

Help and Hindrance in IELTS Listening

Discuss the four questions below about the IELTS listening task(s) that you did and/ or the listening task(s) that you have in front of you:

What things about the task or tasks mean that they are difficult to complete?

How can you tackle those issues (= How can you make the tasks possible despite those difficulties)?

What things about the task(s) help you to complete them successfully, i.e. mean that they are easier to answer than they could be?

How could you use those things to help you get a good score?

Help and hindrance in IELTS Listening

Decide if the things below help or hinder you when you do an IELTS listening paper and put a plus mark (+) or minus mark (-) next to them:

+ = good news/ things which make the task easier (than it could be)/ things that help you

- = bad news/ things which make the task more difficult/ things that hinder you

Some things could be considered both a help and a hindrance, in which case you should put both marks (+ -).

Help and hindrance in all IELTS Listening parts

1. There are always exactly four sections in the test.
2. The kind of speaking in each section of the test is always the same, e.g. always a talk such as a lecture in Section 4.
3. Some of the question types tend to go with the same section of the test, e.g. there is always form filling in Section 1 and diagram completion is most common in Section 4.
4. Some of the question types in each section, e.g. which section or section has multiple choice questions, change from test to test.
5. One section usually has two or three different tasks in it (e.g. filling in a form, filling in a table, then sentence completion all in Section 1).
6. The questions are always in the same order as the listening text.
7. There is usually enough time to read through all the questions in one section and underline important words before the recording starts.
8. There is sometimes enough time to think about what you might hear, e.g. kinds of words which fit the gaps, before the recording starts.
9. There is usually quite a lot of speaking before the information that you need to answer the first question is said.
10. The speaker usually continues speaking for a while after the last question has been answered.
11. There is sometimes something before the (correct) answer that shows that the important information is coming (“and so we decided...” etc).
12. There is sometimes something after the correct answer to confirm that it was the important information (“... and that is indeed the case” etc).
13. There is sometimes something before a (trick) wrong answer that shows it should be ignored (“Many people think that...” etc).
14. There is sometimes something after a (trick) wrong answer to show that it should be ignored (“... but it turned out it wasn’t a good idea” etc).
15. Sometimes intonation can show if the speaker feels positively or negatively, agrees or disagrees, etc.
16. Each section is usually split into shorter sections, e.g. the first half and second half of a lecture in Section 4, with a pause in between.
17. Sometimes one shorter sub-section can have two different kinds of task with it, e.g. a gapfilling task and then a multiple choice task with Section 3 part two, without a pause in between.
18. There are a variety of possible accents in the test (British, Australian, North American, and non-native speaker, e.g. Spanish or Polish).
19. None of the accents are very strong.
20. Unlike real language learners, the non-native speakers speak completely standard English, so they don’t make grammatical mistakes, don’t make typical pronunciation mistakes, etc.

21. Numbers (dates, telephone numbers, etc) are usually pronounced the British English way.
22. All or most of the listening sections will have an academic setting, so there is lots of vocabulary related to education (“student halls”, “tuition fees”, etc).
23. There are no half marks in the test.
24. Each section is only played once.
25. You can write anything you like on your question sheet (underlining, crossing out, question marks, etc)
26. The examiner only looks at your answer sheet, not your question sheet.
27. You have ten minutes at the end to transfer your answers (you don’t need to write your answers on the answer sheet while you are listening).
28. You can also guess during the ten-minute transferring answers to your answer sheet stage.
29. You won’t remember anything about what was said in the recordings by the time you transfer your answers.
30. People often make mistakes when transferring their answers to the answer sheet.

Help and hindrance in IELTS Listening Section 1

31. There is always an example question at the beginning of Section 1, with the same speakers as you will hear in the rest of the section.
32. Section 1 is always two speakers, with one of them asking questions and taking notes.
33. Because you are taking notes, you don’t have to worry too much about the grammar of what you write. For example, you can usually leave out articles like “a” or “the”.
34. If the grammar in your answer makes the information in the answer wrong (e.g. “hat” when it should be “hats”), you will get no mark.
35. If you leave out important information (e.g. writing “men” instead of “two men”), then you will get no mark.
36. There are always be addresses, names and/ or numbers in Section 1.
37. The numbers are often tricky ones such as “fifteen” or “fifty” or telephone numbers with “double”.
38. The person asking the questions in the text will often ask the other person to repeat.
39. Any words in names and addresses which are not basic English words (“Leicester”, “Marlborough”, etc) will be spelt.
40. They probably won’t spell names and place names which are also common words (e.g. “Mr Brown”).

