

Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.

#### **Band 5 - Modest User**

Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.

#### **Band 4 - Limited User**

Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.

**Band 3 - Extremely Limited User**

Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.

**Band 2 - Intermittent User**

No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty understanding spoken and written English.

**Band 1 - Non User**

Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.

## **PART 2**

# GENERAL TIPS

## GENERAL TIPS

With thanks to Dr Vivek,  
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Success in the IELTS exam requires a candidate to know the test format and the specific techniques for answering questions. Make sure you are fully equipped with this knowledge. (Please see Resources on the Internet and Books )

Don't believe people who tell you that IELTS needs no preparation if your English is good. Even if it is, you still need to learn the right skills for the test. I would suggest a period of **two weeks as preparation time**, though this would vary depending on your level of familiarity with English. The test fees are high and if you don't get the band score you need, you have to wait for three months before you can take the test again.

Like in all other exams, practice is the key to doing well in the IELTS. Make sure you have plenty of it before you appear for the test.

Answer all questions. There is no negative marking for incorrect answers.

### Preparing for the test

Start by familiarizing yourself with the test format. Then read the online resources I have suggested. After that you could start with Step Up to IELTS to build the basic skills that you will need to do the test. Lastly, go on to doing the 4 tests in Cambridge IELTS 3 under test conditions. This should get you ready to take on the IELTS.

The British Council offers preparatory courses for IELTS. A placement test is held first to assess the candidate's level of English. This costs Rs 400/-. A four day intensive course is held before the date of the test. This costs Rs 5600/-. If you can afford the fees, the course might be a good idea as it gives you an insight into IELTS along with lots of practice. I think it would not help those whose level is very poor (possibly they would not do well in the placement test itself) or very good (they may not need the course). It would be most useful for those who lie somewhere in the middle of the spectrum.

### Test day

Make sure you have visited the venue of the test a few days before the test date. Arrive at least half an hour earlier than the reporting time specified. Arriving late could send your tension levels soaring and the exam requires you to be absolutely relaxed and ready to give of your best.

**There is no break between the four components of the test.** This means that for around 3-3.5 hours, you can't eat, drink or visit the restroom. However, water was provided in the test hall where I took the exam and students were allowed to visit the restroom, but only while the test was in progress (not in the period between different modules ). Since time is such a crucial factor in the exam, no one would want to waste time going to the toilet in the middle of the test. Make sure you visit the restroom before the test starts.

**Carry your original and valid passport as it is mandatory.** Also take the letter which gave you the venue of the test and your roll number. The receipt for the IELTS fee is another document that is sometimes asked for. Take it too.

Take a number of sharpened pencils, a pencil sharpener, an eraser and pens. Do all the components of the test in pencil. For listening and reading, use of a pencil is mandatory. For writing, it is much easier to erase what you write in pencil when you want to modify a sentence. If you use a pen, deleting sentences or words creates a mess.

Time is a crucial factor in the test. Make sure you take a watch that works and shows the correct time. Keep it in front of you on the desk as you work. It is all too easy to forget how much time has elapsed.

You can write anything you like on the question sheet. It is not read by the examiner. You can underline words, jot down your ideas for the writing test or write the answers for the listening test.

At our center (Delhi - INDIA), the Listening, Reading and Writing tests were held on one day and the Speaking test on the next day. The venue and time for the Speaking test are provided on the first day. Listen carefully to the instructions and remember to take the slip kept on your table which has the time for the Speaking test mentioned on it. You have to bring it along for the test. At some centers, all components of the test are held on the same day. This information is provided in the letter sent to you which gives you your roll number and the test venue.

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## **Important tips**

1. First of all we suggest you to buy Cambridge IELTS 1, 2 & 3. Buy cassettes also, but for book one only.
2. Read the opening section of book 1
3. First concentrate on reading that it is the most difficult part. Attempt the first test of book 1 "in the manner you want" and do it in 55 minutes and check your score. If you have not completed your test and time has run out, give zero to all wrong answers. Just mark yourself. This is your baseline.

## **General tips**

Become familiar with the test as early as possible. The skills being tested in the IELTS take a period of time to build up. Cramming is not an effective study technique. Use your study time efficiently. Study when you are fresh and, after you have planned a timetable, make sure that you keep to it. Set goals and ensure that you have adequate breaks. In the IELTS test, each of the four Band Modules **listening, Reading, Writing and speaking** carries the same weight. Study each skill carefully and spend more time on the skills in which you feel you are weak.

