



IELTS TEST FORMAT



An overview of the test

Listening

- **30** minutes
- Test takers listen to **four** recorded texts, monologues and conversations by a range of native speakers, and write their answers to a series of questions.

Reading

- **60** minutes
- The Academic test includes **three** long texts which range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical. The texts are authentic and are taken from **books, journals, magazines and newspapers** and are on **academic topics** of general interest. All have been selected for a non-specialist audience.

An overview of the test

Writing

- **60** minutes
- The Academic test includes **two** tasks. Topics are selected to be of general interest and suitable for test takers entering undergraduate or postgraduate studies or seeking professional registration.

Task 1

- Test takers are presented with a **graph, table, chart or diagram** and are asked to describe, summarise or explain the information in their own words. They may be asked to describe and explain **data, describe the stages of a process, how something works or describe an object or event.**

Task 2

- Test takers are asked to write an essay in response to **a point of view, argument or problem.** Responses to both tasks must be written in an **academic or semi-formal neutral style.**

An overview of the test

Speaking

- **11–14** minutes
- The Speaking test is carried out face-to-face with a trained IELTS examiner, as we believe this is the most effective way of assessing a test taker's speaking skills. This section takes between 11 and 14 minutes to complete. Every test is digitally recorded and consists of **three parts**:

Part 1

- Test takers answer **general questions** about themselves and a range of familiar topics, such as their **home, family, work, studies and interests**. This part lasts between **four and five minutes**.

Part 2

- Test takers are given a **booklet** which asks them to talk about a **particular topic**. They have one minute to prepare before speaking for up to **two minutes**. The examiner may ask one or two questions on the same topic to finish this part of the test.

Part 3

- Test takers are asked **further questions which are connected to the topic in Part 2**. These questions give the test taker an opportunity to discuss more abstract issues and ideas. This part lasts between **four and five minutes**. The format of the Speaking test is common across both the Academic and General Training tests. It is structured in such a way that **does not allow test takers to rehearse set responses beforehand**.

Listening* (30 minutes)

- Four recorded monologues and conversations

Reading (60 minutes)

- Three long reading passages with tasks
- Texts range from the descriptive and factual to the discursive and analytical
 - Includes non-verbal materials such as diagrams, graphs or illustrations
- Texts are authentic (e.g. taken from books, journals and newspapers)

Writing (60 minutes)

- Writing task of at least 150 words where the test taker must summarise, describe or explain a table, graph, chart or diagram
- Short essay task of at least 250 words

Speaking (11 to 14 minutes)

- Face-to-face interview
- Includes short questions, speaking at length about a familiar topic and a structured discussion

Tips

Reading

- Articles
- Speed reading Breakingnewsenglish.com

Writing

- CNN
- BBC
- The Guardian
- The New York Times

Listening/ Speaking

- TEDxtalk
- Breakingnewsenglish.com

IELTS Academic Reading in detail

Task type 1 – Multiple choice

Task type and format

Test takers are required to 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). Test takers write the letter of the answer they have chosen on the answer sheet. The questions may involve completing a sentence, where they are given the first part of a sentence and then choose the best way to complete it from the options, or could involve complete questions; with the test takers 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

Multiple choice tests a wide range of reading skills, including detailed understanding of specific points or an overall understanding of the main points of the text.



Questions 27–31

Choose the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

Write the correct letter in boxes 27–31 on your answer sheet.

- 27** Neuroeconomics is a field of study which seeks to
- A** cause a change in how scientists understand brain chemistry.
 - B** understand how good decisions are made in the brain.
 - C** understand how the brain is linked to achievement in competitive fields.
 - D** trace the specific firing patterns of neurons in different areas of the brain.
- 28** According to the writer, iconoclasts are distinctive because
- A** they create unusual brain circuits.
 - B** their brains function differently.
 - C** their personalities are distinctive.
 - D** they make decisions easily.
- 29** According to the writer, the brain works efficiently because
- A** it uses the eyes quickly.
 - B** it interprets data logically.
 - C** it generates its own energy.
 - D** it relies on previous events.
- 30** The writer says that perception is
- A** a combination of photons and sound waves.
 - B** a reliable product of what your senses transmit.
 - C** a result of brain processes.
 - D** a process we are usually conscious of.
- 31** According to the writer, an iconoclastic thinker
- A** centralises perceptual thinking in one part of the brain.
 - B** avoids cognitive traps.
 - C** has a brain that is hardwired for learning.
 - D** has more opportunities than the average person.

Task type 2 – Identifying information

Task type and format	<p>Test takers will be given a number of statements and asked: 'Do the following statements agree with the information in the text?' They are then required to write 'true', 'false' or 'not given' in the boxes on their answer sheets.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Students need to understand that any knowledge they bring with them from outside the passage should not play a part when deciding on their answers.</p>
Task focus	<p>Identifying information assesses the test takers' ability to recognise particular points of information conveyed in the text. It can thus be used with more factual texts</p>



Questions 1–7

Do the following statements agree with the information given in Reading Passage 1?

