

IELTS Listening Tips and Useful Phrases

Cross out tips below which you don't think are true, i.e. are bad advice.

Preparation for the test

- 1 The best preparation for the test is listening to lots of lectures such as TED.com.
- 2 Listening to the news is good preparation for the IELTS Listening test.
- 3 There are specific books on IELTS Listening if this is your weakest paper.
- 4 The best preparation for the listening test is lots of IELTS exam practice listening tests.
- 5 Always do practice tests all the way through without stopping, including transferring your answers to the separate answer sheet.
- 6 When you check your answers, make sure you understand why your wrong answers aren't possible.
- 7 Read the transcript, look vocabulary up in the dictionary, read and listen, then listen again.
- 8 You could try repeating what you hear or even shadow reading with the exam text if you have problems understanding speech at natural speed.
- 9 You probably only need one book of practice exams, because you can just listen to the same ones over and over.
- 10 Unlike the reading, it's probably worth learning most of the vocabulary in the listenings.
- 11 There is usually at least one Australian accent in the listening, so it's worth getting used to them with Australian movies and radio (ABC Radio National podcasts etc).
- 12 All the other accents are British.
- 13 *If you're only familiar with American English, it can help to study British and American vocabulary differences, particularly those connected to universities and education more generally.*
- 14 *If you are particularly bad at spelling, it can be worth studying common spelling mistakes in English, or common spelling mistakes in IELTS.*
- 15 *Make sure you know how to pronounce numbers such as dates and times in English, including different ways of saying the same numbers such as British English/ American English.*
- 16 *Make sure you know how to pronounce large and small numbers in English, including different ways of saying the same thing.*
- 17 *Make sure you know how to pronounce the alphabet including letters which sound similar to each other so that you can understand dictated spellings.*
- 18 *It's worth learning symbols for units of money and measurements to avoid spelling and grammar mistakes in the exam.*
- 19 *It can be useful to learn vocabulary that is likely to come up in the academic settings of the exam such as "seminar", "students' union" and "PhD".*

On the day of the exam

- 20 Do an IELTS Listening practice exam in the morning before the exam to prepare yourself.
- 21 Listen again to an exam listening that you have done before on the way to the test on the morning of the exam.
- 22 Revise some vocabulary that you have got from previous listenings on the way to the test on the morning of the exam.
- 23 On the way to the test, have some English on in the background without concentrating on it, just to attune your ear to English.

Before the tasks start

- 24 Although they are always the same, you should listen carefully to the instructions to get used to listening carefully to English.
- 25 Although the example in the first task is always the same, you should listen carefully to attune your ear to the voices you will hear.
- 26 Pay attention to how many questions you have to answer during the next extract.
- 27 You can write anything you like on the question sheet.
- 28 Underline important words in the instructions.
- 29 “Up to two words or a number” means “more than 20” is okay as an answer.
- 30 “Up to two words and/ or a number” means “more than 20” is okay as an answer.
- 31 Underline what seem to be important words in the questions.
- 32 When you have time to read ahead, you should read ahead as far as you can, e.g. the next one or two pages.
- 33 When you have time to read ahead, you should read just the questions you have to answer during the next extract and then try to imagine what you might hear.
- 34 Things you can predict about each question include kinds of word (noun, number, verb, etc), kinds of information (date, time, address, kind of transport, etc), and a range of possible answers (e.g. that a picnic is likely to be in or near the summer and therefore between May and September).
- 35 You can sometimes completely guess the answer to the question from the context or your own knowledge of the topic.
- 36 You can sometimes guess which multiple choice options are most and least likely to be the answer just from reading them.

