

— T Y P O G R A M M A R E D I T I O N S —

A C O M P L E T E P R E P A R A T I O N G U I D E

# IELTS

## *Reading*

*Academic & General Training*

A focused companion for test-takers aiming for Band 6.5 and above. Master question types, sharpen skimming and scanning, decode paraphrase, and walk into test day with a clear strategy.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction to IELTS Reading

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## What Is IELTS?

The International English Language Testing System, almost universally known by its acronym IELTS, is the world's most established high-stakes English proficiency exam. Jointly owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia, and Cambridge Assessment English, it is accepted by more than twelve thousand organisations across one hundred and fifty countries, ranging from universities and professional registration bodies to immigration authorities. Two versions of the test exist: IELTS Academic, intended for candidates seeking higher education or professional registration in an English-speaking environment, and IELTS General Training, intended for those migrating to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, or the United Kingdom, or applying for secondary education, training programmes, and work experience.

Both versions assess the four macro skills of listening, reading, writing, and speaking, but only the Reading and Writing modules differ in content between the two tracks. The Listening and Speaking modules are identical. The Reading module is widely regarded as the most time-pressured section of the entire exam: forty questions in sixty minutes, with no extra time transferred to the answer sheet. This book is dedicated exclusively to that module. Whether you are sitting the Academic or the General Training version, the principles, strategies, and question types covered here apply directly to your test-day experience.

## Why Reading Matters

The Reading module carries equal weight with Listening, Writing, and Speaking in the overall band score calculation, yet it is the section where candidates most frequently either over-perform or catastrophically underperform relative to their actual English ability. The reason is straightforward: reading is the only module where time, not language knowledge, is the primary constraint. A candidate with the vocabulary of a Band 8 learner can easily score Band 6 in Reading if they manage time poorly, fall into the True/False/Not Given trap, or fail to adapt their strategy to the difficulty progression across the three passages.

Conversely, a candidate with a modest Band 6 vocabulary but sharp strategy, disciplined scanning, and confident paraphrase recognition can comfortably reach Band 7. This asymmetry between knowledge and outcome is what makes a focused Reading preparation book worthwhile. The skills that lift your Reading score are learnable, repeatable, and largely independent of how many words you happen to have memorised.

## Academic vs General Training at a Glance

Although the two versions share the same question types and timing, the source material and difficulty profile differ substantially. The Academic module draws from journals, textbooks, and serious magazines,

with passages that are dense, abstract, and argument-driven. The General Training module draws from notices, advertisements, handbooks, and newspapers, with passages that are practical, workplace-oriented, and lexically lighter in the first two sections but ramp up to a long descriptive piece in the third section. Chapters 2 and 3 cover each version in detail.

## How the Band Score Works

Your raw score out of forty is converted to a band score on the nine-band IELTS scale. The conversion table is publicly available and shifts slightly from test to test because each version is statistically equated to a common scale. As a general guide, scoring thirty out of forty places you around Band 7, thirty-four around Band 7.5, and thirty-seven or above around Band 8. The exact thresholds move by one or two raw marks depending on the difficulty of the specific test form you sit.

What this means in practice is that you do not need to answer every question correctly to achieve a strong band score. A candidate aiming for Band 7 can afford to leave five or six questions blank or incorrect, provided the rest are right. Knowing your target band and the corresponding raw-score range helps you make sensible decisions about which questions to invest time in and which to skip and return to later. Chapter 6 develops this into a complete time-management framework.

## Common Myths About IELTS Reading

Several persistent myths distort candidates' preparation. The first is that you must read and fully understand every passage before answering questions. This is not only unnecessary but actively harmful given the time pressure. Skimming the passage for structure and gist, then scanning for specific information as needed, is the only viable approach. The second myth is that vocabulary alone determines your score. While a broad vocabulary certainly helps, the IELTS Reading test is fundamentally a test of paraphrase recognition and question-handling skill, not of lexical range.

The third myth is that all questions appear in the same order as the information in the passage. This is true for some question types (Multiple Choice, Sentence Completion, Short-Answer) but emphatically false for others (Matching Headings, Matching Information, Matching Features). Treating every question set as if it follows passage order is one of the most common reasons candidates lose marks. Chapter 4 covers the order rules for each question type in detail. The fourth myth is that practice alone, without strategy, will improve your score. Untargeted practice tends to reinforce existing habits rather than correct them. This book is structured around deliberate practice: each chapter identifies a specific skill or question type, explains the underlying logic, and provides drills that target the precise weaknesses most candidates show.

## How to Use This Book

The chapters are sequenced to take you from foundational understanding to full test readiness. Chapters 1 to 3 establish the framework: what the test is, how each version is structured, and what you are being asked to do. Chapter 4 is the longest and most reference-heavy, covering every question type with its format, strategy, and pitfalls. Chapters 5 to 8 build core skills: skimming, scanning, paraphrase, time management,

vocabulary, and the most common mistakes that cost marks. Chapter 9 decodes the band descriptors so you can self-assess accurately. Chapters 10 and 11 are full annotated practice passages, one Academic and one General Training, with detailed reasoning for every answer. Chapter 12 gives you a four-week study plan.

If you are six weeks or more from your test date, work through the book sequentially. If you are within four weeks, prioritise Chapters 4, 6, 10, 11, and 12. If you have less than two weeks, focus exclusively on Chapters 4 and 6, then complete both practice passages under timed conditions. Whichever path you take, attempt every question in the practice chapters before reading the walk-through. Reading the answer first teaches you nothing; struggling with the question first, then comparing your reasoning to the walk-through, is where the actual learning happens.