In boxes 1–7 on your answer sheet, write

TRUE	<i>if the statement agrees with the information</i>
FALSE	<i>if the statement contradicts the information</i>
NOT GIVEN	<i>if there is no information on this</i>

- 1 Michael Faraday was the first person to recognise Perkin's ability as a student of chemistry.
- 2 Michael Faraday suggested Perkin should enrol in the Royal College of Chemistry.
- 3 Perkin employed August Wilhelm Hofmann as his assistant.
- 4 Perkin was still young when he made the discovery that made him rich and famous.
- 5 The trees from which quinine is derived grow only in South America.
- 6 Perkin hoped to manufacture a drug from a coal tar waste product.
- 7 Perkin was inspired by the discoveries of the famous scientist Louis Pasteur.

*The examples are taken from Cambridge English IELTS 9

Task type 3 – Identifying writer's views/claims

Task type and format

Test takers will be given a number of statements and asked: 'Do the following statements agree with the views/claims of the writer?' They are required to write 'yes', 'no' or 'not given' in the boxes on their answer sheet.

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.

Students need to understand that any knowledge they bring with them from outside the passage should not play a part when deciding on their answers.

Task focus

This type of task assesses the test takers' ability to recognise opinions or ideas, and so it is often used with discursive or argumentative texts.



Questions 21–26

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer in Reading Passage 2?

In boxes 21–26 on your answer sheet, write

YES	<i>if the statement agrees with the views of the writer</i>
NO	<i>if the statement contradicts the views of the writer</i>
NOT GIVEN	<i>if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this</i>

- 21 Alien civilisations may be able to help the human race to overcome serious problems.
- 22 SETI scientists are trying to find a life form that resembles humans in many ways.
- 23 The Americans and Australians have co-operated on joint research projects.
- 24 So far SETI scientists have picked up radio signals from several stars.
- 25 The NASA project attracted criticism from some members of Congress.
- 26 If a signal from outer space is received, it will be important to respond promptly.

*The examples are taken from Cambridge English IELTS 9

Task type 4 – Matching information

Task type and format

Test takers are required to locate specific information within the lettered paragraphs/sections of a text, and to 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 information that test takers need to locate in a given paragraph/section. When this is the case, they will be told that they can use any letter more than once.

This type of task can be used with any text as it tests a wide range of reading skills, from locating detail to recognising a summary or definition.

Task focus

Matching information 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.



Questions 1–6

Reading Passage 1 has nine sections, **A–I**.

Which section contains the following information?

*Write the correct letter, **A–I**, in boxes 1–6 on your answer sheet.*

- 1 an account of a national policy initiative
- 2 a description of a global team effort
- 3 a hypothesis as to one reason behind the growth in classroom noise
- 4 a demand for suitable worldwide regulations
- 5 a list of medical conditions which place some children more at risk from noise than others
- 6 the estimated proportion of children in New Zealand with auditory problems

*The examples are taken from Cambridge English IELTS 9

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.). A heading will refer to the main idea of the paragraph or section of the text. Test takers must match the heading to the correct paragraphs or sections, which are marked alphabetically. Test takers 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 that 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 for test takers. This task type is used with texts that contain paragraphs or sections with clearly defined themes.

Task focus

Matching headers tests the test takers' ability to recognise the main idea or theme in the paragraphs or sections of a text, and to distinguish main ideas from supporting ones.



Questions 14–17

Reading Passage 2 has five paragraphs, **A–E**.

Choose the correct heading for paragraphs **B–E** from the list of headings below.

Write the correct number, **i–vii**, in boxes 14–17 on your answer sheet.

List of Headings

- i** Seeking the transmission of radio signals from planets
- ii** Appropriate responses to signals from other civilisations
- iii** Vast distances to Earth's closest neighbours
- iv** Assumptions underlying the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence
- v** Reasons for the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence
- vi** Knowledge of extra-terrestrial life forms
- vii** Likelihood of life on other planets

Example
Paragraph **A**

Answer
v

14 Paragraph **B**

15 Paragraph **C**

16 Paragraph **D**

17 Paragraph **E**

Task type 6 – Matching features

Task type and format

Test takers are required to match a set of statements or pieces of information to a list of options. The options are a group of features from the text, and are identified by letters. Test takers may, for example, be required to match different research findings to a list of researchers, or characteristics to age groups, 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 inform test takers if options may be used more than once.

Task focus

Matching features assesses the test takers' ability to recognise relationships and connections between facts in the text and their ability to recognise opinions and theories. It may be used both with factual information, as well as opinion-based discursive texts. Test takers need to be able to skim and scan the text in order to locate the required information and to read for detail.



Questions 18–21

Look at the following statements (Questions 18–21) and the list of people below.

Match each statement with the correct person, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**.

