

Course Companion

IELTS Academic

Every topic handout in one volume

exercises.lol

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About the test

IELTS Academic

What IELTS is and who takes it

IELTS is the English test most Chinese students sit before studying abroad. It is not a test of what you know about English; it is a test of whether you can **use** it — listen to a lecture, read an argument, write a case, and hold a conversation with a stranger.

- There are two tests, and you choose one when you book. **IELTS Academic** is for study at degree level and above, and for professional registration in fields such as medicine and nursing. **IELTS General Training** is for migration and for study below degree level.
- Almost every Chinese student applying for a Bachelor's or Master's degree needs **Academic**.
- Four skills are tested on one day: Listening, Reading and Writing back to back, then Speaking, which may be the same day or a few days either side.
- You can sit it on **paper** or on **computer**. The questions are the same. On computer you get your result in three to five days instead of thirteen, and — this matters later — only a computer test qualifies for One Skill Retake.

The four parts and the clock

Part	Time	What it is
Listening	about 30 minutes, 40 questions	4 recordings, played once only
Reading	60 minutes, 40 questions	3 long texts, 2,150–2,750 words in total
Writing	60 minutes, 2 tasks	Task 1 at least 150 words, Task 2 at least 250
Speaking	11–14 minutes	a face-to-face interview in three parts

- The whole test takes about **2 hours 45 minutes**.
- **Listening on paper gives you 10 extra minutes** to copy your answers onto the answer sheet . On computer you type straight in and get 2 minutes to check.
- **Reading gives you no extra time at all**. You write on the answer sheet as you go. Students who plan a transfer at the end lose marks discovering this on test day.

- Writing Task 2 is worth **twice** as much as Task 1, so budget 20 minutes for Task 1 and 40 for Task 2 — and if you run out of time, run out of it on Task 1.

How the band score works

- Each skill is reported as a **band** from 0 to 9, in whole and half steps: 5.5, 6.0, 6.5.
- The **overall band** is the average of the four skills, rounded to the nearest half band. An average ending in .25 rounds **up** to the next half band; one ending in .75 rounds up to the next whole band.
- So 6.5, 6.5, 5.0 and 7.0 averages 6.25 and is reported as **6.5**.
- $\triangle$ Universities usually set a minimum overall band **and** a floor on each skill. An overall 7.0 with a 5.5 in Writing is not the same offer as a flat 7.0 — the weakest skill decides the result. Work on the lowest number, not the average.
- In Listening and Reading each correct answer earns one mark, and your mark out of 40 becomes a band. IELTS publishes only four points on that scale — on Academic Reading, 15 marks reaches band 5, 23 reaches band 6, 30 reaches band 7 and 35 reaches band 8 — so a practice score tells you which band you have reached, not a precise number.
- Writing and Speaking are judged by a trained examiner against four criteria each, which are set out in the Writing and Speaking sections of these notes.

Academic, General Training and UKVI

- **Listening and Speaking are exactly the same test** in Academic and General Training. Two of your four skills need no separate preparation at all.
- **Reading differs.** Academic uses three long texts from books, journals and newspapers written for a general reader. General Training starts with everyday notices and advertisements, moves to workplace texts, and ends with one longer general text.
- **Writing Task 1 differs.** Academic asks you to describe a graph, table, chart or diagram. General Training asks you to write a letter. Task 2 is an essay in both.
- **IELTS for UKVI** is the same test again — same questions, same format, same difficulty, same scoring. Only the administration differs: a UKVI session, and a Test Report Form that says so. If a UK university or visa route asks for it, book that session and prepare identically.
- **IELTS Life Skills** is a different, much smaller test: Speaking and Listening only, at CEFR A1, A2 or B1, marked Pass or Fail rather than banded. It is for certain visa routes, never for university study.

One Skill Retake

This rule should change how you prepare, so it is worth knowing before you book.

- If one skill lets you down, you may retake **that skill alone** instead of the whole test.
- Any one of Listening, Reading, Writing or Speaking — **one skill, once** for each full test.
- Two conditions: the full test must have been **IELTS on computer** at a centre that offers the service, and the retake must be **within 60 days** of it.
- You then receive a new Test Report Form carrying the new score for that skill and the original scores for the other three.
- △ The practical consequence: find out **which single skill** is short of your target and repair that one. For most Chinese candidates it is Writing, and the repair is a fortnight of marked essays rather than a whole second test.

