

## Test Phobia of IELTS and its Remedy



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**Abstract** *English acquisition as a second language (ESL) has been a Herculean task for students generally. When it comes specifically to IELTS, it seems to be the most difficult assessment of life because students' level of English do not meet the IELTS requirements due to incorrect local practices; either due to an unconducive environment or social factors for which the best way out is rephrasing the text, getting used to standard English, majoring appropriate use of tense, and lack of familiarity with standard accents. Hence, presentation of opinions and variety of vocabulary with its aspects of synonyms and antonyms produce a better result in scoring respectable bands in IELTS.*

## Introduction

An academic program troubles but pretty much less as compared to the TEST which for sure aches enormously partly because we glance back over what we read back in the books for which remembering seems herculean task to instill every single detail in mind to be prepared for the said examination. Further, we are not scared enough for what we forgot and could not carry them to the end rather we are particularly afraid of utter failure. We, of course do not imagine staying back from our fellows in the race of obtaining respectable grades but to be more specific it earns us public shame and disdainful sight of our rivals which itself is playing a pivotal role in whipping us to direct to our milestone. In this regard a study conducted by Winke and Lim (2014) consider the measures and boundaries to which the conduction of tests and test phobia has affected performance on the IELTS prospective tests. The major concern in this study is the IELTS preparation and test takers perception of the format of the test.

According to Richards (1985) "Language is a set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expressions to thoughts and feeling and especially to impart them to others. Language is purely human and non-instinctive method of

communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily reduced symbols. ”

Harry (2002) states that evaluation is a comprehensive term for all forms of quality monitoring, assessment, audit, endorsement or accreditation; if there is a teaching learning process there must be an evaluation/ examination/ test to judge performance of the learners. One way or the other, but exam has the pressure of its own whether that is a home, domestic board or an international academic purposive testing evaluation, the matter of fact is the uncontrollable pressure and stress which consequently diverts our focus from study to alert for the result which way it ends up. Unluckily, when it comes to English, it chokes us with both hands as we yield plainly against this monster’s approaching round the corner. Not to speak of fighting with it rather the very sight of it drives us mad and servile opposing figure. As if this monster has torn others apart and is nearly killing us, too.

Testing is a challenge for the test takers (Palmer, 1996). This much fearful scene indicates two main aspects; first is no home ground preparation which we took very light and easy and the second is the arsenal is not good enough to be fought with or the manufacturer is dealing in the fake arms. Above all, the fault lies in us while bargaining such tools which will resultantly perform unsatisfactorily. We at first should have twice checked the equipment we are purchasing.

According to Sarnaski (1979) the test setters are also responsible for the arousal of such fear in the minds of the students. They should apply such strategies which are applicable, effective and in accordance with the test format. We have to go through the arena of tests and in the course of time interestingly, the coach does not teach us aiming at hitting this monster for having two main reasons: either he himself does not figure out pulling trigger or the monster is mightier than that of the experience of the coach but I assume the first one is solid proof. The coach is not a certified one and the training center where we get enrolled is not aiming to do with what needs to be trained of. This, merely deals in raising amount of money instead providing some quality guideline.

Interestingly enough, as time lapses and the demands of the future get heavier. This, teases more than the miserable condition of the past because the combatting tools must have been sharper and deadlier but the truth is that we at this time feel more deserted than that of the past particularly of that monster (English), which is of course nearly the language of the globe (Crystal, 1997).

To be very frank, from the very onset we have never made up our faults whether that was of general academic tests our English in particular but the matter of fact is that we postponed it to upcoming hours in order to pave way for getting into credulity that let’s fix it by tomorrow but as a common dictum runs that tomorrow never comes. And, when we feel the need of learning English at the later stage of life so that confines to a particular event to get through as entry test or any other academic fulfilling criteria. Then again, we just hope for the best and not

prepare for the worst. We mention proudly “let by gone be by gone” but as we step out from theory into practice, we rub and hold our skull between our hands.

A reliable document source of an IELTS (2014) test-preparation still holding its possession on IELTS website does not give surety that test-preparation might go straight to increase Second Language acquisition skills. Besides the website doesn't fail to provide a list of courses for IELTS preparation and material sources of sample-test. The author of the document is not in the favor of attending a preparatory course on behalf of the course attenders but on the other hand candidates and researchers suggest to have benefit through the course based classes accelerating performance and skills.

It makes us wonder that why students fail in English examinations and tests? The reason is quite obvious that they always try shortcuts which ultimately drown them in a quagmire in a path leading to their undecided future. At the point they needed to have a long term thought they spend it on unnecessary activities as using FACEBOOK, TWITTER and WHATSAPP. The fact is that these too improve English up to some extent but a user at first should have some basic information to get benefitted from these aforementioned internet applications.

