

Test format – Reading (60 minutes)

The Reading section consists of 40 questions, designed to test a wide range of reading skills. These include reading for gist, reading for main ideas, reading for detail, skimming, understanding logical argument and recognising writers' opinions, attitudes and purpose.

IELTS General Training test - this includes extracts from books, magazines, newspapers, notices, advertisements, company handbooks and guidelines. These are materials you are likely to encounter on a daily basis in an English-speaking environment.

IELTS General Training Reading description

Paper format: There are three sections. Section 1 may contain two or three short texts or several shorter texts. Section 2 comprises two texts. In Section 3, there is one long text.

Timing: 60 minutes

No. of questions: 40

Task types: A variety of question types are used, chosen from the following: multiple choice, identifying information, identifying writer's views/claims, matching information, matching headings, matching features, matching sentence endings, sentence completion, summary completion, note completion, table completion, flow-chart completion, diagram label completion, short-answer questions.

Sources: The first section, 'social survival', contains texts relevant to basic linguistic survival in English with tasks mainly about retrieving and providing general factual information, for example, notices, advertisements and timetables.

The second section, 'Workplace survival', focuses on the workplace context, for example, job descriptions, contracts and staff development and training materials.

The third section, 'general reading', involves reading more extended prose with a more complex structure. Here, the emphasis is on descriptive and instructive rather than argumentative texts, in a general context relevant to the wide range of test takers involved, for example, newspapers, magazines and fictional and non-fictional book extracts.

Answering: Test takers are required to transfer their answers to an answer sheet during the time allowed for the test. No extra time is allowed for transfer. Care should be taken when writing answers on the answer sheet as poor spelling and grammar are penalised.

Marks: Each question is worth 1 mark.

IELTS General Training Reading in detail

A detailed look at the paper with links to related resources.

Task type 1 – Multiple choice

Task type and format: In this task type, test takers choose the best answer from four alternatives A, B, C or D, or the best two answers from five alternatives (A, B, C, D or E), or the best three answers from seven alternatives (A, B, C, D, E, F or G). They write the letter of the answer they have chosen on the answer sheet.

The questions may involve completing a sentence, in which the 'stem' gives the first part of a sentence and test takers choose the best way to complete it from the options, or could involve complete questions, choosing the option which best answers them. The questions are in the same order as the information in the text: that is, the answer to the first question in this group will be located in the text before the answer to the second question, and so on. This task type may be used with any type of text.

Task focus: This task type tests a wide range of reading skills including detailed understanding of specific points or an overall understanding of the main points of the text.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 2 – Identifying information

Task type and format: The test taker will be given a number of statements and asked: 'Do the following statements agree with the information in the text?' They then write 'true', 'false' or 'not given' in the boxes on their answer sheets. The questions are in the same order as the information in the text: that is, the answer to the first question in this group will be located in the text before the answer to the second question and so on.

It is important to understand the difference between 'false' and 'not given'. 'False' means that the passage states the opposite of the statement in question; 'not given' means that the statement is neither confirmed nor contradicted by the information in the passage.

Any knowledge students bring with them from outside the passage should not play a part when deciding on their answers.

Task focus: This task type assesses the test takers' ability to recognise particular points of information conveyed in the text. It can thus be used with more factual texts.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 3 – Identifying writer's views/claims

Task type and format: The test taker will be given a number of statements and asked: 'Do the following statements agree with the views/claims of the writer?' They answer 'yes', 'no' or 'not given' in the boxes on their answer sheet. The questions are in the same order as the information in the text: that is, the answer to the first question in this group will be located in the text before the answer to the second question, and so on.

It is important to understand the difference between 'no' and 'not given'. 'No' means that the views or claims of the writer explicitly disagree with the statement, i.e. the writer somewhere expresses the view or makes a claim which is opposite to the one given in the question; 'not given' means that the view or claim is neither confirmed nor contradicted. (Any knowledge students bring with them from outside the passage should not play a part when deciding on their answers.)

Task focus: This task type assesses the test takers' ability to recognise opinions or ideas, and is thus often used with discursive or argumentative texts.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 4 – Matching information

Task type and format: Test takers locate specific information in the lettered paragraphs/sections of a text, and write the letters of the correct paragraphs/sections in the boxes on their answer sheet. They may be asked to find; specific details, an example, a reason, a description, a comparison, a summary, an explanation. They will not necessarily need to find information in every paragraph/section of the text, but there may be more than one piece of relevant information in a given paragraph/section. When this is the case, test takers will be told that they can use any letter more than once. The questions do not follow the same order as the information in the text. This task type can be used with any text as it may test a wide range of reading skills, from locating detail to recognising a summary or definition.

Task focus: This task type assesses the test takers' ability to scan for specific information. Unlike task type 5 (Matching headings), it is concerned with specific information rather than with the main idea.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 5 – Matching headings

Task type and format: Test takers are given a list of headings, usually identified with lower-case Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, etc.), referring to the main idea of the paragraph or section of the text. They must match the heading to the correct paragraphs or sections, which are marked alphabetically, and write the appropriate Roman numerals in the boxes on their answer sheets. There will always be more headings than there are paragraphs or sections, so some headings will not be used. It is also possible that some paragraphs or sections may not be included in the task. One or more paragraphs or sections may already be matched with a heading as an example. No heading may be used more than once. This task type is used with texts that contain paragraphs or sections with clearly defined themes.