Exam tips

- Book the **computer** test unless you have a reason not to. Faster results, and the retake option exists only there.
- Learn the question types until they are automatic, then practise under the clock. The types never change; only the topic does.
- Write your target for each skill on the first page of your notebook. Prepare against the lowest number, not the average.
- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: IELTS Academic, General Training, scoring in detail, One Skill Retake, IELTS for UKVI.

Listening

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The four parts, and what changes between them

Listening is 40 questions in about 30 minutes, and the recording is **played once only**. The four parts get harder in a predictable way, so know which one you are in.

Part	Voices	Situation	What makes it hard
1	two, in conversation	everyday: booking, enrolling, enquiring	names and numbers spelled out
2	one speaker	everyday: a talk, a tour, an announcement	a lot of detail in one voice
3	two to four, in discussion	study: students and a tutor	speakers disagree and change their minds
4	one speaker	academic: a lecture	long stretches with no pause, and abstract vocabulary

- Parts 1 and 2 are the marks you cannot afford to drop. If you are aiming at band 6.5, you should be losing almost nothing before question 20.
- Part 3 is where a **distractor** does most damage, because one speaker says something, another corrects it, and the answer is the correction.
- Part 4 has no second speaker to signal a change of topic, so the **signposting** in the language is all you get: *firstly, turning now to, the key point here*.

Reading the question before the audio

You are given time to read each section's questions before it plays. IELTS calls this the **preparation time**, and it is part of the test, not a courtesy. That time is the single biggest source of easy marks, and most candidates waste it.

- **Predict the word class**. *The tour leaves at _____* needs a time. *Bring a _____* needs a noun. *The museum is _____ on Mondays* needs an adjective. Knowing what kind of word you are waiting for is most of the work.
- **Underline the word limit** in the instruction. *NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER* means a three-word answer is wrong even if it is true. This rule is enforced exactly, and it costs more marks than mishearing does.
- **Underline the words that cannot change**. A name, a number or a date will be said as it is written. Everything else will be **paraphrased** — the

recording almost never uses the question's own words, and a candidate listening for them hears nothing.

- Move your eye to the next question as soon as you have written an answer. The recording does not wait, and one lost question usually costs two.

Spelling, plurals and numbers

These are where the marks actually go, and every one of them is avoidable.

- The four parts get harder along one axis — the **register** moves from everyday to academic — and the vocabulary follows it.
- **Spelling must be correct.** A correct answer spelled wrong scores zero. British and American spellings are both accepted (*organise* / *organize*, *centre* / *center*).
- **Plurals are marked strictly.** If the recording says *two tickets*, then *ticket* is wrong. Listen for the final -s; Mandarin has no final consonant there, so it is easy to miss.
- **Copy the grammar of the gap.** If the sentence reads *the museum has three _____*, the answer must be plural whether you heard the -s or not.
- **Numbers:** *thirteen* and *thirty* are the classic pair — the stress moves to the second syllable in *thirteen*. Dates may be written 21 March or March 21; both are accepted.
- **Letters:** names are spelled out at normal speed. Practise the pairs Chinese candidates confuse — G and J, M and N, S and F, and the vowel letters E, I and A.
- Write the answer exactly as you hear it. Do not “improve” it into a full sentence.

Map, plan and diagram labelling

- Before it starts, find **north** and fix your orientation. The speaker will describe the route as somebody walking it.
- Learn the small set of position words and use them actively: *opposite*, *adjacent to*, *at the far end of*, *on your left as you come in*, *beyond*, *between ... and ...*, *a short way past*.
- The speaker moves in order, so the labels come in order too. If you lose one, skip to the next landmark rather than re-reading the map.
- On a diagram of a machine or a process, the description almost always runs in the direction the material moves.

Matching and multiple choice

- **The distractor is mentioned first.** Almost every multiple-choice item in Parts 3 and 4 names two of the three options in the recording. The one that is said first is usually the one being rejected: *I thought about doing the survey first, but actually the reading has to come first.*
- Listen for the **correction signals**: *actually, in fact, although, I'd say rather, on second thoughts, mind you.* What follows them is the answer.
- A **synonym** in the recording is the normal case, not the exception.
- In a matching task, read all the options first and group the ones that mean nearly the same thing — those are the pair the item is testing.
- An option that repeats the question's own words is usually the wrong one, because the answer is always paraphrased.