## CHAPTER 2

# Academic Reading in Detail

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## Structure of the Module

The IELTS Academic Reading module consists of three long passages, each accompanied by a set of questions, totalling forty questions across the three passages. You have exactly sixty minutes, including the time needed to transfer your answers to the answer sheet. There is no extra time given for transfer, unlike in the Listening module. The total word count across the three passages is approximately two thousand one hundred and fifty to two thousand seven hundred and fifty words, with each passage averaging seven hundred to nine hundred words.

Each passage stands alone: there is no thematic continuity between them, and you may encounter a marine biology passage followed by a history of typography followed by a discussion of behavioural economics. The variety is deliberate. IELTS Academic is designed to test whether you can handle the kind of disparate reading load that undergraduate and postgraduate students face in their first year of university, where a single day's reading list might span three unrelated disciplines.

## Source Material

Passages are adapted from authentic sources: academic journals such as *Nature*, *Science*, and the *Economist*; textbooks from fields including biology, geology, sociology, and engineering; and serious general-interest magazines. The passages are edited for length and to remove culturally specific references that would disadvantage candidates from particular backgrounds, but the vocabulary and syntactic complexity remain at the level of the original source. This means you will encounter nominalisations, long noun phrases, passive constructions, hedging language, and the formal academic register typical of published scholarship.

Diagrams, charts, illustrations, and tables may accompany a passage. When they do, the visual material is integral: at least one question will require you to interpret or label the diagram by drawing on information from the surrounding text. You will never be asked to interpret a diagram using only the visual itself; the answer will always be recoverable from a specific sentence or paragraph in the passage.

## Difficulty Progression

Passages are presented in approximate order of difficulty, though the progression is not strict. Passage 1 is typically the most accessible: a clear topic, straightforward structure, and vocabulary drawn from common academic discourse. Passage 2 is moderately more complex, often with more abstract argumentation or a denser factual load. Passage 3 is the most demanding, frequently presenting an argumentative or evaluative text with subtle distinctions, hedged claims, and a writer's viewpoint that must be inferred rather than directly extracted.

What this means for your time allocation is that Passage 1 should take you the least time, Passage 2 a little more, and Passage 3 the most. A common pacing breakdown is twenty minutes for Passage 1, twenty minutes for Passage 2, and twenty minutes for Passage 3, but stronger candidates often compress Passage 1 to fifteen or seventeen minutes to leave extra time for the harder Passage 3. Chapter 6 covers pacing in detail.

## Question Distribution

Each passage is typically paired with two or three different question types, with twelve to fourteen questions per passage. Common combinations include a Matching Headings task followed by a True/False/Not Given task on Passage 1, a Multiple Choice plus Summary Completion on Passage 2, and a Matching Features plus Sentence Completion plus Yes/No/Not Given on Passage 3. The full catalogue of fourteen question types is covered in Chapter 4. Familiarity with each type, and the specific reasoning it requires, is the single biggest predictor of Reading score after baseline vocabulary.

## Academic vs General Training: A Comparison

The table below summarises the structural differences between the two versions of the Reading module. While the timing and total question count are identical, the content, source material, and difficulty profile differ substantially. Choosing the right version depends entirely on your purpose for taking IELTS. If you are applying to a university or seeking professional registration (medical, accounting, engineering), you must take the Academic version. If you are migrating for work or applying for a visa under skilled migration categories, you typically take the General Training version.

Feature	Academic	General Training
Passages	3 long texts	3 sections (5-6 texts total)
Total questions	40	40
Time	60 minutes	60 minutes
Source	Journals, textbooks, magazines	Notices, ads, handbooks, newspapers
Topic range	Academic disciplines	Everyday, workplace, general interest
Word count	~2,150-2,750	~2,150-2,750
Difficulty curve	Gradual increase P1 to P3	Steep jump at Section 3
Typical use	University admission, professional registration	Immigration, work, training programmes

Table: see text for context.

## What the Academic Module Really Tests

Beyond surface-level comprehension, the Academic module tests four specific cognitive skills: identifying main ideas, locating detailed information, understanding argument structure, and recognising the writer's attitude or viewpoint. Each question type maps to one or more of these skills. Matching Headings tests your ability to identify the main idea of a paragraph. True/False/Not Given tests your ability to verify specific factual claims against the passage. Yes/No/Not Given tests your ability to identify the writer's opinion on a claim. Multiple Choice can test any of these depending on the specific question stem.

Recognising which skill a question is targeting helps you apply the right strategy. A main-idea question requires you to read the whole paragraph and abstract its central point. A detail question requires you to scan for a specific keyword and read the surrounding sentence carefully. A viewpoint question requires you to look for evaluative language such as 'arguably', 'unfortunately', 'surprisingly', or 'rightly'. Conflating these skills, for example treating a viewpoint question as a factual question, is a frequent source of errors.

## Sample Academic Topics

While the topic pool is theoretically unlimited, certain themes recur across the years: animal behaviour and cognition, climate and environmental change, the history of science and technology, the psychology of learning and memory, urbanisation and architecture, language evolution and linguistics, public health and medicine, and economic history. Building familiarity with these topic areas, and the vocabulary typical of each, gives you a meaningful edge. You do not need specialist knowledge, the passage provides everything required to answer, but background awareness reduces cognitive load and speeds up your initial skim.

## CHAPTER 3

# General Training Reading in Detail

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## Structure of the Module

The General Training Reading module, like its Academic counterpart, contains forty questions and runs for sixty minutes with no transfer time. The structural difference is that the test is divided into three sections rather than three passages. Each section may contain one or more separate texts. Section 1 typically contains two or three short texts, Section 2 contains two texts, and Section 3 contains one longer continuous text. The total word count across all sections is roughly the same as the Academic module, around two thousand one hundred and fifty to two thousand seven hundred and fifty words.