While listening

- 37 There is usually a long introduction before the answer to the first question is said.
- 38 *There is often a word or phrase to show that the topic is changing or that they are getting down to business.*
- 39 *There are often phrases to warn you that spelling and other dictation is coming.*
- 40 There will often be something in the recording that can help you anticipate what the answer might be, e.g. “We decided to change vehicle” if the answer is “van”.
- 41 The questions are always in the same order as the recording.
- 42 Just listen for the information without writing anything, then fill in the answers from memory in the time that is given to check your answers.
- 43 Make notes of everything you understand while you are listening.
- 44 When listening for information to fill in a table or form, listen for the information that is already there and register it to keep track of when the information which you need to add will be coming.
- 45 Don't expect to rely on hearing the words on the answer sheet – the words around the gap, wording of the multiple choice option etc will always be different from what is written down there. However, the words in the gap will be exactly the same as in the recording.
- 46 Always keep two or three questions in mind (in case you hear the answer to the question after next before you realise that you've missed the next answer).
- 47 If you didn't catch the exact words, try to write something that you are sure has the same meaning rather than what you think you heard.
- 48 Don't necessarily panic or give up if you think you missed an answer, as there is sometimes something after the answer that helps reinforce it, e.g. saying “Yes, on the

top floor” after the answer “an apartment”.

49 *There are often phrases that show that the next thing that is going to be said won't be the right answer.*

50 *There are often phrases that show that the last thing that was said wasn't the right answer.*

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53 Wrong multiple choice options are usually similar to what is said in the recording, but occasionally nothing similar to one of the topic is mentioned.

54 You can listen to some extracts twice.

After doing each listening to each extract

55 If you have answered all the questions in that section but the recording isn't finished, quickly move onto reading the instructions and questions for the next extract anyway.

56 Before you move onto the next task, quickly write something in each gap, maybe with a question mark.

57 Make sure all spelling is correct before you go onto the next page.

Transferring your answers to the separate answer sheet

58 Use pen

59 *Write countries, nationalities, languages, months, days of the week etc with capital letters.*

60 *Write proper nouns (names of streets, names of buildings, names of works of art, etc) with capital letters.*

61 Be especially careful with capital letters if a word could be a name or just a description. If you can't remember, look back at the gap to guess from context.

62 If you really aren't sure about capital letters, just write the whole word in capitals.

63 *Make sure you include hyphens if they are needed.*

64 *Don't mix up compound nouns which must be written as one word and compound nouns which must be written as two words.*

65 Words in gaps must also fit grammatically (e.g. be an adverb if that fits the gap) but grammatical words like determiners can sometimes be left out (and sometimes have to be to stay under the maximum number of words and/ or numbers).

66 Never leave blanks. If you really don't know, just write anything at all that could fit in the gap.

67 Only add extra information if you are sure it's correct – wrong extra information leads to no mark.

68 Missing important information also leads to no mark.

69 If you have extra time after you've transferred all your answers, first check all your spelling and punctuation, then look again at the ones you wrote a question mark next to when you were guessing.

70 Only change your answers if you are absolutely sure they are wrong – statistically when students change their mind it is more likely to produce a wrong answer than a right one.

For the ones in italics above, brainstorm suitable language to do that thing or suitable language for avoiding that mistake.

Suggested answers

Bold means not a good idea

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- 12 **All the other accents are British.**
- 13 *If you're only familiar with American English, it can help to study British and American vocabulary differences, particularly those connected to universities and education more generally. – "primary school"/ "elementary school", "junior high school"/ "secondary school", "fresher/ first year student"/ "freshman", "second year student"/ "sophomore", "state school"/ "public school", "term"/ "semester", "revise"/ "review"*
- 14 *If you are particularly bad at spelling, it can be worth studying common spelling mistakes in English, or common spelling mistakes in IELTS. – definately X oppotunity X necessary X ocasion X succes X independant X serprise X equiptment X*
- 15 *Make sure you know how to pronounce numbers such as dates and times in English, including different ways of saying the same numbers such as British English/ American English. – 17/9/2001 x 2, 2010 x 3, 16:00 x 3, 12:00 x 4, 07:45 x 2*
- 16 *Make sure you know how to pronounce large and small numbers in English, including different ways of saying the same thing. – 0.5 x 3, 1,700,000,000 x 2*
- 17 *Make sure you know how to pronounce the alphabet including letters which sound similar to each other so that you can understand dictated spellings. – "double"/ "W", "double U"/ "W", "B"/ "V", "G"/ "Z", "M"/ "N"*
- 18 *It's worth learning symbols for units of money and measurements to avoid spelling and grammar mistakes in the exam – dollars, Euros, pounds, Australian dollars, kilometres, millimetres, kilogrammes, grams, litres*
- 19 *It can be useful to learn vocabulary that is likely to come up in the academic settings of the exam such as "seminar", "students' union" and "PhD" – So many possible examples (see above).*

