

SPEAKING

PART-3

What do I do if I don't understand the question?

First of all, this is not a very academic test. The questions are designed so that anyone can answer them. If you look at some example questions, it will surprise you how easy they are. They require no specialist knowledge and the examiner does not even have to agree with your opinion, they just want to hear how well you convey your ideas and express your opinion.

However, sometimes you may not quite understand what the examiner just said. In this case, simply ask him or her to repeat the question. If there is a word or term you don't understand, it is also acceptable to ask them to explain it to you. Don't overdo this, as it will seem as if you are abusing this rule.

It is a speaking test, not a listening test and the examiner wants you to give your best possible answer so don't be afraid to let them know. They won't repeat the question or explain a word to you unless you ask.

What if I need time to think?

The IELTS examiner does not expect you to give instant answers, you are not a robot! However, they do expect you to respond in a natural way. It is completely normal for native speakers to use certain words and phrases in order to give themselves time to think. You probably also do it a lot in your own language.

Phrases that can be used include:

That's a difficult question, let me think for a second.

That's a very interesting question, let me think.

It's very difficult to know exactly, but I think/but I believe/perhaps....

It's difficult to say, I think....

I don't really know for sure, but I would say....

How do I extend my answer?

Technique #1- Paraphrase Question

A good way to extend your answer is respond with a paraphrase of the examiner's question. Paraphrasing is when you repeat the sentence but with synonyms so that it has the same meaning.

For example:

Examiner: What can people do to try and reduce water pollution?

Student: So, what can individuals do to ensure water is kept clean? I think....

Examiner: How can events like the Olympics improve international relations?

Student: Hmmmm, how can sport bring people from different countries closer together? I believe...

Technique #2- Explain why

Many students state their opinion but don't extend their answer by stating **why** they feel that way. Some students have told me that they are afraid of patronising the examiner and assume he or she will know why they have stated their opinion. Assume that the examiner has no knowledge at all about the topic. Pretend you are speaking to a child who knows nothing of the topic and this will help you explain how you feel.

By asking ourselves 'why' we continue to explain our opinions and this leads to more developed answer.

Example:

Examiner: What can people do to reduce water pollution?

Student: I believe the best way to keep water clean is to curb water use at home. (Why?) The vast majority of water is used in the home, (why?), for cooking, cleaning and washing, (why?) therefore by reducing the amount of water we use, (why?) the government can conserve the water supply and keep it clean.

Technique #3- Give Examples

This seems an obvious one but it is something many students don't do. In order to really develop your answer an example is normally needed. A lot of my students complain that they don't know or can't think of any examples. If you can't think of one just make one up. You will not lose any marks for making up an example and this will only lead to you gaining marks for giving a well developed answer.

Example:

Examiner: Have the modes of transport people use in your country changed much over the last few decades?

Student: Absolutely, they have changed a lot. In the past most people used bicycles, but now they predominantly use motorbikes. For example, a recent survey found that 72% of people in Dhaka City now own a motorbike.

Technique #4- Make Concessions

We make a concession by admitting that there are limits to our opinion or there may be another side to the argument. We use words like 'however', 'on the other hand' and 'despite this' to make concessions.

Some students don't like doing this because they think it weakens their argument or opinion. In fact, by showing you are aware of other opinions you actually strengthen your argument.

Example:

Examiner: To what extent do you think advertising affects people's shopping habits?

Student: Personally, I don't think that it affects the way people shop at all. When people need something they make up their own mind rather than thinking about adverts. However, it must have some influence, if companies pay lots of money for ads.



#OnTop

- giving examples;
- giving opinions;
- contrasting viewpoints;
- commenting on someone else's opinion;
- talking about cause and effect;
- talking about hypothetical situations;
- talking about the past and future.

7 Common Question Types

1. Opinion– What do you think about 'this'? Remember to say why you think that way and give examples.

Opinion

One thing you should not do is start every sentence with 'I think...' or 'In my opinion...' The IELTS examiner will be looking for how you vary your language. Below are a number of ways you could do that:

- As I see it,
- Personally,
- For me,

If you feel very strongly about something you could use:

- I'm convinced that....
- I'm certain that....
- I'm sure that....

