

CONCISE REVIEW OF A COMMERCIALY DEVELOPED OR WIDELY USED TEST

Test Reviewed: International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

Language(s) Assessed by this Test: English

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Intended Purpose and Audience:

IELTS is the most widely administered international high-stakes English proficiency test for higher education and global migration in the world. Two versions of the test are offered for distinct purposes. The Academic Test is intended for prospective undergraduate and graduate students or professionals such as medical doctors and nurses. The General Training test is intended for those who plan to work in non-academic, non-professional contexts or for immigration purposes. IELTS measures communicative competence with an international outlook and recognizes both British and US lexicon, grammar, spelling, and pronunciation.

Ordering Information:

All ordering information can be found at www.ielts.org. The site offers an interactive search and a linked registration form. The website is easy to navigate and offers not only test ordering information, but also links to research studies, news articles, sample exam problems, a teacher guide, and FAQs.

Description of the Test:

The Academic Test and General Training test follow identical formats; they differ in the stimulus material and prompts. All materials are authentic, ranging from academic texts and charts for the Academic Test to newspaper and recorded conversations for the General Training test. IELTS attempts to use prompts that mirror activities test takers will likely encounter in English-speaking countries, such as writing a short analytical essay based on a proposed problem for the Academic Test and letter-writing for the General Training test. There are four test sections: listening (30 minutes), reading (60 minutes), writing (60 minutes), and speaking (11-14 minutes). Test takers receive scores for each section. IELTS administrators acknowledge that the four skills are not isolated and are integrated within the test as they are in real world use. Most test items employ a direct testing approach and many items, such as the writing and speaking prompts, integrate a wide range of hierarchical language components. In notable contrast to the TOEFL, the IELTS Speaking section is conducted with a face-to-face interviewer. The Listening and Reading Sections are scored objectively and the raw score is converted to a Band Scale of 1-9. The Writing and Speaking Sections are scored subjectively and holistically based on a Band Scale of 1-9. The section scores are averaged in equal weight to calculate an overall score of 1-9.

Evaluation of the Test:

IELTS has been shaped by a substantial body of research in connection with joint owners Cambridge English Language Assessment, IDP Education, and the British Council. This ownership, as well as IELTS' international outlook and focus on communicative competence using authentic materials and real world prompts likely explain its success. Still, there is room for improvement regarding reliability, validity, and washback. Some studies have suggested that the test remains Eurocentric and has minimal impact on English education; others have noted a need for improved reliability with the Band Scale scoring method and subjective examiner scoring methods.