Be aware of the exact procedure for the test. Be very clear on the order of each section, its length and the specific question types. There are many resources available to help you practice these skills.

Having a study partner or a study group is an excellent idea. Other students may raise issues that you may not have considered.

Seek help from teachers, friends and native English speakers.

This is not a time for intensive study. It is a time to review skills and your test technique. It is important to exercise, eat, rest and sleep well during the week in which you will take the test.

Leave nothing to chance. If you do not know how to get to the test center, try going there at a similar time one or two weeks before the real test.

## **The night before the test**

You must have a good dinner and go to bed at your normal time not too early and not too late, as you do not want to disrupt your sleep pattern if possible. Have everything ready that you need to take with you to the test so you can simply pick it up in the morning, for example, the test registration form, passport, test number, pens, pencils, erasers, etc. A pen that runs dry or a pencil that breaks can take several minutes to replace. Check before the exam exactly what articles you need. Set your alarm clock the night before or arrange a wake-up call.

## **On the morning of the test**

Eat a good breakfast. You will have several hours of concentration ahead of you and you will need food and drink in the morning. You may even want to bring more food or a snack with you, especially if your speaking test is at a later time that day. You cannot, however, take food or drink into the exam room. If possible, wear a watch in case you cannot see the clock in the exam room. It is essential that you keep track of time.

Give yourself plenty of time to get to the test center. You will be required to complete a registration form and to show your passport before you enter the examination room so you must arrive at the time specified by your test center. If you are early, you could go for a walk. If you are late, you will not be allowed to enter. Avoid the added tension of having to rush.

## **During the test**

Most students at the test will feel nervous. This is quite normal. In fact, it can actually be quite helpful in terms of motivation. It may make you alert and help you to focus. The aim is for you to try to perform at your optimum level.

In contrast, high levels of anxiety can affect a student's performance. However, good preparation, familiarity with test details and a positive attitude can overcome much of this anxiety.

The examination room should be suitable for testing, that is, the lighting, ventilation and temperature should be appropriate. If you are uncomfortable because of any of these factors or if there is some other problem, such as not being able to hear the recording of the Listening Module, make sure you ask the person in charge to do something about it. For example, you may ask to change seats.

**PART 3**  
THE LISTENING TEST



## ----- LISTENING -----

With thanks to Dr Vivek,  
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Answer all questions. There is no negative marking for incorrect answers.

Read the [How to prepare for IELTS - Listening test manual](#) at the Hong Kong City University site to familiarize yourself with the test, the types of questions that are asked and strategies for answering them.

To get an idea of how this kind of test is conducted, you can try doing the practice tests at [Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab](#). The accent is American so it does not approximate the actual test very well. Still, it is useful practice for this type of test.

Practise doing the 4 listening tests in the book -- Cambridge IELTS 3. It helps a lot. It is the closest you can get to the actual test.

At the center where I did the test, each of us was given cordless headphones to listen to the recording. This feels very different from listening to the conversation over speakers. Check with the British Council at the time of registering for IELTS if these will be used for your test. If yes, it might be a good idea to do the practice tests at home using headphones.

Keep all your attention focused for the half hour or so that the test lasts. A lapse of concentration can make you lose the sequence of answers and panic sets in fast.

The test consists of four sections. Sections 1 and 3 are dialogues and sections 2 and 4 are monologues. There are 40 questions to be answered and the test lasts for 30 minutes. Ten minutes are provided at the end of the test to transfer your answers to the answer sheet.

Pay special attention to the dialogues sections (Sections 1 and 3). I found it more difficult to focus on these and the conversation tends to be faster than a monologue (Sections 2 and 4).

At the beginning of each section of the recording, time is provided to read the questions. Use this time to read the questions pertaining to that section (the voice on the tape tells you how many questions to read ) and underline key words in each question on the question booklet like "when", "where", "who" and "what" which tell you what to listen for. Time is also provided at the end of each section to check your answers. Use this time also to read the questions for the next section.