Exam tips

- **Never stop to fix a missed answer.** You will lose the next one too. Leave it blank, keep up, and come back in the checking time.
- **Guess every blank.** There is no penalty for a wrong answer, so an empty space is a mark you have chosen to give away.
- On paper, use the **10 minutes** of transfer time to check spellings and plurals, not to re-think answers. On computer you have 2 minutes and the same advice.
- Practise with the recording played **once**, with no pause and no rewind. Practising any other way trains a skill the test does not measure.
- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: Listening format, scoring in detail.

Reading

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The three passages and the 60-minute clock

Academic Reading is 40 questions on three passages, 2,150–2,750 words in total, taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers written for a general reader rather than a specialist.

- **There is no extra transfer time.** You write on the answer sheet as you go. Students who plan to copy their answers across at the end lose five or more marks finding out.
- **Twenty minutes per passage**, and the passages get harder. Use **skimming** for the shape of a passage and scanning for one fact.
- The **register** of the texts is a general reader's, not a specialist's. If passage 1 takes you thirty minutes, you will not finish passage 3, and passage 3 carries the same 13 or 14 marks.
- Put a **hard stop** at 20 and 40 minutes. Move on with blanks and come back; never let an early passage eat a later one.
- **Questions follow the passage in order** for most task types. If you have found question 17 in paragraph D, question 18 is almost never in paragraph B.
- You will not have time to read a passage properly and then answer. Read the questions, then **scan** for the place each one is answered, then read that place carefully.

True, False, Not Given

This is the biggest single mark-loser for Chinese candidates, and it is lost in one specific way: **Not Given is confused with False.**

- **True** — the passage **says** it. The wording will differ; the meaning will not.
- **False** — the passage says the **opposite**. There is a specific sentence that contradicts the statement.
- **Not Given** — the passage does not say, either way. It may be obviously true in the real world. It may be something the writer would surely agree with. That does not matter.

The test:

1. Find the part of the passage the statement is about.
2. Ask: is there a sentence here that **contradicts** it? If yes → **False**.

3. If no: is there a sentence here that **states** it? If yes → **True**.
 4. If neither → **Not Given**. Do not reason further.
- △ The commonest mistake is to decide *the passage does not say this, so it is false*. That is exactly what Not Given means, and it is half the errors on this task type.
 - Watch **qualifiers** : *all, always, never, only, the main reason*. A statement saying *the main cause* against a passage saying *one cause* is **False**, not True.
 - **Yes / No / Not Given** is the same task applied to the writer's **opinion** rather than to facts. Ask what the writer thinks, not what is true.
 - Answer with the exact word — *TRUE, FALSE, NOT GIVEN*. Writing *T, F, NG* is accepted; writing *Not mentioned* is not.

Matching headings

- The trap is matching a **word**. A heading containing *pollution* and a paragraph containing *pollution* is the pairing the test expects you to make wrongly.
- A paragraph's **topic sentence** usually carries its function.
- Match the paragraph's **function** instead: what is this paragraph *doing*? Introducing a problem, giving a history, presenting evidence against, drawing a conclusion.
- The first and last sentences of a paragraph carry its function far more often than the middle.
- Do the paragraphs you are sure of first and cross those headings off. There are always more headings than paragraphs, and eliminating is faster than matching.
- Two headings will usually be near-synonyms. Those two are the pair the item is testing; decide between them last, when the others are gone.

Completion tasks and the grammar of the gap

Sentence, summary, note, table, flow-chart and diagram completion all work the same way.

- **Obey the word limit.** *NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS* means a three-word answer is wrong even when it is the right idea. A hyphenated word counts as one; a number counts as one.
- **Words must come from the passage**, unchanged, in most completion tasks. Do not substitute a synonym of your own.
- **Read the grammar of the gap** — its **word class** — before you look for the answer. If the gap follows *a*, you need a singular countable noun. If it follows *have been*, you need a past participle. This alone eliminates most wrong candidates.
- In summary completion, the summary paraphrases one section of the passage, not the whole thing. Find that section first.

- If a box of options is given, the answer is in the box — and the box will contain words that fit the grammar but not the meaning.

Matching information and matching features

- **Matching information** (“which paragraph contains...”) is the one task type that does **not** follow passage order, and a paragraph can be used more than once. Leave it until last: by then you know the passage.
- Look for the *specific* thing named — an example, a comparison, a date, a reason — rather than the topic.
- **Matching features** pairs statements with people, places or studies. Underline each name in the passage first; the names are the fastest thing on the page to find.
- **Matching sentence endings** is a grammar task as much as a meaning task. Only some endings fit each beginning grammatically, which cuts the list before you think about content.
- A **prefix** or a **suffix** often gives the sense without the dictionary.
- Vocabulary in context: guess from the **word parts** and from the sentence around it. You are never expected to know every word, and looking one up in your head costs time you do not have.