The logic behind this structure is that General Training is intended to assess your ability to handle the kind of English you would actually encounter in daily life, training environments, and the workplace. Nobody in a real job reads three nine-hundred-word academic papers back to back; they read a policy notice, an email, a handbook extract, a job description, and then, occasionally, a longer article for general interest. The test mirrors that distribution.

## Section 1: Social Survival

Section 1 contains two or three short factual texts, each typically between one hundred and two hundred and fifty words. Source material includes advertisements, public notices, instruction leaflets, restaurant menus, hotel booking confirmations, public transport timetables, college prospectuses, and similar everyday documents. The texts are usually short enough that you can read them in full in two or three minutes, and the questions test factual retrieval: locate a specific piece of information, identify which option matches a stated condition, or complete a sentence with a word or phrase drawn directly from the text.

Because Section 1 is the easiest part of the test, strong candidates complete it in twelve to fifteen minutes. This frees up valuable time for Section 3, which is the hardest. A common error is to spend too long on Section 1, either because of over-confidence (reading every word carefully when scanning would do) or because of unfamiliarity with the question type. Treat Section 1 as a time bank: extract maximum marks in minimum time, then carry the surplus into the more demanding sections.

## Section 2: Workplace and Training

Section 2 contains two texts, each around five hundred to six hundred words, focused on workplace or training contexts. Source material includes staff handbooks, health and safety policies, training programme descriptions, job descriptions, pay and benefits documents, intern induction packs, and similar professional-but-not-academic material. The questions test a mix of factual retrieval and slightly more complex comprehension, including matching features, completing a summary, and short-answer questions.

Section 2 typically takes fifteen to eighteen minutes. The texts are denser than Section 1 but still lexically accessible, and the structure is usually explicit: clear headings, numbered lists, bullet points, and visible signposting. Use this structural clarity to your advantage. When a question asks about 'pay during the first month of training', go directly to the heading that mentions pay or remuneration rather than reading from the start.

### Section 3: General Reading

Section 3 contains a single long text of approximately seven hundred to nine hundred words. The source is typically a magazine or newspaper article, a non-fiction book extract, or a long-form feature on a topic of general interest: travel, history, biography, science, technology, or culture. Despite the General Training label, this section is comparable in difficulty to an Academic Passage 2 or early Passage 3. The text will contain argument, opinion, and narrative, and the questions will test inference, paraphrase, and the writer's attitude, not just factual retrieval.

Plan for twenty to twenty-five minutes on Section 3. Many candidates find this section harder than expected precisely because they assume General Training is uniformly easy. It is not. Section 3 is the section where General Training scores are made or broken, and the question types used here are the same as those in the Academic module. If you are sitting General Training, the second half of Chapter 4 (question types) and Chapter 5 (core skills) apply to you in full.

### Question Types Specific to General Training

Most question types appear in both versions of the test, but their distribution differs. In General Training, Section 1 leans heavily on Multiple Choice, Short-Answer Questions, and Sentence Completion, all of which test factual retrieval. Section 2 introduces Matching Features and Summary Completion. Section 3 uses the full range, including Matching Headings, True/False/Not Given, Yes/No/Not Given, and Matching Information. By the time you reach Section 3, you are effectively sitting an Academic-style passage, and your preparation should reflect that.

### Common General Training Pitfalls

Three pitfalls recur among General Training candidates. The first is over-reading Section 1. The texts are short, the questions are direct, and the answers are usually lifted verbatim from the text. A two-minute scan per text is often sufficient. Spending eight minutes per text not only wastes time but increases the chance of second-guessing correct answers. The second pitfall is treating Section 3 as if it were another Section 1. It is not. The text is long, the questions require paraphrase recognition and inference, and a quick scan will not suffice.

The third pitfall is ignoring the workplace context of Section 2. Candidates sometimes miss answers because they assume the text uses 'standard' English when in fact it uses British workplace conventions: 'leave' for vacation, 'sick note' for medical certificate, 'line manager' for direct supervisor, 'PAYE' for pay-as-you-earn taxation. Familiarising yourself with this vocabulary, particularly if you are sitting IELTS

for migration to the UK or Australia, removes a small but consistent source of errors.

## How General Training Is Scored

The band score conversion is identical in form to the Academic module: a raw score out of forty is mapped to a nine-band scale. However, the raw-score thresholds for each band are slightly higher in General Training. To achieve Band 7, a General Training candidate typically needs around thirty-four or thirty-five correct answers, whereas an Academic candidate needs around thirty. The reason is that the General Training test is, on average, slightly easier overall, so the same band requires a higher raw score. This does not make one version easier or harder than the other in absolute terms; it simply reflects the statistical calibration of the two tests to a common scale.

## CHAPTER 4

# The Fourteen Question Types

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## Overview

The IELTS Reading module, in both Academic and General Training versions, uses a fixed repertoire of fourteen question types. Each type has its own format, its own internal logic, and its own characteristic traps. This chapter walks through each one in turn, explaining what the question is really asking, the recommended strategy, and the pitfalls that most often cost candidates marks. Treat this chapter as a reference: return to it whenever you encounter a question type you find difficult.

A common mistake is to assume that because all questions carry one mark each, they should all be approached in the same way. They should not. A Matching Headings question and a True/False/Not Given question test fundamentally different cognitive skills, and applying the wrong mental process to the wrong question type is one of the fastest ways to lose marks. Master each type individually before trying to chain them under timed conditions.