Read the questions carefully. If the question says mark the answer as A, B, C or D on the answer sheet, make sure you don't write the phrase that A, B, C or D correspond to. Just write A, B, C or D. If the question specifies that you must not use more than three words in your answer, writing 4 words will get you no marks for that question.

The answers usually appear in the conversation in the same order as the questions. The speakers often correct themselves. They will say something initially and then change the statement. For example, "we will go in March" is said first and then "No, let's make it May". The correct answer is the final statement i.e. May and not March. Watch out for this and make sure you write the final correct answer.

If you miss an answer, don't panic. Keep listening for the next answer.

Write your answer immediately on the question sheet itself. Don't try to memorize the answers or to write on the answer sheet. The ten minutes provided at the end of the test are quite sufficient to transfer your answers to the answer sheet.

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### TIPS FOR LISTENING

The IELTS listening part is RELATIVELY easy but this does not mean that you take it lightly and do not prepare for it.

Some tips:

1. The questions are in SETS and you hear tape recording for one set at a time.
2. Glance through the SET of questions for which you will be hearing the tape.
3. Read the questions & find out what SPECIFIC information is required (name, place, date, number, etc)
4. Circle key words (Clue/trigger words)
5. When the tape plays listen intently when you think your specific information will come.

For example,  
Q 1-5

1. Kevin is arriving London at \_\_\_\_\_
2. Dave will be waiting for Kevin at \_\_\_\_\_
3. Kevin will be wearing a \_\_\_\_\_
4. Dave will be accompanied by \_\_\_\_\_
5. Kevin is coming for \_\_\_\_\_

It is obvious from above that the key word for 1 is at & you will be writing TIME.

In 2, you will write a PLACE. In 3 CLOTHES, in 4, PERSON ACCOMPANYING DAVE & in 5, PURPOSE of visit. So you have already guessed what to listen for!

Listen to English program on RADIO at least half an hour a day. Two things are important; RADIO not TV, because TV is visual & scenes & visuals easily distract us. The next important thing is LISTEN & not just hear!

**PART 4**  
THE READING TEST

----- **READING** -----

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Answer all questions. There is no negative marking for incorrect answers.

The reading test is considered by many to be the most difficult part of IELTS and with some justification. You have to read 3 long sections, each with multiple paragraphs, and answer 40 questions (13 to 14 per section). Unlike the listening test, no extra time is given at the end to transfer your answers to the answer sheet. Time can be a major constraint since you only have an hour to finish the test.

Start by reading the [How to prepare for IELTS - Reading test manual](#) at the Hong Kong City University site to familiarize yourself with the test, the types of questions that are asked and strategies for answering them.

The key to doing well in this part is practice. Read newspapers, magazines and books. Try and improve your reading skills and speed. Do the practice tests in Cambridge IELTS 3. The most important thing to understand is that the test does NOT assess your comprehension of the paragraphs. It does NOT test how well you have understood the passage. It tests specific skills called Scanning and Skimming.

Scanning is what one does, for example, when looking for a phone number in a directory. You know the specific information you are looking for and you go down the page quickly to find it. This technique is used when answering questions such as multiple-choice and matching. You scan the passage to quickly find the information mentioned in the question. Once you find it, you get the answer from the passage and write it against the question.

Skimming refers to reading a paragraph quickly to get an idea of what it is about, without trying to understand its details. This technique is part of the initial reading (see below). It can be modified (reading a little slower) to answer "Provide headings for the paragraphs", "In which paragraph does this information appear in the text?" and "Author's views" type of questions.

The sections get progressively more difficult. Aim to spend about 15 to 17 minutes on Section 1, 20 minutes on Section 2 and 23 to 25 minutes on Section 3. If possible, keep some spare time to check your answers.

I would suggest (and this is how I did it) that you first read all the questions quickly to get an idea of what type of information is required and whether scanning or skimming (or a combination of the two) is called for. As you read the questions, use a pencil to underline important information such as dates, places and names.

Once you are through with reading all the questions, skim over the text and underline/mark important parts. If you see any information relating to the questions, mark it straight away. You may even be able to answer some questions as you read.

Answer the questions one by one with the help of the underlined parts of the text. Having read the text once, you will find it easy to find specific information by scanning.