Secondly, the major variable is held responsible for students failure is the traditional text teaching class where there is no creative exercise and in addition to that the learning materials hardly meet the desired requirements while another point is of absence of A.V. aids which themselves play vital role in improving students' English partly because when there is input so one can expect output which merely happens with the existence of Audio Visual aids.

Thirdly, the most efficient point is the standard English but pronunciation in particular which is the crucial organ of English in whose detaching the charm vanishes. As most of the time students can't pick what the speaker utters. Whose way of speaking students cannot fully comprehend due to local pronunciation uttered by non-natives which of course can be the means of conveying a message but not the source of competing the world academically and fulfill English learners' needs.

Most importantly, learning a language properly and use it appropriately has got a different skill. In this regard Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) state that thinking “Who I am” is translated by the form of language an individual speaks, the speaker must hold the level of proficiency and fluency. Unluckily, in Pakistan English users just convey message in broken English which is for the time being is right enough but it slowly and gradually develops in our academic usage of various examination which gets us low grades and more to it is grammar translation method (GTM) of whose exercise students develop the habit of translating one passage into native language and vice versa. This resultantly proves fixity and limited grammatical structures which do not serve students' academic needs. Lastly, it seems as if one is thinking in but not out of the box.

As far as international tests and exams are concerned, it becomes more panic and troublesome to get through them with satisfactory scores. The level of tension increases, as more than contents of the papers' English language skills are evaluated and thoroughly analyzed on the behalf of which it is determined whether the student is capable on promoting to the next level or not. It entirely depends on excellence of your English determines your competence; however in some tests information is more preferable than the level of your English. But again the edge is given to the appropriate usage of English.

IELTS (International Language Testing System) is one of the most frequent means of evaluating the level of English especially in getting enrolled in under and graduate study programs set by Cambridge University for the aspirants having burning desire to pursue their studies abroad. According to Bailey (2002) there are certain issues in the acquisition of English as a Foreign/ Second Language. The seekers of success in a test must be well aware of the test format and the contents of the test to be taken by him. A prerequisite criteria mentioned by the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (AERA, APA & NCME, 2014) suggests that test takers must be well aware of the content validity, criterion validity as well as construct validity of the test. IELTS comprises of four basic skills such as: Reading, writing, listening and speaking. Each module contains its specific rules to be attempted and keeping in view its proper procedure which ultimately turns out in better results.

Pre-exam tips:

1. Seek guidance of test each module
2. Engineer rephrasing/ paraphrasing statements
3. Have through command on synonyms and antonyms
4. Obtain standard pronunciation of standard accents
5. Grasp using transitional devices appropriately
6. Get familiar with skimming and scanning strategies

## **Speaking**

*Thornbury and Slade (2006) state that speaking plays significant role in the establishment of rapport and harmonious accord accelerating social identity including skills of interaction.* Speaking is the index of the whole IELTS in which the ball is in candidate's coat. It is usually subjective where students are enquired about their personal matters and life related queries. It is sub-categorized into three various sections. Before the proper commencement of the interview, students are asked to introduce themselves. If the examiner asks each question separately, still students are required to extend their introduction as the interviewer specifically wants to know the usage of English so an extended answer scores respectable Bands more than a short reply, if the question goes this way that:

➤ Can I know where do you live?

So, if the response is mono and not very illustrious so it will result in poor Band scoring for instance: I live in Swat which is in KP.

Instead, if the answer goes this way that:

*I am basically the inhabitant of a region naming Swat known for its beauty surrounded by massive mountain sand the hub of produce where most of the public across our country as well as from various countries pay visit which is located on Northern side of KP.*

The interviewer specifically looks for:

1. The selection of diction
2. Rephrasing
3. The variety of diction
4. Transitional devices
5. The appropriate usage of tense
6. Fluency devices..umm,uh, ahhh.

If all these above bullet points are kept in consideration for attempting IELTS speaking test, it will enable students score high bands. Another noteworthy point is that speaking module itself is divided into three sub-section as section one: these are life related questions (study, choices, colors, clothes, study background) where students are judged whether they can use present tense correctly, are they capable of fuse present into past and can link present with future or fail to do so.

The interviewee is required to major these skills before setting out for the real test and make sure a sound rehearsal on the above mentioned points.

This is immediately followed by another section naming most of the time CUE CARD which on some questions are inscribed as hints to develop a real life story from the given points having time for 2 minutes to make some useful notes and approximately 3 minutes to articulate the speculated event. The examiner basically wants to check:

1. Do you have a thorough command on presenting a past event in present?
2. Do you have the potential to peep in the past and show what exactly happened to make a real story of that event?
3. How possibly you can link present with past with slight touch of future tense?
4. How naturally can you narrate anything of the past?

