IELTS Speaking Test Tips from a Tutor with 16 years experience.

Improve your Band Score with these Simple Hints

By Alanna Carysforth MA Oxon, Dip TEFLA

Hi and thank you for downloading this free report,

Let me introduce myself; my name's Alanna Carysforth, I'm English and I live in Australia.

Before you read my IELTS speaking tips, you probably want to know a little bit about me so that you can decide if I'm worth listening to or not!

Well, first of all, I'm an IELTS tutor. I have been teaching English to overseas students since 1994 and tutoring IELTS since 1998. I am DTEFLA (now called DELTA) trained and so have studied teaching methodology and all about different learning styles.

As you can imagine, in these last sixteen years, I've taught English for many different purposes across all levels (including many examination classes; FCE, CPE and IELTS). I've had students of many different backgrounds and nationalities..

Prior to becoming a teacher of English, I studied French and German at Oxford University. Being a linguist (I also speak fluent Italian) has always helped me to understand my students' needs better and I have a good understanding of how to study for language tests (I've walked my talk!)

I hope you enjoy the information in the next pages and find it useful.
Please feel free to contact me via the contact page on www.bestieltsonline.com with any comments or questions you may have. I value your feedback.

On the following page, you will find an overview of the IELTS speaking test and then my tips begin on page 3.

Happy Reading!

Warm Regards,



General Information

- The speaking test lasts between 11 and 14 minutes.
- The speaking test is in the form on an interview with a trained examiner (all examiners all over the world complete the same training).
  The interview is recorded but please DON'T panic! The interviews are recorded to check the examiners are doing their job properly, not to test your English.
- There are three parts to the speaking test:

Part 1 (4-5 minutes)

In this part, you answer questions about topics you know well, such as your home life, family life, work or study and your interests. You also answer questions about other familiar topics, which are quite general and do not require any specialised knowledge.

Part 2 (3-4 minutes)

The examiner gives you a particular topic and asks you to talk about it for 1-2 minutes. Before you talk, you are given exactly 1 minute to prepare yourself. The topic is written on a card, which the examiner will give you, and there are also some instructions which will help you guide your talk. At the end of the talk, the examiner asks one or two questions related to your talk.

Part 3 (4-5 minutes)

This part of the test is a discussion with the examiner based on themes connected to the topic you spoke about in Part 2. In this part of the test, you discuss more theoretical ideas.

My top tips

- Make sure you know where your interview room is and that you arrive at least a few minutes before your interview time. In my experience, candidates who arrive late are usually stressed and upset. Don't do this to yourself!

- Try to relax (easy to say, I know!) but you really do perform better if you are calm. Remember, the examiner wants you to show the best of your ability so be calm, polite and positive and show them what you've got!

- Remember that in part 1 (and part 2) of the test, the examiner can only ask the questions on the card so it's up to YOU to make sure you speak.

  Let me give you and example;

  1. Question; *'Do you like reading?'*
     Answer *'Yes/No'*

  2. Question; *'Do you like reading?'*
     Answer *'I love reading actually and always have a book in my bag. At the moment, I'm reading 'xxxx' which I'm really enjoying.'*

     OR

     'To be honest I'm not a great fan of reading. I'm more of an outdoors person and love sport. In fact, the only books that I read are for my course.'

So, which answer gives a better indication of your ability to speak English? Number 2 of course!

The speaking test is your opportunity to speak so make sure you give full answers when the examiner asks you questions.

- The examiner does not give you an overall Band Score out of 9 for your speaking test. He/She gives you a score out of 9 in four different areas of speaking ability and your final speaking Band Score is an average of these four scores.

You must consider these four areas during your test and try to find a balance between being fluent and being accurate in order to get the Band Score you need.

Here are the four areas the examiner gives you a score for:

Fluency and Coherence

Here the examiner is looking at how your speech flows.
Do you speak at a 'normal speed' and without hesitation?

He/She also assesses how you link ideas and language together to make coherent, connected speech.
Do you sequence your ideas in a logical way? Do you use (but not overuse!) cohesive devices (connectors, pronouns and conjunctions)?

Lexical Resource

Here the examiner looks at the range of vocabulary you use.
Do you use a reasonable variety of words? Are they appropriate and adequate to express your meaning?

Grammatical Range and Accuracy

Here the examiner looks at the accuracy, the appropriacy and the range of your grammar.
Do you make a lot of grammatical errors when you speak and do those errors make it difficult for people to understand you? Do you use more complex grammar and subordinate clauses?

Pronunciation

Here the examiner assesses your ability to produce comprehensible speech. He/She will consider how easy/difficult it is to understand you and how much of your speech (if any) is unintelligible.
Do you use English sounds, stress and intonation patterns correctly?

- I find that students focus a lot on their grammar when preparing for the IELTS test. Of course grammar is important but as you can see above, it's only 25% of your Band Score.

  Don't be afraid to correct yourself OCCASIONALLY if you make a grammatical mistake but don't let your correcting yourself stand in the way of your fluency.

- There is a very simple trick for avoiding some verbal grammar mistakes in part 1. Listen attentively to the question!
  I find that a lot of candidates use the wrong verb tense in their answers.

  Remember, the verb tense in the question is the verb tense you are expected to use in the answer:

  1. Question; 'Do you **like** reading?'

  The verb 'like' is in the present simple so the answer will be too.