Exam tips

- **Never leave a blank.** There is no penalty for a wrong answer, and a blank is a mark given away. Fill every gap in the last two minutes even if you are guessing.
- Transfer answers **as you go**, in capitals, and check that the number on the answer sheet matches the number of the question.
- Practise the whole 60 minutes in one sitting. Reading three passages in three separate sessions trains none of the pacing the test is really measuring.
- If a question is taking more than ninety seconds, mark it, move on, and return. The last question of a passage is worth the same as the first.
- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: Reading format, scoring in detail.

Writing

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How Writing is marked

Writing is 60 minutes and two tasks. Each is marked against **four criteria**, each worth a band from 0 to 9, and the four are averaged into the task's band. **Task 2 counts twice as much as Task 1** in the Writing score.

Criterion	Task 1	Task 2
1	Task achievement — did you select and report the key features, with an overview?	Task response — did you answer every part, with a clear position?
2	Coherence and cohesion — does the writing progress logically, one idea per paragraph, with the right linking words?	same
3	Lexical resource — range, precision and collocation	same
4	Grammatical range and accuracy — variety of structures, and how often errors appear	same

- Two thirds of the Writing band comes from Task 2, so give it 40 of the 60 minutes. Running out of time on Task 1 costs a third as much as running out on Task 2.
- Under the minimum length — 150 words for Task 1, 250 for Task 2 — is **penalised mechanically** on criterion 1. Count if you are unsure; the count costs 20 seconds and the penalty is a band.
- You must write in **full connected prose**. Notes and bullet points score as an unfinished answer.

Task 1 — select, report, and write the overview

Task 1 asks you to describe a graph, table, chart, diagram or map **in your own words**.

- **There is no opinion in Task 1.** No *I think*, no *this is because*, no recommendation. A sentence of opinion or an invented cause caps Task achievement at band 5.

- **The overview** is one or two sentences saying what the data does **overall** — the biggest movement, the largest category, the crossing point, the thing that did not change. **Without an overview, Task achievement cannot exceed band 5**, however accurate the detail is.
- Structure that always works: rewrite the question in your own words (1 sentence) → overview (1–2 sentences) → two body paragraphs of grouped detail.
- **Group, do not narrate.** Two paragraphs — one for what rose, one for what fell; or one for the two large categories, one for the three small ones. A year-by-year account of every line is the commonest band-5 answer.
- **Quote figures selectively.** Enough to support each statement, not every number on the chart.
- A process diagram needs no data at all: say how many stages there are and whether it is a loop or a straight line, then run through it in the passive.

Task 1 — the language of change

- Verbs: *rise, increase, climb, soar, peak, level off, plateau, fall, decline, drop, plummet, fluctuate, remain stable*.
- A **trend** is the direction over the whole period; a **fluctuation** is movement without one.
- Nouns from the same verbs: *a rise in, a sharp fall in, a steady increase in*.
- **△ The prepositions are where marks are lost.** *Rise by 20* is the size of the change; *rise to 20* is the end point; *rise from 10 to 30* gives both. Chinese candidates overwhelmingly write *increased of* or *increased to 20%* when they mean *by*.
- **△ Percentage and percentage point are different.** From 20% to 24% is a rise of **4 percentage points**, or of 20%. Writing “a rise of 4%” there is a factual error.
- Approximation: *just over, just under, roughly, around, nearly, approximately*.
- A **proportion** is a share of a whole; an **amount** is not, and a pie chart shows only the first.
- Comparison: *twice as many as, three times the figure for, by far the largest, the same as, slightly higher than*.
- A pie chart shows **shares**, not amounts. “Households spent more on housing” is wrong unless you also know the total; “a larger share went on housing” is right.

Task 2 — answering the actual question

Read the question twice and decide which of the five forms it is, because each one has its own way of going wrong.