If you are less sure about your opinion you could give a weaker opinion by using:

- I guess that...
 - I suppose that....
- say that.....

Example Question

What are some of the ways people can help others in the community?

As I see it, there are many ways one can help the needy, but the best way is by making charitable donations. People can choose a charity and simply donate a sum of money and leave it to them to help others in need. For instance, I recently gave money to an orphanage. I don't have time to help them personally, so I'll leave it up to them to use the money as they see fit.

2. Evaluate– What do you think about someone else's opinion?

Evaluate

In these kinds of questions you will be asked what you think about someone else's opinion. We will therefore need to use expressions that allow us to agree or disagree.

For agreement we can use:

- I couldn't agree with you more.
- That's so true.
- That's for sure.
- That's exactly how I feel.
- No doubt about it.
- I suppose so./I guess so.
- You/they have a point there.

For disagreement we can use:

- I don't think so.
- I'm afraid I disagree.
- I totally disagree.
- I beg to differ.
- I'd say the exact opposite.
- Not necessarily.
- That's not always true.
- That's not always the case.

Example Question

Some people say that people helped others more in the past than they do now. Do you agree or disagree?

I don't think so. When it comes to my parent's generation I think they are quite sceptical about helping other people in the community, but my generation are regularly doing things to improve it, such as volunteering for various environmental and charitable organisations. Young people are actively encouraged to help out in the community and I don't think this happened in the past, so I'm afraid I'd disagree.

3. Future– What do you think will happen in the future?

Future

You are often asked to predict how a certain topic will change in the future.

For making future predictions we normally use 'will + verb', however this is quite simple and the examiner will be looking for your ability to use more complex structures to predict the future. More complex structures could include:

- X plans to.....
- It is predicted that....
- X intends to....
- I foresee.....
- It is foreseeable....
- Conditionals- If X + verb.....
- It is likely that...
- It is probable that....
- It is unforeseeable that....
- I envisage....

Example Question

Some people say that working from home will be quite common in the future. Do you agree?

It is foreseeable that more people will work from home in the future. If the internet becomes faster and there are more programs, such as Skype, that allow people to work from home more easily, I'd predict that more people will stay at home. If you think about it, most people don't need to be physically present to do their jobs and I envisage that face to face meetings will be a thing of the past.

4. Cause and Effect– What caused 'this' and/or what effects has 'it' had?

Example Question

How does advertising influence what people choose to buy?

I think advertising has a big influence on what people purchase and often leads to them always sticking with the same brand. For example, I always drink Coca Cola and I believe this is because I grew up watching all those ads on TV and I instinctively buy it as a result. I mean, why would companies spend so much money on adverts, unless it led to more sales?

To talk about cause and effect you can use:

- ...because...
- ...as a result....
- ...resulted in...
- ...as a consequence...
- ...due to....
- ...caused...
- ...led to....
- ...means that....

5. Hypothetical– Talk about imaginary or unreal situations.

Hypothetical

The second conditional is used to talk about 'unreal', 'unlikely' or 'impossible' situations. You might get asked a question about an 'unreal' situation, for example 'If you were mayor of your city, what would you do to improve it?'

Example Question

If you could choose any country to live in, where would you choose?

If I could live in any country, I would probably choose Australia. The weather is great; the people are super friendly and just imagine living beside all those beaches. If I could choose another country, it would have to be Italy, for the architecture, the culture and its fascinating history.

6. Compare and Contrast– Talk about the difference and/or similarities between two things.

Example Question

Do you think primary school children should learn a second language or should they wait until secondary school?

It's obvious that the earlier children start a language the easier it becomes in later life. However, some parents might think that subjects like maths are more important than languages at primary level. They may also think that a foreign language is less important than their first language and this should be prioritised.

7. Past– How were things different in the past and how have they changed?

Example Question

How has teaching changed in your country over the past few decades?

In the past, teachers simply lectured students and the students just listened to what they said. We were given lots of facts to learn and there was no room for creativity or freedom of expression. I remember learning lots of things without thinking about the theory behind it. Now, there's been a movement towards students thinking for themselves.