An Overview of IELTS Listening

Module format
IELTS Listening has four sections, each with 10 items (or questions). Each item is worth one mark. The items are designed so that the answers appear in order in the listening passage. During the test, time is given for candidates to read the questions and write down and check their answers. Answers are written on the Question Paper as candidates listen. When the tape ends, ten minutes are allowed for candidates to transfer their answers onto an Answer Sheet.

The table below provides a summary of IELTS Listening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>Topic Area</th>
<th>Input</th>
<th>Main Skill Focus</th>
<th>Number of Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Social needs</td>
<td>Conversation with a transactional purpose e.g. finding out about travel services</td>
<td>Listening for and noting specific factual information</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Social needs</td>
<td>Monologue or prompted monologue with a transactional purpose e.g. giving information about a public event</td>
<td>Listening for and noting specific factual information</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>Discussion between 2 – 4 people in an academic context, e.g. tutorial or seminar</td>
<td>Following a conversation which involves negotiation of meaning. Listening for specific information, attitudes, and speakers' opinions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Education and training</td>
<td>Monologue in an academic context e.g. lecture</td>
<td>Following an academic argument. Listening for main ideas, specific information, attitude and speaker's opinion</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Answer format**
Candidates write their answers on an answer sheet.

**Timing**
Approximately 30 minutes plus 10 minutes transfer time.

**Marks**
Each question carries one mark, giving a total of 40 marks.

**Listening texts**
The first two sections are concerned with social needs. There is a dialogue between two speakers, for example a conversation about travel arrangements, and then a monologue, for example a recording about museum opening times.

The final two sections are concerned with situations related more closely to educational or training contexts. There is a conversation between up to four people, for example a conversation between a tutor and a student about an assignment, and then a further monologue, for example a lecture of general academic interest.

**Task types**
A variety of task types is used. The principal task types are:

- **Task Type 1** Forms/Notes/Table/Flow-chart/Summary Completion
- **Task Type 2** Multiple Choice
- **Task Type 3** Short-answer Questions
- **Task Type 4** Sentence Completion
- **Task Type 5** Labelling a Diagram/Plan/Map
- **Task Type 6** Classification
- **Task Type 7** Matching

**Recordings**
Each section is played ONCE only. The recordings include a range of accents, including British, Australian, New Zealand and American.
## DOs and DON'Ts

| ✓   | Listen carefully to the introduction to each section. This will give you useful information about the situation and the speakers. |
| ✓   | Use the time at the beginning of each section (and in the middle of Sections 1 – 3) to look through the questions and think about the topic. |
| ✓   | Read the instructions for each task carefully. Remember to check the maximum number of words allowed. |
| ✓   | Write all your answers as you listen – remember you won’t hear the recording a second time. |
| ✓   | Check that what you write makes sense in the context. |
| ✓   | Answer all the questions even if you don’t feel sure about an answer – you may have understood more than you think. |
| ✓   | Wait until the end of the test to transfer your answers. You have ten minutes for this which is plenty of time. |
| ✓   | Write clearly when you transfer your answers. If an answer isn’t clear on your answer sheet, you will lose the mark. |
| ✓   | Check your spelling (and grammar where necessary). |

| ✗   | Don't worry if you have to cross out or change an answer. |
| ✗   | Don't panic if you miss one question. Look ahead and concentrate on the next one. |
| ✗   | Don't try to rephrase what you hear. Write down the words you hear which fit the question. |
| ✗   | Don't write more than the maximum number of words or letters allowed for each answer. |
| ✗   | Don’t copy any words that were printed on the Question Paper when you transfer your answers to the Answer Sheet. |

You can check how much you and your students know about these DOs and DON'Ts by doing the activity.
**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

