

How to bump up your IELTS Reading test up to 7.0 or higher

The IELTS reading test is one hour long and consists of three passages taken from a variety of sources. These sources might be journals, books, magazines, articles or reports. You have to answer 40 (usually) questions based on the texts, with 12 to 14 questions per passage. The texts are usually of a similar level of difficulty, though the questions may become more difficult as the test progresses.

What kind of questions will you face?

Question types could include any of the following: gap fill, multiple choice, labelling a diagram, sentence completion, notes completion, summary completion, selecting suitable headings for paragraphs or sections, selecting which person holds a particular view, or selecting the most suitable title for a passage. Obviously, all the question types will not appear on every test, but you should be familiar with all the types and the strategies used to successfully answer them.

Developing essential reading strategies

A good tip is to understand what you need to read and what you don't. There may be as many as 2,000 words per reading passage plus perhaps another 200 words in the questions, so potentially over 6,000 words in total - and only 1 hour to read, understand, and answer 40 questions. The strategy is therefore **NOT** to read all the texts in great detail. A native speaker would find reading and understanding this amount of text challenging.

To do this, you need to develop the ability to read the text quickly to understand the key messages, and then the ability to find specific pieces of information, such as dates, people, or something which changed. To start, read the questions so you have an idea of what you are looking for. Then you should read the whole of the introductory paragraph. This gives an overview of what the text is about. Once you have done this, you can work on each paragraph.

As part of this strategy, remember that academic writing follows a formula; each paragraph contains one idea only and that idea tends to be in the first sentence of the paragraph. Everything else in that paragraph will then be either supporting content or 'signpost words' to help you understand the text. So, if you read the first sentences in each paragraph, you can then begin to find the appropriate paragraph which will contain the answers you need. When you find the right paragraph, you can then scan through the text looking for the specific information you need.

This strategy saves doing a lot of reading that is not required to answer a question.

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Answering 'YES / NO / Not Given' questions

This type of question causes huge problems for some students. Y/N/NG questions are all about a particular topic and require you to find where any specific evidence for (Y)/against (N)/or just not mentioned (NG) is. If you do not find positive or negative evidence to support Yes or No then it **MUST** be Not Given. You may have to look at two paragraphs if the main topic runs over both. However, you do not need to read the whole text to establish that it is not there.

Here is an example paragraph about rainforests:

There are many reasons why rainforests are being lost at such a high rate nowadays. Chief among these reasons is the never ending quest for new agricultural land. Secondary reasons of importance are timber extraction for profit and clearance to access the underlying resources just below the soil. Minor reasons include man-made forest fires, expanding urban areas and flooding with associated landslides caused by changing and unusual rainfall patterns.

Now, answer this Y/N/NG question based on the paragraph.

Drilling for oil is a major factor in rainforest deforestation. Y, N, Not Given

- Can you find positive proof that this happens?
- Can you find negative proof that this does not happen?
- Do you think that drilling for oil is not mentioned?

There is neither positive nor negative evidence for oil drilling. Although access to resources was mentioned, oil was not specifically mentioned. Therefore the answer is Not Given. There is no need to read any more of the text, this is the paragraph which deals with reasons for the loss of rainforests.

Another point to remember is that in a series of questions featuring Y / N / Not Given options, at least **one of each** will be used. Look at the series of answers below. If you are sure that questions 1-4 have been correctly attempted, then the final answer **MUST** be Not Given, as it has not yet been used.

1. Y / N / Not Given
2. Y / N / Not Given
3. Y / N / Not Given
4. Y / N / Not Given
5. Y / N / Not Given

Scanning for specific information

When we read there are some high frequency words which we know without having to 'decode' them, including common words such as: *and, because, sometimes, and get*. However, in the IELTS Reading test, there will be many words we may not recognise, especially names and data, such as *Madame Issac Periere, Asa Griggs Candler, 1896 AD, or £14.6million*. These may often be the answers you need, and you will need to scan the text to find the right information quickly.

You should also only use information from the text to inform your answer, even if it is about something you have studied or that you know very well. Do not be tempted to bring in extra information, all the information you need to answer the questions is in the texts.

Unknown words

You may read a word that you do not know. Do not worry about this, as the meaning is often clear through context. If you need to know the meaning of a less frequent word in order to complete a task, there may be a glossary at the bottom of the page. A glossary is a 'mini dictionary' which gives definitions of more difficult words in a text.

Finally

Finally, the test is marked positively, in other words if you get an answer incorrect your score does not go down, it merely does not increase. Use this to your advantage and guess any questions you really get stuck with, or are running out of time with, you never know, the guess could be the difference of a band score. Answer all the questions!

So, to summarise, only read what you need to, starting with the questions, the first introductory paragraph and the topic sentences of the other paragraphs. Use the knowledge of the layout of the text to guide you to where the answers are. Use scanning techniques to locate specific words and information as these are often the answers. And never leave any blanks on your answer sheet.

Good luck with your test!



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