## 1. Multiple Choice

**Format:** a question stem followed by three or four options labelled A, B, C, and (sometimes) D. You select the one correct option. Some variants ask you to select two correct answers from five options, or to select the best title from a list.

**Strategy:** read the stem carefully, underline the key concept being tested, and scan the passage for the relevant sentence. Once you have located the source sentence, read it carefully and compare each option against it. Beware of options that are partially correct, options that use vocabulary from elsewhere in the passage to distract, and options that contradict a detail in the source sentence. The correct option is almost always a paraphrase, not a direct copy, of the relevant information.

**Pitfalls:** the most common error is choosing an option that is true in the real world but not stated in the passage. IELTS does not test general knowledge; it tests passage comprehension. A second error is selecting an option because it contains a keyword from the stem. Keyword matching without comprehension is unreliable because distractors are deliberately seeded with keywords from the stem.

## 2. Identifying Information (True / False / Not Given)

**Format:** a series of statements. You must decide whether each statement agrees with the information in the passage (True), contradicts the information in the passage (False), or is not mentioned in the passage (Not Given).

**Strategy:** locate the relevant sentence in the passage by scanning for keywords from the statement. Read the source sentence carefully and compare it to the statement. If the statement says the same thing in different

words, the answer is True. If the statement says the opposite, or asserts something the passage explicitly denies, the answer is False. If you cannot find any sentence in the passage that addresses the claim, the answer is Not Given.

**Pitfalls:** this is the single most misjudged question type in IELTS Reading. The crucial error is treating Not Given as a fallback when you cannot decide between True and False. Not Given is a positive determination that the passage does not address the claim, not a confession of uncertainty. A second error is reading real-world knowledge into the answer. If the statement is 'The Earth orbits the Sun' but the passage says nothing about astronomy, the answer is Not Given, not True. A third error is over-eager False marking. For the answer to be False, the passage must directly contradict the statement; absence of confirmation is not contradiction.

### 3. Identifying Writer's Views (Yes / No / Not Given)

**Format:** identical to True/False/Not Given, but the statements test the writer's opinion rather than factual information. You decide whether the statement agrees with the writer's views (Yes), contradicts the writer's views (No), or is not addressed by the writer (Not Given).

**Strategy:** the approach is the same as for True/False/Not Given, but the focus shifts from factual verification to identifying evaluative language. Look for words such as 'arguably', 'surprisingly', 'rightly', 'unfortunately', 'inevitable', 'questionable', or 'compelling'. These signal the writer's stance. A statement that the writer 'believes X' should be tested against the passage's evaluative claims, not its factual claims.

**Pitfalls:** the most common error is conflating Yes/No/Not Given with True/False/Not Given and answering as if both test factual accuracy. They do not. Another error is assuming that the writer must explicitly state their opinion; in practice, opinions are often embedded in the choice of adjectives, adverbs, and verb modalities. If the passage describes a policy as 'a poorly designed measure that nonetheless produced the desired effect', the writer's view that the policy worked is Yes, even though they also criticise its design.

### 4. Matching Information

**Format:** a list of statements or pieces of information, and a list of paragraphs labelled A, B, C, and so on. You match each statement to the paragraph in which the information is found. Some paragraphs may be used more than once; others may not be used at all.

**Strategy:** read the statements first and underline keywords. Then scan each paragraph in turn, looking for the keywords or their paraphrases. Match as you go. Because paragraphs can be reused, do not eliminate a paragraph after you have used it once.

**Pitfalls:** candidates often assume that each paragraph matches only one statement, which is not the case. Another error is matching based on a single shared keyword without checking the full meaning. The correct paragraph must contain the full information in the statement, not just one word.

## 5. Matching Headings

**Format:** a list of headings (short phrases summarising paragraph content) and a list of paragraphs labelled i, ii, iii, and so on, or A, B, C. You match each heading to the correct paragraph. There are always more headings than paragraphs.

**Strategy:** read the first sentence of each paragraph (the topic sentence) and the final sentence. Together these usually establish the paragraph's main idea. Then scan the headings and select the one that captures that main idea. Ignore headings that focus on a minor detail within the paragraph rather than its central point.

**Pitfalls:** the most common error is choosing a heading that mentions a keyword from the paragraph but does not capture its main idea. A paragraph might mention 'the history of the steam engine' in passing, but if its main argument is about the social impact of mechanisation, the correct heading is the one about social impact, not the one about steam engines. A second error is choosing a heading that is too narrow or too broad. Headings should match the paragraph's level of generality.

## 6. Matching Features

**Format:** a list of items (for example, four researchers named in the passage) and a list of statements. You match each statement to the correct item. Items may be used more than once or not at all.

**Strategy:** scan the passage to locate where each named item appears. Note the surrounding context. Then read each statement and match it to the item whose context contains the relevant information. The matching is usually straightforward once you have located the items.

**Pitfalls:** candidates sometimes confuse two items that appear in similar contexts. Read carefully to distinguish between, for example, two researchers who disagree with each other. The statement may summarise one view, and the distractor may paraphrase the opposite view.

## 7. Matching Sentence Endings

**Format:** a list of incomplete sentences (beginnings) and a list of possible endings. You match each beginning to the correct ending. There are more endings than beginnings.

**Strategy:** read the beginnings carefully and predict the kind of information needed to complete each one. Then scan the endings and match. Verify by reading the completed sentence: it should be grammatically correct and factually consistent with the passage.

**Pitfalls:** grammatical correctness alone is not sufficient; the matched sentence must also be true to the passage. A grammatically perfect but factually wrong match is still wrong.