Task focus: This task tests the ability to recognise the main idea or theme in the paragraphs or sections of a text, and to distinguish main ideas from supporting ones.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 6 – Matching features

Task type and format: Test takers match a set of statements or pieces of information to a list of options. These are a group of features from the text, and are identified by letters. Test takers may, for example, be required to match different characteristics to age groups or events to historical periods, etc. It is possible that some options will not be used, and that others may be used more than once. The instructions will advise whether options may be used more than once. The questions do not follow the same order as the information in the text.

Task focus: This task assesses the ability to recognise relationships and connections between facts in the text, and to recognise opinions and theories. It may be used both with texts dealing with factual information, description or narrative. Test takers need to be able to skim and scan the text in order to locate the required information and to read for detail.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 7 – Matching sentence endings

Task type and format: Test takers are given the first half of a sentence based on the text and choose the best way to complete it from a list of possible options. They will have more options to choose from than there are questions. The questions are in the same order as the information in the text: that is, the answer to the first question in this group will be found before the answer to the second question, and so on. This task type may be used with any type of text.

Task focus: This task type assesses the test takers' ability to understand the main ideas.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 8 – Sentence completion

Task type and format: Test takers complete sentences in a given number of words taken from the text, writing their answers on the answer sheet. The instructions will make it clear how many words/numbers should be in the answers, e.g. 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER from the passage', 'ONE WORD ONLY' or 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS'. If test takers write more than the number of words asked for, they will lose the mark.

Numbers can be written using figures or words. Contracted words will not be tested. Hyphenated words count as single words. The questions are in the same order as the information in the passage: that is, the answer to the first question in this group will be found before the answer to the second question, and so on.

Task focus: This task type assesses the test takers' ability to locate detail/specific information.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 9 – Summary, note, table, flow-chart completion

Task type and format: Test takers are given a summary of a section of the text, and are required to complete it with information drawn from the text. Note that the summary will usually be of only one part of the passage rather than the whole. The given information may be in the form of; several connected sentences (referred to as a summary), several notes (referred to as notes), a table with some of its cells empty or partially empty (referred to as a table), a series of boxes or steps linked by arrows to show a sequence of events, with some of the boxes or steps empty or partially empty (referred to as a flow-chart). The answers will not necessarily occur in the same order as in the text. However, they will usually come from one section rather than the entire text. There are two variations of this task type. Test takers may be asked either to select words from the text or to select from a list of answers. Where words have to be selected from the passage, the instructions will make it clear how many words/numbers test takers should use in their answers, e.g. 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER from the passage', 'ONE WORD ONLY' or 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS'. If test takers write more than the number of words asked for, they will lose the mark. Numbers can be written using figures or words. Contracted words are not tested. Hyphenated words count as single words. Where a list of answers is provided, they most frequently consist of a single word, There are always more words or phrases in the box than there are gaps to fill. Because this task type often relates to precise factual information, it is often used with descriptive texts.

Task focus: This task type assesses the test takers' ability to understand details and/or the main ideas of a section of the text. In the variations involving a summary or notes, they need to be aware of the type of word(s) that will fit into a given gap (for example, whether a noun is needed, or a verb, etc.).

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 10 – Diagram label completion

Task type and format: Test takers complete labels on a diagram which relates to a description contained in the text. The instructions will make it clear how many words/numbers test takers should use in their answers, e.g. 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER from the passage', 'ONE WORD ONLY' or 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS'. If they write more than the number of words asked for, they will lose the mark. Numbers can be written using figures or words. Contracted words will not be tested. Hyphenated words count as single words. The answers do not necessarily occur in order in the passage.

However, they will usually come from one section rather than the entire text. The diagram may be of some type of machine, or of parts of a building or of any other element that can be represented pictorially. This task type is often used with texts describing processes or with descriptive texts.

Task focus: This task type assesses the ability to understand a detailed description, and to relate it to information presented in the form of a diagram.

No. of questions: Variable

Task type 11 – Short-answer questions

Task type and format: Test takers answer questions about factual details in the text. Test takers must write their answers in words or numbers on the answer sheet. Test takers must write their answers using words from the text. The instructions will make it clear how many words/numbers test takers should use in their answers, e.g. 'NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER from the passage', 'ONE WORD ONLY' or 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS'. If they write more than the number of words asked for, they will lose the mark. Numbers can be written using figures or words. Contracted words are not tested. Hyphenated words count as single words. The questions are in the same order as the information in the text: that is, the answer to the first question in this group will be located in the text before the answer to the second question, and so on.

Task focus: This task type assesses the ability to locate and understand precise information in the text.

No. of questions: Variable

IELTS General Training Reading - How it's marked

The General Training Reading test is marked by certificated markers, who are regularly monitored to ensure reliability. After being marked, all answer sheets, are further analysed by Cambridge English.

Band score conversion

A band score conversion table is produced for each version of the General Training Reading test which translates scores out of 40 into the IELTS 9-band scale. Scores are reported in whole bands and half bands.