Help and hindrance in IELTS Listening Section 2

41. Section 2 is always a monologue such as a speech giving instructions on how to do something (but not an academic lecture).
42. Section 2 usually has an academic setting, e.g. a university library.
43. Any kinds of questions could be in Section 2.

Help and hindrance in IELTS Listening Section 3

44. IELTS Listening Section 3 is always a conversation between two people with often a third person guiding their conversation, e.g. two students discussing something in a meeting with their tutor/ dissertation supervisor.
45. The two main speakers are almost always one male and one female.

- 46. Any kinds of questions could be in Section 3.
- 47. You quite often have to identify who says what.

Help and hindrance in IELTS Listening Section 4

- 48. IELTS Listening Section 4 is always an academic talk such as a lecture (without any interruption or questions).
- 49. Any kinds of questions could be in Section 4.
- 50. You quite often have to complete a task which looks like something in a textbook, e.g. labelling a diagram or filling in a table.

Help and hindrance in IELTS Listening gapfilling tasks (labelling diagrams, completing tables, etc)

- 51. You can usually guess something about what information is needed in gaps, e.g. that it is a date or length of time, before you listen.
- 52. You can never guess exactly what word or number should go in a gap before listening, even if you know the topic very well.
- 53. The word which you put in the gap can be taken directly from the listening text, with no changes.
- 54. The words before and after the answer are always different in the question and in the listening text.
- 55. Anything which has exactly the right meaning (e.g. synonyms of words said in the text) should get a mark.
- 56. Many different instructions about how many words and/ or numbers should go in each gap are possible.
- 57. Writing more words than you are told to in a gap leads to no mark.
- 58. The words “and” and “and/ or” in “Write a word and(/ or) a number” make a big difference to what you should write.
- 59. Missing information which is important in your answer (e.g. writing “a man” instead of “an old man”) leads to no mark.
- 60. Adding extra information which is wrong (e.g. writing “a male elephant” when the gender of the elephant isn’t mentioned) leads to no mark.
- 61. All grammar, spelling and punctuation must be 100% correct.
- 62. Compound nouns must be written correctly (one word, two words or two words with a hyphen).
- 63. The test always includes some words which need capital letters like days and names.
- 64. It’s probably okay to write your answers all in capitals (“BROWN” etc).

Multiple choice questions (choose from A, B or C)

- 65. It’s impossible to predict anything about which multiple choice answer is more likely before you listen.
- 66. You might be able to predict what words you might hear by thinking about synonyms and antonyms of words in the options.
- 67. Signalling phrases such as “...but in fact...” often suggest that the right or wrong option has just been said or is just coming.
- 68. You can cross off most of the wrong options because something (slightly or very) different is said in the text.

Suggested answers

Brackets () means that answer is much less likely or only true for some people.

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3. Some of the question types tend to go with the same section of the test, e.g. there is always form filling in Section 1 and diagram completion is most common in Section 4. +
4. Some of the question types in each section, e.g. which section or section has multiple choice questions, change from test to test. -
5. One section usually has two or three different tasks in it (e.g. filling in a form, filling in a table, then sentence completion all in Section 1). -
6. The questions are always in the same order as the listening text. +
7. There is usually enough time to read through all the questions in one section and underline important words before the recording starts. +
8. There is sometimes enough time to think about what you might hear, e.g. kinds of words which fit the gaps, before the recording starts. +
9. There is usually quite a lot of speaking before the information that you need to answer the first question is said. +/-
10. The speaker usually continues speaking for a while after the last question has been answered. +/-
11. There is sometimes something before the (correct) answer that shows that the important information is coming (“and so we decided...” etc). +
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18. There are a variety of possible accents in the test (British, Australian, North American, and non-native speaker, e.g. Spanish or Polish). - / (+)
19. None of the accents are very strong. +
20. Unlike real language learners, the non-native speakers speak completely standard English, so they don’t make grammatical mistakes, don’t make typical pronunciation mistakes, etc. +
21. Numbers (dates, telephone numbers, etc) are usually pronounced the British English way. - / (+)
22. All or most of the listening sections will have an academic setting, so there is lots of vocabulary related to education (“student halls”, “tuition fees”, etc). +/-

23. There are no half marks in the test. -
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36. There are always be addresses, names and/ or numbers in Section 1. +/- -
37. The numbers are often tricky ones such as "fifteen" or "fifty" or telephone numbers with "double". -
38. The person asking the questions in the text will often ask the other person to repeat. +
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Discuss how to use the things that make the exam easier and tackle the things that make the exam more difficult.