## 8. Sentence Completion

Format: incomplete sentences. You fill in the blank with a word or short phrase taken from the passage. The instructions specify the maximum number of words allowed, typically one, two, or three.

Strategy: read the sentence, identify the missing information, scan the passage for the relevant sentence, and copy the exact words from the passage. Do not paraphrase. Do not change the word form. The instructions will tell you to use words 'taken from the passage', and this is meant literally.

Pitfalls: the most common error is paraphrasing. If the passage says 'the device was invented in 1892', the answer is '1892', not 'the late nineteenth century'. A second error is exceeding the word limit. If the limit is two words and you write three, your answer is wrong even if the content is correct. A third error is using articles ('a', 'the') unnecessarily; these count towards the word limit and should be omitted if they are not part of the original phrase.

## 9. Summary, Notes, Table, Flow-Chart Completion

Format: a summary, set of notes, table, or flow-chart that paraphrases information from part or all of the passage. You fill in the blanks. Variants include a word bank (you select from a list of words provided) and a no-word-bank version (you locate words in the passage).

Strategy: read the entire summary first to understand the context. Identify which part of the passage the summary is drawn from (often signalled by a phrase such as 'Complete the summary of paragraphs C and D below'). Then work through each blank, scanning the relevant part of the passage for the corresponding information. If a word bank is provided, eliminate options as you go to reduce the search space for later blanks.

Pitfalls: the summary is a paraphrase, not a copy, so keywords from the summary will not appear verbatim in the passage. You must recognise the paraphrase. A second error is filling a blank with a word that is grammatically correct but factually wrong. Always verify that your word fits both the grammar of the summary and the meaning of the passage.

## 10. Diagram Label Completion

Format: a diagram (often a process diagram, a labelled cross-section, or a flow-chart) with blank labels. You fill in the labels using words from the passage.

Strategy: study the diagram first to understand what it depicts. The visual structure often reveals which part of the passage contains the relevant information. Then scan for that part of the passage and extract the words that label each part.

Pitfalls: the diagram is always based on information in the passage, never on general knowledge. Even if you know what a process diagram 'should' say, use only information from the passage. A second error is miscounting word limits; the same rules as Sentence Completion apply.

## 11. Short-Answer Questions

Format: questions requiring a short answer, typically one to three words taken from the passage.

Strategy: read each question, underline keywords, scan the passage for the relevant sentence, and copy the answer directly. The questions usually follow the order of the passage.

Pitfalls: the most common error is paraphrasing or rephrasing. Copy the exact words from the passage, in the same word form. A second error is writing more than the word limit. A third error is including unnecessary words such as 'the' or 'a' that are not part of the answer.

### Question-Type Strategy Summary

The table below summarises the order rule for each question type. 'Order' means the answers appear in the same order as the information in the passage. Knowing this rule saves substantial time: for ordered question types, you can scan forward from the location of the previous answer.

Question Type	Passage Order	Common Difficulty
Multiple Choice	Usually ordered	Distractors with passage keywords
True/False/Not Given	Ordered	Not Given vs False confusion
Yes/No/Not Given	Ordered	Opinion vs fact confusion
Matching Information	Unordered	Reused paragraphs
Matching Headings	Per-paragraph	Detail vs main idea confusion
Matching Features	Unordered	Similar named items
Matching Sentence Endings	Ordered beginnings	Grammar-only matching
Sentence Completion	Ordered	Paraphrasing instead of copying
Summary/Notes/Table	Ordered within summary	Paraphrase recognition
Diagram Label	Ordered around diagram	Miscounting word limits
Short-Answer	Ordered	Rephrasing instead of copying

*Table: see text for context.*

## CHAPTER 5

# Core Reading Skills

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## The Three Reading Modes

Effective IELTS Reading rests on three distinct reading modes that most candidates conflate: skimming, scanning, and intensive reading. Skimming is the rapid reading of a text to grasp its overall structure and main ideas. Scanning is the targeted search for a specific piece of information, such as a name, a date, or a keyword. Intensive reading is the careful, line-by-line reading of a specific passage segment to extract precise meaning. All three are necessary; using the wrong mode at the wrong time is the most common cause of time pressure.

A well-paced candidate spends about two minutes skimming each passage before touching the questions, then alternates between scanning and intensive reading for the remaining eighteen minutes per passage. A poorly-paced candidate either skips skimming (and spends the entire passage lost, jumping back and forth) or treats every question as an intensive reading exercise (and runs out of time on passage three). The skill is not reading faster; it is matching the reading mode to the task.

## Skimming: Reading for Structure

Skimming is not reading quickly. It is reading selectively. When you skim a passage, you are looking for: the topic of each paragraph (one sentence, usually the first or last), the overall structure (is this an argument, a description, a chronological account?), and any signposting language (however, in contrast, similarly, finally) that signals the writer's logical moves. You are explicitly not looking for: specific details, vocabulary definitions, or the answer to any particular question.

To skim effectively, read the title and any subtitle first. Then read the first sentence of each paragraph, the last sentence of each paragraph, and the first and last paragraphs in full. This takes about ninety seconds for a typical eight-hundred-word passage. The result is a mental map of the passage: you know where the introduction is, where the writer's main argument is set out, where the counter-argument appears, and where the conclusion sits. When a question later asks about a specific detail, you will know roughly where to scan.

## Scanning: Reading for Location

Scanning is the skill of moving your eyes rapidly over a text looking for a specific target: a keyword, a name, a date, a number, or a phrase. Your eyes should not be reading; they should be pattern-matching. A good scanner can locate a specific keyword in a passage of eight hundred words in under ten seconds.