It is worth mentioning that cue card may relate any life event or may not be, but the matter of fact is to develop an imaginary story somehow happened in someone's life or any other fictional filmy event in order to evaluate your speaking level, not the originality of the story. Hence, the crucial point is to not remain silent.

Certainly making sure these useful tips will fascinate the examiner to rank your speaking highly in consequence of meeting the set criteria. Interestingly, the 3<sup>rd</sup>

section itself is connected with the cue card which will bring you similar concept of questions somehow associated with the event you drew in 2<sup>nd</sup> section of speaking interview. Thus it is crystal clear that 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> sections have relevancy in terms of key concepts where there lies the only difference of usage of tenses and the selection of words.

This is, immediately, followed by Listening module which consists of 4 various sections including life related information, a tutorial of student teacher discussion mostly about a research as well as a lecture about a subject at university level delivered to students about a particular topic.

In this section, there is an audio recording being played as time of test starts where the first section of the booklet is about 1 to 10 question linked with the common information that of booking or reservation of seat on cruise ship, a hotel room or citizenship a dialogue between helpdesk and client. This mostly consists of giving and taking personal information where fill in the blanks type of questions are asked which seem easier comparatively than other section of this test. As this section ends, the difficulty rises and questions understanding becomes hard due to fast track of the audio, but what is very essential are:

1. Do not lose focus of the audio track.
2. Understand the question thoroughly and guess the answer itself.
3. The answer of question is stressed more than that of other words.
4. If you lose the track, quickly jump up to the other question and leave that.
5. Try to understand the synonyms of the important words.
6. Jot down what the speaker says nearly relevant the answer.
7. Conceptualize standard accents well in order to fish out the point.

Keeping in view all the above important points, it enables us to score desired bands as per the nature of this very module as it is assumed that this module is comparatively harder than the others, however it is not so as we are not familiar with standard accents spoken in Europe and the united states partly because we always communicate and listen to our local accents only for conveying message where we fail to comprehend when it comes to articulate on international level.

Similarly, there is reading, comprises of three various passages being attempted in one hour where students come across with numerous problems in comprehending the nature of the test. The substantial point is not to read out the whole passage and understand what it is about rather skim the text and take out the answers as possibly one could. The students do not plan the suggested strategy of skimming and scanning where one has to just match the given questions with the clue in hand comparing with the relevant statement and waste their time by reading between the lines the whole passage.

What are skim and scanning techniques?

Basically, skimming is a particular reading strategy of grasping the general idea of the text where we come to know what the paragraph is all about in the light of which it enables us to juxtapose the paragraph headings with the text to answer the question.

Whereas, scanning is a technique of finding a specific information within a passage of the given questions below. Unlike skimming, this skill of reading is different from others where you have to read meticulously to mark a question right or wrong or the information not given.

Having the suggested tips in hand, a student can possibly achieve high bands than before because IELTS is the game of tips and tricks, having no strategy at hand... one will hardly be able to score but unrespectable bands.

Finally, the last module is writing which includes 2 basic tasks: task 1 is report writing on the provided data shown via charts and bars where one has to report the main features as well as make comparison where relevant. The student is not supposed to present every single detail but the major cross sections and trends as it is also important to draft data conclusively in a coherent report style. If one provides every single detail, it loses the worth of writing because the examiner is not looking for the exact facts and figure rather checking the skill of your writing that how comprehensively you can present data.

It is pretty much essential to sub-categorize your report into certain paragraphs as:

1. Introductory paragraph of given data that what is it where and since when including the type of chart or bar.
2. The overall view of the data what has basically happened: ups and downs.
3. Details in view of comparison and contrast of main features.
4. Specific jargon of report writing.
5. Conclusion in light of the provided data.

Last but not the least, task 2 is an essay of minimum 250 words by shedding light on most of the time on two opposing statement with the author own opinion which comprises of approximately 5 paragraphs including introductory with paraphrasing along with writer's thesis statement, pros and cons followed by personal assumed conclusion in light of the body of essay.

What basically the examiner checks out is not only information but the presentation of your language skills that how effectively you can write an argument with TEE (Title, explanation, example) paragraphing style by switching from one idea to the other with the help of transitional devices also known as connectors with own opinion. What are more essential inscribed below:

1. Rephrasing of statement by selecting right diction with thesis statement
2. Important to mention whether you are writing in favor of one and opposing other or having a balanced approach.
3. Variety of diction with natural fitting transitional devices

4. Giving conclusion at the end in light of the body of essay.

Bringing all these instructions under consideration will make students able to enhance their academic as well as drafting and presentation skills of English language to obtain high grades in any academic or professional test in practical life.

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