The answers usually appear in the text in the same order as the questions. That is, the answer to question 4 will be earlier in the text than the answer to question 5. This need not always be true. It may apply to each question type rather than to all the questions taken together. The answer to MCQ 2 will appear before that to MCQ 3 and the answer to Matching question 2 will usually appear earlier than that to Matching question 3. However, the answer to MCQ 3 may appear before the answer to Matching question 2. This will not apply to questions like "In which paragraph does this information appear?" and "Yes/No/Not given". For these question types, the information may be scattered randomly anywhere in the paragraphs.

As soon as you find an answer, write it against the question on the question paper. It is not always a good idea to try answering questions in the order in which they are asked.

Read the instructions for each question very carefully. If the question specifies that you must not use more than three words in your answer, stick to three words.

The toughest questions are the True/False/Not given and Yes/No/Not given ones. Practise doing these questions till you are confident. Make sure you do not answer True/False for a Yes/No question and vice versa. Such an answer will be considered wrong and fetch no marks.

Do not get stuck on any one question. If you can't get the answer, move on. You can always come back later.

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## TIPS FOR READING

The Academic Reading Module takes 60 minutes. There are 40 questions. There are three reading passages with a total of 1500 to 2000 words.

Tests are taken from magazines, journals, books, and newspapers. At least one text contains detailed logical argument. One text may contain non-verbal materials such as diagrams, graphs or illustrations.

A variety of questions are used, chosen from the following types:

- -Multiple choice
- -Short-answer questions
- -Sentence completion
- -Notes/summary/diagram/flow chart/table completion
- -Choosing from a "heading bank" for identified paragraphs/ sections of the text
- -Identification of writer's views /attitudes/claims
- -Classification
- -Matching lists /phrases

Texts and questions appear on a Question Paper which candidates can write on but not remove from the test room. All answers must be entered on an Answer Sheet during the 60-minute test. No extra time is allowed to transfer answers.

In reading part one must follow the following part to solve it.

1. In the reading part one has to read & understand THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE PASSAGE.
2. Read the questions FIRST & remember them. Circle key words on the QUESTIONS like dates, names, places etc. This is so that you can have an idea of the type of information you will be looking for & when you are reading the passage these key words/triggers will ring a bell.
3. Read instructions carefully. THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT because this is a READING test. You also have to read instructions.
4. Read the first Para and glance through the questions and think if you can answer any question.
5. Read other paragraph and do the same
6. While reading paragraph, also encircle the key words in the paragraph.
7. Remember one thing, all the questions in ONE PARTICULAR SET are in a sequence & order and SO is the information in the paragraph. So if you answer 1 of a SET then logically the info in the paragraph is for 2 and so on.
8. Do at least one hour of reading daily in quiet place & try to read 6 pages.
9. Daily in the night attempt just one passage (not three) and do it in 20 minutes.

# **PART 5**

## THE WRITING TEST

## ----- WRITING -----

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Actually sit and write out tasks 1 and 2 while practising. It is very tempting to think of what you would write and not do the actual writing. You will appreciate the importance of using a structured format and avoiding being repetitive only if you practise writing.

Start by reading the [How to prepare for IELTS - Writing test manual](#) at the Hong Kong City University website to familiarize yourself with the test and to get useful hints.

Task 2 carries more marks. Spend more time on it. Twenty minutes on task 1 and 40 minutes on task 2 would be a good balance.

Since task 2 is more important, it may be a good idea to do task 2 first and task 1 later. However, make sure you write for each task in the allotted area since the answer sheet has separate areas designated for each task.

For both writing tasks, it is a good idea to jot down your ideas on the question sheet so that you know the outline of what you will be writing. It may take 2 or 3 minutes but the time spent is worth it. Writing task 1 requires you to describe a graph/table/diagram in AT LEAST 150 words. I had practised on a lot of graphs but the task we had was to describe the data in a table! So practise describing all kinds of graphs/tables. See how much of your writing is 150 words. If you write less than 150 words, you lose marks. If you write more, you are likely to make more mistakes. Try and stick to around 150 words.

For task 1, first spend some time looking at the graph/table and understanding the information given. Don't start writing immediately. Make sure you know what each axis of the graph represents and in what units. The following structure is suggested for writing:

- A sentence describing what the graph/table shows.
- Another sentence describing the broad/important trends shown.
- Description of the data. It may not be possible to describe all the data as there may be too much data presented. Describe the relevant and most important parts. If there is more than one graph / chart, describe any comparisons or trends that can be made out.
- A concluding sentence which sums up the data/trends.