Effective scanning starts with careful question analysis. Before you scan, identify the keyword in the question that is most likely to appear in the passage verbatim. Names, dates, numbers, and technical terms

are usually preserved verbatim because they cannot be paraphrased. Common nouns and verbs, by contrast, are frequently paraphrased, so they make poor scan targets. Once you have identified your scan target, move your eyes down the centre of each column of text, looking only for that target. Do not read surrounding words. When you find the target, slow down and read the surrounding sentence intensively.

## **Intensive Reading: Reading for Meaning**

Intensive reading is what most people call 'reading': careful, line-by-line comprehension of a specific segment of text. In IELTS Reading, intensive reading is reserved for the one or two sentences surrounding a located keyword, never for the passage as a whole. Once you have scanned to a keyword, you read the surrounding sentence (and sometimes the one before and after) intensively to extract the precise information needed to answer the question.

The mistake most candidates make is intensive reading when they should be scanning or skimming. They read a paragraph in full because they 'want to understand it properly', then look at the question, then realise the answer was in the next paragraph and they have wasted two minutes. Discipline yourself: skim first, scan to locate, intensive read only at the located spot. This three-step rhythm is the foundation of all the question-type strategies in Chapter 4.

## **Paraphrase Recognition**

Paraphrase recognition is the single most important skill in IELTS Reading, more important even than vocabulary size. Almost every question is a paraphrase of the passage; almost every correct answer is a paraphrase of the passage. A candidate who can recognise that 'the company was forced to close' and 'the firm had no choice but to cease operations' express the same idea will outscore a candidate with twice the vocabulary who cannot make that connection.

Paraphrase works at three levels. At the lexical level, synonyms substitute for each other: 'happy' becomes 'content', 'big' becomes 'substantial'. At the grammatical level, structures transform: active becomes passive, clauses become phrases, statements become noun phrases. At the conceptual level, the entire expression is reformulated: 'the policy failed because it was too rigid' becomes 'inflexibility doomed the initiative'. IELTS paraphrases span all three levels, and recognising them requires conscious practice.

Build paraphrase awareness deliberately. When you read any IELTS Reading passage, after answering the questions, return to each question and identify the specific paraphrase used. Write down the original sentence from the passage and the paraphrased version in the question. Over time, you will build a personal inventory of paraphrase patterns that recur across passages.

## **Predicting Content**

Before you skim a passage, spend fifteen seconds predicting what it will contain. Look at the title, any subtitle, and any illustration. Ask yourself: what is this text likely to be about? What arguments is it likely to make? What kind of vocabulary is it likely to use? Prediction primes your brain to recognise relevant

information when you encounter it and reduces the cognitive load of processing unfamiliar material.

Prediction is not guessing what the answers will be; it is building a mental schema into which the actual content of the passage can be slotted. A predicted schema is easier to revise than an empty mind is to populate. Even if your prediction turns out to be wrong, the act of predicting has activated the relevant semantic networks in your brain, and you will process the passage more efficiently than if you had approached it cold.

## Understanding Text Structure

Most IELTS passages follow one of a small number of structural patterns. Argumentative passages typically open with a context-setting paragraph, present a main claim, develop supporting evidence, acknowledge a counter-argument, and conclude. Descriptive passages often organise information by category, chronology, or cause-and-effect. Problem-solution passages introduce a problem, discuss its causes, present one or more solutions, and evaluate them.

Recognising the pattern helps you locate information quickly. If a question asks about the writer's recommended solution, you can scan for the conclusion or the final substantive paragraph. If a question asks about a counter-argument, scan for signposting language such as 'however', 'critics argue', or 'on the other hand'. Treating the passage as a structured artefact, rather than a flat sequence of sentences, dramatically improves your ability to navigate it under time pressure.

## Inference: Reading Between the Lines

Inference questions ask you to deduce something that is not explicitly stated but is implied by the passage. The writer never says 'X is bad'; instead, they describe X's effects in negative terms and leave you to draw the conclusion. Inference questions are common in Yes/No/Not Given tasks and in some Multiple Choice variants.

The rule for inference is conservative: infer only what the passage strictly entails. If the passage says 'the new policy reduced emissions by 40 percent but increased costs by 60 percent', you can infer that the policy was effective in one respect and costly in another. You cannot infer that the policy was a failure or a success overall, because the passage does not provide a criterion for evaluating the trade-off. IELTS inferences are narrow and tightly constrained by the text; do not extrapolate beyond what is strictly implied.

## Skill Building Across the Module

These skills do not develop in isolation. Skimming feeds scanning (you cannot scan a passage whose structure you do not know). Scanning feeds intensive reading (you cannot read intensively a sentence you have not located). Intensive reading feeds paraphrase recognition (you cannot recognise a paraphrase if you have not read the original carefully). Paraphrase recognition feeds inference (you cannot infer what a writer implies if you cannot decode what they actually say). Build all five skills in parallel, and the cumulative effect is a substantial improvement in your Reading score within four to six weeks of focused

practice.

## CHAPTER 6

# Time Management and Test Strategy

## The Sixty-Minute Reality

Sixty minutes for forty questions works out to ninety seconds per question, but this average is misleading. Reading the passage, locating the relevant segment, reading the question, and writing the answer all take time, and these components are not evenly distributed. A more useful framing is that you have roughly twenty minutes per passage (Academic) or per section (General Training Section 3), and within that twenty minutes you must read the passage, answer twelve to fourteen questions, and transfer your answers to the answer sheet.