- What aspects of listening are tested in IELTS Listening?
- Do the different sections use different task types?
- Are all the sections equally difficult?
- How do candidates record their answers?
- When the instructions state that the candidate should answer in, for example, NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS, would they lose marks by writing an answer with more than three words, even if one is ‘a’ or ‘the’?
- Do answers in IELTS Listening have to be correctly spelled?
- Does IELTS Listening always include all the different task types listed in the Overview?
- How is the band score for IELTS Listening calculated?
- How does the Listening band score relate to the overall band score?
- Will studying for IELTS Listening help students to improve their general listening skills?
- What information are candidates given before each section?
- Will candidates have time to look at the questions before they listen?
- Will there be a break during the recording?
- Will there be an example at the beginning?
- How many times do candidates hear the recording?
- Do the questions follow the order in which the information occurs in the recording?
- Will candidates have time to check their answers at the end of each section?

**What aspects of listening are tested in IELTS Listening?**

Sections 1 and 2 of IELTS Listening test the types of listening skills needed for survival in an English-speaking country in situations relating to accommodation, transport, entertainment, health, shopping etc. The main focus is on understanding key points of factual information. Sections 3 and 4 focus on the types of academic situations likely to be encountered by students following a training or study course in an English speaking country, including lectures,
tutorials, seminars, and discussions with other students on academic matters. Here the student must be able to identify key points as well as detail, and also to cope with the negotiation of meaning and follow a line of academic argument.

**Do the different sections use different task types?**
No. Any section may include any of the task types listed in the Overview. However, there will not generally be more than three different task types in any section, and in some cases the whole section may consist of just one task type.

**Are all the sections equally difficult?**
No. IELTS Listening tests a wide range of abilities, and in order to allow this, the sections gradually get more difficult from Section 1 to Section 4.

**How do candidates record their answers?**
Candidates write their answers on the Listening Question Paper during the test. At the end of the recording they are given 10 minutes to transfer their answers onto the Listening Answer Sheet.

**When the instructions state that the candidate should answer in, for example, NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS, would they lose marks by writing an answer with more than three words, even if one is ‘a’ or ‘the’?**
Yes. Answers which exceed the word limit will be marked incorrect.

**Do answers in IELTS Listening have to be correctly spelled?**
Yes. Incorrect spelling and grammar are penalised. However, words which the candidates have to write will generally be high-frequency words. Both UK and US varieties of spelling are accepted. Proper names may be spelled out in the recording.

**Does IELTS Listening always include all the different task types listed in the Overview?**
No. Each test version will contain a different combination of task types.

**How is the band score for IELTS Listening calculated?**
One mark is awarded for each of the 40 questions. A Band Score conversion table is produced for each version of IELTS Listening which translates scores out of 40 onto the IELTS 9-band scale. Scores are reported as a whole band or a half band.

**How does the Listening band score relate to the overall band score?**
The overall score is worked out based on the band scores for each of the four Modules; the final score may be reported as a whole band or a half band.

**Will studying for IELTS Listening help students to improve their general listening skills?**
Yes. Students will be encouraged to listen in different ways for different purposes and to become more aware of the strategies that English speakers use to communicate in speech.
What information are candidates given before each section?
At the beginning of each section candidates hear a short description of the situation they are about to listen to. This may give information about who the speakers are, where they are and what the general topic is. This description is not written on the Question Paper, so it is important for candidates to listen carefully.

Will candidates have time to look at the questions before they listen?
Yes, there is time for candidates to look at the questions before each section. They are told which questions to look at.

Will there be a break during the recording?
There is one break during each of Sections 1, 2 and 3 to allow candidates time to look at the following questions. However, there is NOT a break in Section 4.

Will there be an example at the beginning?
There is usually an example at the beginning of Section 1, and for this section only, the recording relating to the example is played twice.

How many times do candidates hear the recording?
Each recording is heard ONCE only.

Do the questions follow the order in which the information occurs in the recording?
Yes. This is the case for all task types in IELTS Listening.

Will candidates have time to check their answers at the end of each section?
Yes, candidates have half a minute to check their answers at the end of each section.

If you have any other questions about IELTS Listening, please contact us and we’ll answer the most frequently asked questions here.