Form	What it asks	The trap
Agree or disagree	choose a position	sitting on the fence — caps Task response at 6
Discuss both views and give your opinion	both views and your own	giving the two views and no opinion
Advantages and disadvantages	both; <i>outweigh</i> means decide	listing four of each and never deciding
Causes and solutions	both halves, matched	a solution that answers no cause you gave
Two-part question	two answers	answering the second and forgetting the first

- **Answer every part.** A partly-answered question cannot exceed band 5, however well written.
- **Hold one position.** If your introduction disagrees and your conclusion says "both sides have merit", Task response cannot exceed band 6.
- A **counter-argument** answered properly is what separates a position from a preference.
- **Support, do not assert.** Every main idea needs a reason, an example, or a consequence traced one step further. *Pollution is bad for health* is an assertion; *particles from traffic aggravate asthma, which is why clinics near main roads report more attendances* is support.
- A useful shape: introduction (rewrite + position) → body 1 (first reason, developed) → body 2 (second reason, developed) → conclusion (restate position, no new material).
- A **concession** names what the other side gets right.
- **Concessions raise the band.** Naming the strongest objection and answering it shows you have a position rather than a preference.

The template trap

Chinese candidates are often taught openers and "high-level" phrases to memorise. Examiners are trained to discount **memorised language**, so a template-heavy essay reads as a *lower* Lexical resource band, not a higher one.

Delete	Write instead
With the development of society / the economy	<i>(nothing — start with the topic)</i>
It is undeniable that / There is no doubt that	<i>Clearly</i> , or nothing
Every coin has two sides	<i>(state the two sides)</i>
As far as I am concerned	<i>I think / In my view</i>
more and more people	<i>a growing number of people / a figure</i>
in today's fast-paced world	<i>(nothing)</i>
Last but not least	<i>Finally</i> ,

- The problem is not that these are wrong English. It is that they carry **no information**, and the examiner has seen them a thousand times.
- The same applies to a rare word used out of collocation. *Ameliorate the problem* is not better than *improve the situation*; it is worse, because *ameliorate* does not collocate with *problem*. **A common word used precisely beats a rare word used wrongly.**
- Mechanical linkers hurt too. *Firstly, Moreover, Furthermore, Last but not least* at the start of every sentence lowers Coherence and cohesion. Real cohesion comes from pronouns, repeated noun phrases and the order of ideas.

Errors Chinese speakers make most

These are systematic, so hunt for the **pattern**, not the one instance.

- **Articles** — Mandarin has none. *The government should build more school* → *schools*; *in the society* → *in society*.
- **Plurals** — an unmarked plural is the single most frequent error. *Many student* → *many students*; *informations, advices, equipments* are uncountable and have no plural at all.
- **Tense not carried through** — a paragraph that starts in the past drifts into the present.
- **Subject–verb agreement** — *the number of students have risen* → *has risen*.
- **Although ... but ...** and **Because ... so ...** — English uses one connector, not two. *Although it is expensive, but it is useful* → drop *but*.
- **Comma splices** — two full sentences joined by a comma. Use a full stop or a conjunction.
- **Missing preposition after a verb** — *discuss about, emphasise on, affect to* are all wrong; those verbs take a direct object.
- Fixing two of these consistently is usually worth half a band on criterion 4, and it

is faster than learning new vocabulary.

Exam tips

- Spend **5 minutes planning Task 2**. An essay with a plan is a different band from the same ideas written as they arrive.
- Do **Task 2 first** if you tend to run out of time. It is worth double.
- Count your words once, at the end. Learn how many words your own handwriting puts on a line and count lines instead.
- Leave 3 minutes to reread for articles, plurals and tense. Those three account for most of what a reread can fix.
- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: Writing format, scoring in detail.

Speaking

IELTS Academic

What the examiner is listening for

Speaking is 11 to 14 minutes with a real examiner, in three parts, and it is recorded. You are marked on four criteria, each 0 to 9, averaged into your Speaking band.

Criterion	What it means in practice
Fluency and coherence	can you keep going, at a natural speed, with ideas that follow each other? Self-correction is fine; long silences and constant restarting are not
Lexical resource	can you talk about a topic you did not prepare, and paraphrase when a word will not come?
Grammatical range and accuracy	do you use more than one tense and more than one clause type, and how often do errors appear?
Pronunciation	can a listener understand you without effort?

- **Pronunciation is a quarter of the band.** Most candidates spend none of their preparation on it, which makes it the cheapest quarter to improve.
- **You are not marked on your opinions.** There is no right answer. An interesting answer and a dull one score the same if the English is the same.
- **Fluency is not speed.** Speaking fast with no structure scores below speaking steadily with visible organisation.
- The examiner follows a script and controls the time. Being interrupted is normal and is not a bad sign.

Part 1 — answer, then add one reason

Four to five minutes of questions about yourself: home, family, work, study, and two or three familiar topics.