There is no transfer time given in Reading, unlike in Listening. Whatever you write in the question booklet must be transferred to the answer sheet within the sixty minutes. A candidate who keeps answers in the booklet planning to transfer them at the end inevitably runs out of time and loses marks. Transfer as you go: the moment you decide on an answer, write it on the answer sheet.

## The 20-20-15-5 Framework

A practical time-allocation framework that works for most candidates is the 20-20-15-5 split. Allocate twenty minutes to Passage 1, twenty minutes to Passage 2, fifteen minutes to Passage 3, and reserve five minutes as a buffer for review and difficult questions. The buffer is non-negotiable; without it, any time overruns on earlier passages cascade into lost marks on later ones.

Stronger candidates, particularly those targeting Band 7.5 and above, often compress Passage 1 to fifteen or seventeen minutes because Passage 1 is reliably the easiest. This releases extra time for Passage 3, which is reliably the hardest. If your diagnostic scores show that you consistently score well on Passage 1, this compression is a sensible adjustment. If your Passage 1 score is volatile, stick to the standard twenty minutes.

## Per-Question Pacing

Within a passage, the per-question pacing depends on the question type. Factual retrieval questions (Multiple Choice, Short-Answer, Sentence Completion) should take sixty to ninety seconds each. Paraphrase-heavy questions (Matching Information, Matching Headings, Summary Completion) typically take ninety seconds to two minutes each. Inference and viewpoint questions (Yes/No/Not Given, harder Multiple Choice) take two minutes or more. Knowing the typical duration for each question type helps you identify when you are over-investing time in a single question.

A hard rule: never spend more than three minutes on a single question. If you have not located or answered the question in three minutes, mark your best guess, circle the question in the booklet, and move on. Return

to it during your buffer time if you have any left. Spending four minutes on a question worth one mark is a poor trade when four minutes could secure three or four marks on easier questions later in the test.

## Question Sequencing Within a Passage

Within a single passage, the questions are not always arranged in the optimal order for you to attempt them. A common pattern is for Matching Headings to appear first, followed by True/False/Not Given, followed by Sentence Completion. Matching Headings is the most time-consuming of the three because it requires you to engage with every paragraph; True/False/Not Given is more localised; Sentence Completion is usually the fastest because the answers are in passage order and can be located quickly.

A common strategy is to attempt the questions in reverse-skill order: do the most localised questions first (Sentence Completion, Short-Answer, basic Multiple Choice) to build a mental map of the passage, then move to the medium-difficulty questions (True/False/Not Given, Summary Completion), and finish with the most global questions (Matching Headings, Matching Information). By the time you reach Matching Headings, you have already engaged with most of the passage through the other questions, and the heading matches become much easier.

## The Skip-and-Return Discipline

Skipped questions are not failures; they are strategic investments. A candidate who spends three minutes on a difficult Matching Information item, gets it wrong, and then has only twelve minutes for Passage 3 has lost far more than one mark. A candidate who skips the same item, completes Passage 3 with adequate time, and returns to the skipped item with two minutes of buffer has a much higher overall score even if they guess on the skipped item.

The mechanics of skipping are simple. When you encounter a question that you cannot answer within sixty seconds of locating the relevant segment, circle the question number in your booklet, mark your best guess on the answer sheet (always have a guess on the sheet; never leave a blank), and move on. Returning to a skipped question with fresh eyes and remaining buffer time often reveals the answer that seemed impossible earlier.

## Answer Sheet Discipline

Three rules govern answer sheet management. First, write on the answer sheet as you go, not in batches at the end. The booklet is a worksheet; the answer sheet is the deliverable. Second, write clearly and within the box. Markers read scanned answer sheets, and any writing that extends beyond the box may not be scanned. Third, check that your answer numbers align with the question numbers. A single misalignment, where your answer to question 14 is written in the box for question 15, propagates through every subsequent answer and can cost you ten or more marks.

A useful check is to glance at the answer sheet every time you turn a passage page. Confirm that the last answer you wrote is in the box corresponding to the question you just answered. This three-second check

catches misalignments before they cascade.

## Guessing Strategy

There is no negative marking in IELTS Reading. A wrong answer scores zero, the same as a blank. Therefore, you should never leave an answer blank. If you cannot decide between two options, pick one and move on. If you have no idea, pick a single letter (say, C) and use it consistently for all guesses. Statistically, this gives you a one-in-four or one-in-three chance on each guess, and across ten guesses you will likely pick up two or three marks. Over a full test, that is the difference between Band 6.5 and Band 7 for many candidates.

When you guess on a non-multiple-choice question (such as True/False/Not Given), the optimal guessing strategy is to avoid Not Given unless you are confident. Statistically, Not Given appears in roughly fifteen to twenty percent of items, while True and False split the remainder roughly equally. If you must guess, default to True or False rather than Not Given. This is not a guarantee, but it improves your expected value.

## Test-Day Routine

On test day, arrive early enough to settle in but not so early that you sit and stew in anxiety. Bring only what is permitted: identification, pencils, eraser, and a clear water bottle. During the test, glance at the clock only at passage boundaries, not on every question. Constant clock-checking is anxiety-inducing and time-wasting. At each passage boundary (after Passage 1, after Passage 2), confirm you are on pace and adjust if necessary.

If you finish with time to spare, do not leave the room. Use the remaining time to review your answer sheet for misalignments, spelling errors (correct spelling is required), and incomplete answers. A surprising number of marks are lost not to wrong answers but to misspelled ones, where the candidate knew the answer but wrote 'enviroment' instead of 'environment'. Two minutes of careful review at the end is worth one or two marks to most candidates.

