

Frequently Asked Questions

How do IELTS scores relate to other tests?

Although it is not possible to give exact comparisons across different types of tests and test scores, the table below shows in broad terms the relationship between IELTS scores and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), published by the Council of Europe which provides a standard specification of language levels, used and understood all over the world.

IELTS	CEF
9.0	
8.5	
8.0	
7.5	C2
7.0	
6.5	C1
6.0	
5.5	B2
5.0	
4.5	
4.0	
3.5	
3.0	A2

How long are the results valid for?

IELTS recommends that a Test Report Form which is more than two years old should only be accepted as evidence of present level of language ability if it is accompanied by proof that a candidate has actively maintained or tried to improve their English language proficiency. This recommendation is based on research evidence into the way learners retain their language skills, and is in line with other international tests.

Why can't the IELTS modules be taken as separate tests?

IELTS is designed to assess a candidate's overall English language proficiency within a specified time-frame. Performance in the four skill areas is combined to provide a maximally reliable composite assessment of a candidate's overall language proficiency at a given point in time.

Scores on the four component modules are computed to provide an overall band score; the four component scores are also reported separately for their diagnostic value, to indicate a candidate's relative strengths and weaknesses.

Why aren't the IELTS Academic Reading and Writing tasks more like university-level tasks?

IELTS is designed to test readiness to enter the world of university-level study in the English language and the ability to cope with the demands of that context immediately after entry. It does not assume that test-takers have already mastered (or even partially acquired) the range of university level reading or writing skills which they are likely to need. Instead, tasks are designed to be accessible to a wide range of test-takers (irrespective of their academic discipline) and to reflect features of writing activities that are already familiar to candidates from previous study experience as well as some general features of writing they may encounter in subsequent study.

Is IELTS biased?

Published external studies of IELTS have supported the view that the test is fair to candidates whatever their national and cultural backgrounds, and regardless of gender. All the texts and tasks in the IELTS modules are designed to be widely accessible. Topics or contexts of language use which might introduce a bias against any group of candidates of a particular background (e.g. due to gender, ethnic origin) are avoided.

Is IELTS suitable for younger students below the age of 18?

IELTS is targeted primarily at adults, i.e. those in their late teens or above. This is particularly true for the Academic modules (Reading and Writing) which tend to assume a level of maturity normally not achieved until early adulthood. However, research into the performance of test takers aged between 15 and 17 suggests that IELTS – particularly General Training – is suitable for use with students below 18.

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How well does IELTS predict academic success?

The relationship between English language proficiency and subsequent academic success is extremely complex and it is vital for users of IELTS test scores to set responsible admissions criteria and to have a clear understanding of the contribution that IELTS scores can make in determining an applicant's suitability for entry, including the relative importance of scores in the four modules for particular academic courses.

The IELTS partners are working to help university admissions departments and other test users improve their understanding of the relationship between students' English language proficiency and subsequent performance.

On the IELTS test application form candidates are obliged to give personal information not directly relevant to taking the exam. Why is this compulsory?

Some of these questions can play a role in establishing the candidate's identity and thus contribute to the security and integrity of the exam. The information is also used to help us ensure that IELTS is fair. It is important that we can know, for example, the range of first languages represented within a sample, whether it is balanced in terms of gender, whether it contains an unusually high, or unusually low, proportion of candidates taking the exam for particular purposes, etc.

On taking IELTS a second time, the overall result may be the same, but there can be different band scores on the Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing components. Why does this happen?

Language learning is a dynamic process involving both acquisition (improving ability in some aspects of language) and attrition (loss of ability in others). Between IELTS tests both of these processes take place and can affect score profiles. For example, a learner may improve their reading and writing ability, but lose some ability in speaking and listening. Sometimes, improvement takes place in those skills on which the candidate has focused for the retake but they

may not have maintained their ability in the other skills. Other reasons derive from the nature of tests and measurement. In addition to the candidate's language ability, differences in test content across versions and other variables such as the test taker's mood or state of health at the time can also affect their scores and contribute to unexpected variation.

Why isn't there a link between the Reading and Writing modules?

This issue has been intensively researched over many years. We have found that by keeping the skills separate, we can give a fairer, more accurate assessment.

How Reliable is IELTS?

Longer tests involving multiple components, such as IELTS, are generally considered more reliable since they give test takers more opportunities to display their true ability. We ensure the reliability of the IELTS test through rigorous quality control of test content and scoring procedures. Before appearing in a live test, all material is trialled with IELTS candidates to ensure that it is at the appropriate level of difficulty and operates as intended. Examiners are trained and their performance is regularly monitored. We also re-mark the performance of any candidate whose score on Speaking or Writing is significantly different from their scores on other components. Performance in the four skill areas is combined in IELTS to provide a reliable composite assessment of a candidate's overall language proficiency at a given point in time.

Statistics on the reliability of IELTS are published on the IELTS website, www.ielts.org

Where can I get more information?

More information on these issues and many others and a full bibliography of published research on IELTS is available on the IELTS website at www.ielts.org