Write the correct letter, **A**, **B**, **C** or **D**, in boxes 18–21 on your answer sheet.

- 18 He calculated the distance of the Sun from the Earth based on observations of Venus with a fair degree of accuracy.
- 19 He understood that the distance of the Sun from the Earth could be worked out by comparing observations of a transit.
- 20 He realised that the time taken by a planet to go round the Sun depends on its distance from the Sun.
- 21 He witnessed a Venus transit but was unable to make any calculations.

List of People

- A** Edmond Halley
- B** Johannes Kepler
- C** Guillaume Le Gentil
- D** Johann Franz Encke

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 asked to 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. Test takers must write the letter they have chosen on the answer sheet. 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. This task type may be used with any type of text.
Task focus	Matching sentence endings assesses the test takers' ability to understand the main ideas within a sentence.



Questions 38–40

Complete each sentence with the correct ending, **A–E**, below.

Write the correct letter, **A–E**, in boxes 38–40 on your answer sheet.

- 38** Thinking like a successful iconoclast is demanding because it
- 39** The concept of the social brain is useful to iconoclasts because it
- 40** Iconoclasts are generally an asset because their way of thinking

- A** requires both perceptual and social intelligence skills.
- B** focuses on how groups decide on an action.
- C** works in many fields, both artistic and scientific.
- D** leaves one open to criticism and rejection.
- E** involves understanding how organisations manage people.

*The examples are taken from Cambridge English IELTS 9

Task type 8 – Sentence completion

Task type and format

Test takers complete sentences in a given number of words taken from the text. They must write their answers on the answer sheet. 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 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. This task type may be used with any type of text.

Task focus

Matching sentence endings assesses the test takers' ability to locate detail/specific information.



Questions 33–37

Complete the notes below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 33–37 on your answer sheet.

The Voyager 1 Space Probe

- The probe transmitted pictures of both **33** and , then left the **34**
- The freezing temperatures were found to have a negative effect on parts of the space probe.
- Scientists feared that both the **35** and were about to stop working.
- The only hope was to tell the probe to replace them with **36** – but distance made communication with the probe difficult.
- A **37** was used to transmit the message at the speed of light.
- The message was picked up by the probe and the switchover took place.

*The examples are taken from Cambridge English IELTS 9

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

Task type and format	<p>Test takers are given a summary of a section of the text, and are required to complete it with information drawn from the text. 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 of text (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).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Because this task type often relates to precise factual information, it is often used with descriptive texts.</p>
Task focus	<p>Summarising assesses the test takers' ability to understand details and/or the main ideas of a section of text. In the variations involving a summary or notes, test takers 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.).</p>



Questions 9–12

Complete the summary using the list of words, **A–I**, below.

Write the correct letter, **A–I**, in boxes 9–12 on your answer sheet.

The language debate

According to **9**, there is only one correct form of language. Linguists who take this approach to language place great importance on grammatical **10**
Conversely, the view of **11**, such as Joseph Priestley, is that grammar should be based on **12**

- | | | | | | |
|----------|------------------|----------|------------------|----------|----------------|
| A | descriptivists | B | language experts | C | popular speech |
| D | formal language | E | evaluation | F | rules |
| G | modern linguists | H | prescriptivists | I | change |

*The examples are taken from Cambridge English IELTS 9

Task type 10 – Diagram label completion

Task type and format

Test takers are required to 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 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 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

Diagram label completion assesses the test takers' ability to understand a detailed description, and to relate it to information presented in the form of a diagram



Questions 34–39

Complete the flow-chart below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 34–39 on your answer sheet.

Method of determining where the ancestors of turtles and tortoises come from

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Step 1

71 species of living turtles and tortoises were examined and a total of **34** were taken from the bones of their forelimbs.



Step 2

The data was recorded on a **35** (necessary for comparing the information).

Outcome: Land tortoises were represented by a dense **36** of points towards the top.

Sea turtles were grouped together in the bottom part.



Step 3

The same data was collected from some living **37** species and added to the other results.

Outcome: The points for these species turned out to be positioned about **38** up the triangle between the land tortoises and the sea turtles.



Step 4

Bones of *P. quenstedti* and *P. talampayensis* were examined in a similar way and the results added.

Outcome: The position of the points indicated that both these ancient creatures were **39**

Task type 11 – Short-answer questions

Task type and format

Test takers answer questions, which usually relate to factual information about details in the text. This is most likely to be used with a text that contains a lot of factual information and detail. 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 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. The questions are in the same order as the information in the text.

Task focus

Short answer questions assess the test takers' ability to locate and understand precise information in the text



Questions 18–20

Answer the questions below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the passage for each answer.

Write your answers in boxes 18–20 on your answer sheet.

- 18** What is the life expectancy of Earth?
- 19** What kind of signals from other intelligent civilisations are SETI scientists searching for?
- 20** How many stars are the world's most powerful radio telescopes searching?

*The examples are taken from Cambridge English IELTS 9