- **Never answer in one word.** *Do you like cooking?* — *Yes* is a band-4 answer. The pattern is **answer + one reason or example**, two or three sentences.
- *Yes, I do — I cook dinner most evenings because it's the one part of the day I'm not looking at a screen.* That is the whole technique, and it works on every Part 1 question.

- Do not give a speech either. Part 1 has many questions; a 40-second answer costs you the chance to show range on the next one.
- Expect present, past and future in this part: *do you..., did you... when you were younger, will you....* Answer in the tense you were asked in.
- Prepare **topics, not scripts**. A memorised answer is audible and is discounted.

Part 2 — the two-minute long turn

You get a card with a topic and four prompts, **one minute to prepare** with paper and pencil, then you speak for **two minutes**. The examiner will not stop you early.

- **Most candidates dry up at 45 seconds.** That is the whole difficulty, and it is fixed by practice with a timer, not by better ideas.
- **Use the preparation minute to write nouns, not sentences.** Six to eight words, one or two per prompt. Sentences cannot be read aloud naturally; nouns trigger speech.
- **The four prompts are your paragraphs**, in order, and the last one — usually *and explain why...* — deserves the most time. Spend about 20 seconds on each of the first three and 50 on the last.
- If you finish early, go back and add detail: *what it looked like, who else was there, how I felt at the time, what I would do differently*. Detail is always available.
- Past tenses dominate this part, because most cards ask you to *describe a time when....* Get the irregular verbs right; they are the errors an examiner cannot miss.
- It is fine to invent. Nobody is checking whether the story is true.

Part 3 — develop, hedge, disagree politely

Four to five minutes of abstract discussion about the Part 2 topic, at a higher level.

- **A one-sentence answer is the standard failure here.** Part 3 is where the higher bands are won, and the skill is **developing**: state a view, give a reason, name an example, then consider the other side.
- **Fluency** here means continuity and organisation, not speed.
- **Hedging** is grammar as well as politeness, and it shows range: *it tends to be, it depends on, broadly speaking, I'd say, on the whole, that's probably truer of... than of...*
- Disagree with the examiner when you want to; it is not rude, and it shows language: *I see why people say that, but I'd argue..., That's true up to a point, although....*
- Expect **comparison** (*how has this changed?*), **speculation** (*what will happen...?*) and **evaluation** (*is that a good thing?*). Each needs a different tense, which is exactly what criterion 3 is measuring.

- If you do not understand, ask: *Sorry, do you mean... ?* That costs nothing. Answering a question you did not understand costs marks.

Pronunciation for Chinese speakers

Chinese-L1 pronunciation errors come from a small, enumerable set. Working on these four is worth more than any amount of general “speaking practice”.

- **Final consonants.** Mandarin syllables end in a vowel, -n or -ng, so English final consonants get dropped or a vowel is added. *Wanted* becomes *wan*; *desk* becomes *des*. This one change does more for intelligibility than anything else on the list.
- **-ed and plural -s.** These are grammar **and** pronunciation. Dropping them is heard as a tense or number error as well as a pronunciation one, so it costs two criteria at once. *Walked* is /w kt/, *needed* is /ni d d/, *lived* is /l vd/ — three different sounds.
- **/θ/ and /ð/** (*think, this*) do not exist in Mandarin and usually become /s/ and /z/. Put the tongue tip between the teeth; it feels exaggerated and sounds correct.
- **/l/, /n/ and /r/** at the start of a word, and **/v/ versus /w/** — *light / night, very / wery*.
- **A syllable** is the unit stress sits on.
- **Word stress** in long words. *phoTOgraphy, phoToGRAPHic, ecoNOMic, eCONomy*. A word with the stress on the wrong syllable is often not recognised at all, even when every sound is right.
- **Intonation** is the tune of a sentence; **sentence stress** is which words carry the weight.
- **Sentence stress and intonation.** English stresses the content words and reduces the rest, and a flat, evenly-stressed delivery is heard as monotonous. Rising intonation on a list, falling at the end of a statement.
- Record yourself for two minutes and listen back. It is uncomfortable and it is the fastest diagnostic available.

Exam tips

- **Arrive with topics, not scripts.** Memorised answers are recognised and discounted, and they fall apart when the follow-up question comes.
- Practise Part 2 with a **timer**, out loud, standing up, until two minutes is comfortable. That single habit is worth half a band.
- If you make a mistake, correct it once and move on. Repeatedly restarting a sentence damages Fluency more than the original error did.
- Speak at your normal pace. Speed is not fluency, and a nervous rush makes every

pronunciation problem worse.

- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: Speaking format, scoring in detail.