Practise using a variety of phrases to avoid being repetitive.

The best practice for task 2, which asks you to present an argument, is to read newspaper editorials and magazine articles on current topics. This will help you develop your ideas. A suggested structure for writing is:

- Introduce the topic and state your stand, whether you agree or disagree.
- Give arguments in support of your viewpoint supported by relevant examples.
- State the contrary viewpoint and give reasons why you don't agree with it.
- Conclude with a short concluding paragraph.

If there is time left at the end, revise your answers and correct any spelling or grammatical mistakes.

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### WRITING TIPS

The writing part has two tasks: minor & major.

The minor task should be done in 20-25 minutes. Usually three things asked in the minor task;

1. Object (e.g. a cycle is shown & various parts are labeled)
2. Process (e.g. the various ways in which solar energy is used)
3. Data; (graphs of all types e.g. line graph, bar graph, pie charts, tables, etc.)

For data one has to write;

1. Introduction (what it is about do not copy the question what. Use your imagination & write in your own words what the data is about)
2. Then in the next Para write three things, this is very important.

The three things are General trend, Comparisons, differences.  
3. In the last Para write conclusion.

Use pencil to write and take with you a new good quality eraser and sharpener. Write at least twenty words more than required. This way examiner gets an idea that you are confident and can write properly.



**PART 6**  
THE SPEAKING TEST

----- **SPEAKING** -----

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The test consists of three parts. In the first part the examiner introduces himself and asks you your name, address, interests and occupation. This part, lasting 4 to 5 minutes, is fairly simple if you are not nervous and your conversational English is adequate.

In the second part you will be given a sheet of paper with a topic written on it. You have to speak for 2 minutes on this topic. You can't ask for another topic. You are given 1 minute to write down your ideas. A sheet of paper and a pen are provided.

Make sure you read all the questions relating to the topic, written on the paper. It usually has two or three parts which you will have to talk about. Don't miss out any question or you will lose marks.

Take the one minute provided to write down all the ideas you get about the topic. You lose no marks if you use up the one minute. Two minutes can be a long time to talk solo and the notes you make will help you keep talking for the full two minutes.

Once you finish your two minutes, the examiner will stop you and then ask you some questions on what you have talked about. The second part lasts a total of 3-4 minutes.

The third part involves a discussion between you and the examiner on a topic related to what you spoke about in part 2.

You will be marked on fluency, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and ideas.

The most important thing which will help you in the speaking test is to use English in your everyday conversations. Avoid using your native language for a few weeks before the test and converse only in English. This will make you confident and you will talk fluently in the test. Watch English movies or English programmes on television to improve your pronunciation and to expand your vocabulary.

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## **TIPS FOR SPEAKING**

The speaking part of the test have been changed on July 1, 2001. It is now made up of three parts –

In Part 1 the candidate answers general questions about themselves, their homes/ families, their jobs/studies, their interests, and a range of similar familiar topic areas. This part lasts between four and five minutes.

In Part 2 the candidate is given a verbal prompt on a card and is asked to talk on a particular topic. The candidate has one minute to prepare before speaking at length, for between one and two minutes. The examiner then asks one or two rounding-off questions.

In Part 3 the examiner and candidate engage in a discussion of more abstract issues and concepts which are thematically linked to the topic prompt in Part 2. The discussion lasts between four and five minutes.

The speaking part is usually a conversation about you, your plans for the future, your past studies, the reason for which you are taking the IELTS, your country, your town. Therefore be prepared for these subjects. You should prepare something to say about them. In addition, the examiner will show you a card with an argument you are supposed to discuss about. The thing you have to remember is: use easy words and expressions if you are not very confident and everything will go well. To be able to communicate what you think is far more important than doing it with a perfect English accent. Therefore, don't worry if your pronunciation is not exactly a British one. That's not the main point. Your understanding of what the examiner says and the ability to communicate without grammar mistakes is more important. The conversation lasts usually 15-20 minutes and will be recorded. Don't panic about that!!

**I HOPE YOU ENJOYED READING THIS EBOOK!**  
**Aung Myo Min**