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While listening

- 37 There is usually a long introduction before the answer to the first question is said.
- 38 *There is often a word or phrase to show that the topic is changing or that they are getting down to business. – “So”, “Okay”, “Moving onto...”, “Turning to...”, “Right”, “Now, let’s talk about...”, “If we’ve finished that topic,...”*
- 39 *There are often phrases to warn you that spelling and other dictation is coming. – “Have you got a pen?”, “Just let me write it down”, “Can you spell that for me?”, “Not like the animal but with a Y. I mean...”*
- 40 There will often be something in the recording that can help you anticipate what the answer might be, e.g. “We decided to change vehicle” if the answer is “van”.
- 41 The questions are always in the same order as the recording.
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- 48 Don't necessarily panic or give up if you think you missed an answer, as there is sometimes something after the answer that helps reinforce it, e.g. saying "Yes, on the top floor" after the answer "an apartment".
- 49 *There are often phrases that show that the next thing that is going to be said won't be the right answer. – "used to (be the case)", "It is/ was commonly thought that...", "It is a common misconception that...", "was/ were going to", "was/ were planning to", "was/ were thinking about", "had arranged", "at first", "we were supposed to...", "we should have", "claim/ claims", "to start with", "rather than", "instead of", "initial impression", "theoretically", "in principle", "in theory", "Despite what you've heard,...", "Although we said...", "The original plan was..."*
- 50 *There are often phrases that show that the last thing that was said wasn't the right answer. – "(but) in (actual) fact", "(but) in reality", "(but) actually", "I meant to say...", "My mistake", "Sorry, I mean...", "However,...", "but..."*
- 51 *There are often phrases that show that the next thing that will be said will be the right answer. – "Despite initial doubts,...", "It is well known that...", "There is general consensus that...", "It is universally agreed that...", "As you (probably) know", "As you (might) be aware", "There's (absolutely) no doubt that...", "As expected,...", "As (expected/ usual/ we agreed/ explained earlier),...", "If I'm not mistaken,...", "I agree with...", "My view is that..."*
- 52 *There are often phrases which show that the last thing that was said was the right answer. – "And that is (indeed) the case/ so", "which is what we decided", "I hope that answers your question", "So that's what we decided to do/ settled on", "which is correct", "Let me (just) check. Yes, that's right", "and I agree", "which is also my view", "and it continues to...", "and that remains the case", "and that is (still) the situation",*
- 53 Wrong multiple choice options are usually similar to what is said in the recording, but occasionally nothing similar to one of the topic is mentioned.
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Transferring your answers to the separate answer sheet

58 **Use pen**

- 59 *Write countries, nationalities, languages, months, days of the week etc with capital letters. – England, British, English, January, Monday*
- 60 *Write proper nouns (names of streets, names of buildings, names of works of art, etc) with capital letters. – Oxford Street, The Empire State Building, Sunflowers*
- 61 Be especially careful with capital letters if a word could be a name or just a description. If you can't remember, look back at the gap to guess from context.
- 62 If you really aren't sure about capital letters, just write the whole word in capitals.
- 63 *Make sure you include hyphens if they are needed. – “passer-by”, “brother-in-law”, “do-it-yourself”, “X-ray”*
- 64 *Don't mix up compound nouns which must be written as one word and compound nouns which must be written as two words. – “postman”, “billboard”, “cybercrime”, “film star”, “online shopping”, “carbon monoxide”, “fast food”, “sales figures”, “social services”*
- 65 Words in gaps must also fit grammatically (e.g. be an adverb if that fits the gap) but grammatical words like determiners can sometimes be left out (and sometimes have to be to stay under the maximum number of words and/ or numbers).
- 66 Never leave blanks. If you really don't know, just write anything at all that could fit in the gap.
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