

Like all language exams, performance in the IELTS test depends on a combination of language knowledge, practical language skills and exam technique.

While language knowledge can be increased by attending a general English course, I am convinced that to optimise their result, students should attend an IELTS preparation course of at least 40 hours. By learning to deal with the particular demands of the test and getting training in all IELTS question types, they should improve their result by a minimum of one band level.

Conversely, candidates who do not do an IELTS preparatory course are limiting their chances in the test and putting themselves at a disadvantage with respect to the course they wish to study.

Many teachers complain about the problems of preparing students for this test. While much of the exam content (and therefore published practice tests) may seem dry, I believe that with lively, interesting teaching materials, this can be an enjoyable and challenging course for both teachers and students.

One of the distinguishing features of the IELTS test is the wide range of question-types it employs. In the Reading Module, candidates may encounter any of 9 different question-types with an even greater variety of format. The questions require different reading techniques for dealing with them: reading in detail, skimming and scanning, and candidates have to recognize what is being demanded of them and adapt their reading strategies accordingly.

A good course, and a good textbook will therefore be one which trains students in efficient reading techniques.

Here is an example of how this is done in *Instant IELTS*:  
On the students' page the following questions appear on a text dealing with travelling in Australia:

**Questions 1-6**

The passage has nine paragraphs labelled A-I.

Which paragraphs contain the following information?

Choose the appropriate letters A-I.

- A A comparison between the interior and areas near the sea
- B A warning about luggage
- C Advice about clothing
- D Advice on litter
- E Information on a problem which doesn't occur often
- F Reassurance about what you can eat

In the teacher's notes, the following advice is given for dealing with the same question depending on whether the students are intermediate or advanced level:

### Questions 1-6 (12 mins)

**The words in the questions will almost certainly not be the words in the passage, so they should look for synonyms. This will require them to scan the passage.**

#### Intermediate

- Before reading, ask them in pairs to think of synonyms for the vocabulary in questions 1-6 e.g. *areas near the sea: the coast / luggage: suitcases etc.*
- Tell them they shouldn't read the whole passage carefully but scan to find the information i.e. run their eyes over the passage looking for the synonyms. When they find something which seems possible, they should read just that part carefully to see whether it coincides with the ideas in the questions.
- Point out that they managed to answer the questions in spite of unfamiliar vocabulary.

#### Advanced

- To encourage efficient, fast reading you could set a time limit to answer questions 1-6 of 5 minutes.

Unlike other exams, in the Listening Module, candidates only hear each piece once. Also, they may be confronted with any of 7 question-types plus a variety of formats.

Again, they require thorough preparation in how to deal with the questions and how to listen efficiently. This goes far beyond merely giving students listening practice, and a good course will provide this preparation, while the textbook will suggest ideas to both students and teachers for improving listening technique.

You can see examples of this from *Instant IELTS* by [clicking here](#).

The Writing Module in IELTS is relatively limited in scope but may be quite specialised. Also, it is often the part of the test where candidates perform worst.

If candidates are doing the Academic Writing Module, they will need to be able to write a short report based on charts, statistics or other diagrammatic input, and a longer academic-style discursive essay.

Both types of writing require specific training, especially for students who come from an educational culture which does not require them to write discursively. A good preparatory course will teach the grammar and vocabulary which are most useful in these types of writing. It will also teach students to

- analyse the question to ensure that they answer it correctly.
- brainstorm ideas – many students have difficulty coming up with sufficient ideas for a discursive essay and especially under exam conditions.
- organize ideas and structure their writing logically and coherently.

- make use of their vocabulary resource to create the best impression on the examiner.
- use discourse-markers so that the reader will find what they are writing easy to follow.

The General Training Module requires candidates to write a transactional letter and also a discursive essay, but of a less academic nature. Once again, candidates will benefit from careful preparation and practice in both.

*Instant IELTS* deals with the Writing Modules by providing sample questions and compositions, and by basing exercises and activities around these.

All activities are put into the context of complete, lively, enjoyable lessons which offer plenty of opportunities for interaction amongst students and with the teacher while allowing them to feel that they are using their time in a constructive manner.