  Answer 'I **love** reading actually and always **have** a book in my bag.
  *At the moment, I**'m reading*** *'xxxx' which I**'m** really **enjoying***.'*
  (* still present tense but the candidate is speaking about *'at the moment'* so the present continuous is necessary)
  OR
  'To be honest I**'m** not a great fan of reading. I**'m** more of an outdoors person and **love** sport. In fact, the only books that I **read are** for my course.'

  2. Question; '**Did** you **like** reading when you **were** a child?'

  The verbs are in the past simple so the answer will be too.

  Answer I **loved** reading actually and always **asked** for books for my birthday.
  OR
  'To be honest I **wasn't** a great fan of reading. I **was** more of an outdoors child and **loved** sport. In fact, the only books that I **read were** at school.'

- Ask the examiner to repeat the question if you don't understand what he/she asked you:

  'I'm not sure what you mean. Could your repeat the question please.'

  I have known a lot of students/candidates think that asking the examiner to repeat the question makes their level of English look lower. Not true, don't you also ask people to repeat questions in your mother tongue?! It is much better to ask for the question to be repeated than to simply 'freeze up'.

- Another awkward moment for candidates is when they cannot think of anything else to say. Have a few phrases ready for these situations, such as:

  'I think that's about it'.
  'I can't think of anything else right now.'

  By saying one of these phrases, you're giving the examiner a clear message that you can't think of anything else to say and not just hesitating and making the examiner wonder if the problem is a language problem.

- In part 2 you are expected to talk for one to two minutes. The examiner will stop you when two minutes has passed. Obviously, you want to make sure that you speak for at least one minute.
  I suggest you practise speaking about a topic and time it so that you know what a minute feels like.

- Recently I heard of the following situation. A candidate had a topic about 'leisure activities'. At the end of the minute's preparation, she asked the examiner 'What does leisure mean?'

  Anyway, here's my advice.

  1. Don't wait for a whole minute to ask a question!

  2. Remember that the examiner can only speak to ask the questions on his / her card (although I've heard that they sometimes give a simple definition of one word in situations like this).

  3. If you don't really understand the question, interpret it in your own way and when the time to speak comes, simply say to the examiner, *'I'm not really sure what 'leisure' means but I think it's 'blah' so I'm going to talk about that.'*

Not knowing one word of vocabulary is probably not going to affect you Band Score but sitting in silence certainly will!

- In part 3 the examiner is finally allowed to converse with you (!) as part 3 is a two-way discussion. Although it is a discussion, you are still expected to do most of the talking and the examiner will ask you questions to encourage you to speak.

  In this part of the test, you must be aware that the questions are of a general nature and not about you and your immediate life. To do well in this part of the test, you need to be able to respond to questions and prompts about abstract ideas.

  If a candidate tries to pull their answer over to information about themselves and their immediate life, the examiner will always try to pull the answer over to the general!

  Remember that each part of the test assesses your speaking in different ways. Part 1 is seeing how you perform with familiar topics, part 2 is seeing how you perform you speak alone for a period of time and part 3 wants to se how you perform when talking about more general, abstract topics.

- Unlike in parts 1 and 2 where the examiner can only repeat the question if you ask for clarification, in part 3 the examiner is allowed to re-phrase the prompt if necessary.
  This means that you can actually ask the examiner *'Can you ask the question in different way'.* Don't just freeze; asking for clarification probably won't affect your Band Score much but sitting in painful silence probably will.

  Don't worry if you cannot answer the questions in this part easily. Part 3 is designed to be the most linguistically challenging part of the test. The examiner is trying to push you to see how far you can go. This is a positive thing; for example maybe you were speaking more at a level 7 band during the other parts but now the examiner can see flashes of 8.

- Learn some phrases for giving opinions such as *'In my opinion…', 'I think that…'* or *'As far as I'm concerned…'*

- As this part of the test contains some hypothetical and abstract ideas, you will need to use to use some future forms and phrases.

Brush up on your future tenses grammar and lean some useful phrases such as:
Probably 'blah' will happen
'Blah' might even happen

Try not to use 'will' exclusively to talk about the future. We are quite sure about a statement when we use 'will' and how sure can we be about the future?
Use words for speculating instead, such as *'probably', 'possibly', 'might', 'may', 'perhaps'* etc

- Don't be worried if the examiner stops you at some point and says *'That is the end of the speaking test……'*
  In order for IELTS to be a fair test, and standardized wherever you take it, the examiner must be strictly aware of timing.
  To make IELTS a fair test for all is also the reason why examiners ask the exact question in parts 1 and 2 and cannot re-phrase.

- Don't ask the examiner for your Band Score. He/She cannot give you that information; you will receive your result from IELTS after a few weeks.

- I'm guessing that the Band Score you receive is really important for your future. Maybe it's for immigration purposes or to enable you to study. In my opinion, it's therefore worth making a serious effort to study; remember nobody cares as much about your result as you do.

  I personally believe that any exam is 50% how much you know and 50% how well you know the exam and what's expected of you so practise, practise, practise.

OK, now I need your help; I'm putting together a comprehensive e-book about IELTS and would love to hear what you'd like to see in it.

Feel free to contact me via the contact page at www.bestieltsonline.com and let me know what you'd like to see in my e-book.

Once the e-book is ready, I'm going to randomly select 5 people who contacted me with suggestions and give them the choice to either a free copy of the e-book or a free practice speaking test (on Skype) with me

Here's to your success. Good Luck!