## CHAPTER 7

# Vocabulary and Paraphrase

## Why Vocabulary Matters, and Why It Does Not Matter as Much as You Think

Vocabulary is the most visible component of IELTS Reading preparation, and candidates accordingly spend disproportionate time memorising word lists. Vocabulary does matter: without knowing the words in the passage, no amount of strategy will help. But the relationship between vocabulary size and Reading score is not linear. Beyond a threshold of roughly the most frequent four thousand word families in English, additional vocabulary yields diminishing returns, and the marginal value of each new word becomes smaller than the marginal value of one more hour spent on paraphrase recognition.

This chapter therefore treats vocabulary as a tool, not an end in itself. The goal is not to know every word in every passage; it is to know enough words to recognise paraphrases, infer the meaning of unknown words from context, and extract precise information from sentences that contain unfamiliar vocabulary. The chapter covers high-frequency academic vocabulary, common synonym pairs that appear in IELTS paraphrases, word families that recur across passages, and the collocations that signal a writer's attitude.

## High-Frequency Academic Vocabulary

Academic English draws on a relatively small set of high-frequency words that appear across disciplines. The Academic Word List (AWL), developed by Averil Coxhead, contains 570 word families that account for roughly ten percent of all academic text. Mastering the AWL is the highest-yield vocabulary investment an IELTS candidate can make. Common AWL words include 'approach', 'concept', 'derive', 'establish', 'evident', 'factor', 'indicate', 'interpret', 'method', 'objective', 'principle', 'require', 'significant', 'theory', and 'vary'. These words are not field-specific; they appear in passages on marine biology, economic history, and psychology alike.

Beyond the AWL, certain verbs recur in IELTS passages as markers of academic argument: 'assert', 'claim', 'contend', 'demonstrate', 'highlight', 'illustrate', 'imply', 'maintain', 'note', 'observe', 'posit', 'propose', 'reveal', 'suggest', and 'undermine'. Each carries a slightly different stance: 'assert' and 'contend' suggest strong commitment, 'suggest' and 'imply' suggest hedged claims, 'demonstrate' and 'reveal' suggest evidence-backed conclusions. Recognising these distinctions helps you answer Yes/No/Not Given questions accurately.

## Synonym Awareness

Paraphrase in IELTS Reading operates primarily through synonym substitution. The table below shows some of the most common synonym pairs that recur in IELTS passages and questions. Building a personal synonym inventory, by noting every paraphrase you encounter during practice, is one of the most efficient

ways to lift your Reading score.

Passage word	Question / paraphrase
important	significant, crucial, vital, essential, key
difficult	challenging, demanding, arduous, complex
increase	rise, grow, expand, escalate, surge
decrease	fall, decline, drop, diminish, reduce
cause	lead to, result in, bring about, trigger
effect	consequence, outcome, result, impact
problem	issue, challenge, difficulty, obstacle
solution	answer, remedy, resolution, fix
change	alter, modify, transform, shift, adapt
show	demonstrate, reveal, indicate, illustrate
argue	contend, assert, maintain, claim, posit
support	back, endorse, advocate, uphold
oppose	resist, contest, dispute, counter
ancient	old, historic, age-old, early
modern	contemporary, current, recent, present-day
difficult to find	rare, scarce, uncommon, elusive
worldwide	global, international, universal, planetary

*Table: see text for context.*

## Word Families and Morphology

Many IELTS paraphrases operate through morphology rather than synonym substitution: the same root word appears in different grammatical forms. A passage might use the noun 'variation', while the question uses the verb 'vary' or the adjective 'variable'. Recognising these morphological families allows you to connect a question keyword to a passage word that does not look identical but shares the same root.

Common morphological transformations include verb-to-noun ('decide' to 'decision'), adjective-to-adverb ('rapid' to 'rapidly'), and noun-to-adjective ('history' to 'historical'). Less obvious transformations involve prefixes and suffixes: 'predict' and 'unpredictable' share a root but a candidate who does not recognise the

family might miss the connection. Build awareness by listing word families explicitly during practice: when you encounter a paraphrase, write down both forms and the morphological operation that links them.

## Collocations

Collocations are word combinations that conventionally go together: 'heavy rain' (not 'strong rain'), 'make a decision' (not 'do a decision'), 'highly likely' (not 'very likely'). IELTS passages use collocations heavily because academic writing prefers conventional phrasing. Recognising collocations speeds up your reading because your brain processes the collocation as a single unit rather than as two separate words.

For paraphrase, collocations matter because a paraphrase often substitutes one element of a collocation while keeping the other. 'Heavy rain' might become 'torrential rain'; 'make a decision' might become 'reach a decision'. A candidate who recognises that 'heavy' and 'torrential' collocate with 'rain' in similar contexts can decode the paraphrase instantly. Conversely, a candidate who reads 'torrential rain' as an unknown phrase will spend time inferring its meaning from context.

## Prefixes, Suffixes, and Word Building

A working knowledge of common prefixes and suffixes dramatically extends your effective vocabulary. The prefix 'un-' (as in 'unusual', 'unexpected') reverses meaning; 're-' (as in 'reconsider', 'rebuild') indicates repetition; 'pre-' (as in 'predate', 'precondition') indicates before; 'post-' (as in 'postwar', 'postpone') indicates after. The suffix '-able' (as in 'predictable', 'adaptable') indicates capability; '-ness' (as in 'effectiveness', 'usefulness') forms a noun from an adjective; '-tion' (as in 'creation', 'alteration') forms a noun from a verb.

These morphological rules are not exhaustive, but they cover the majority of academic word formations. When you encounter an unfamiliar word in a passage, scan it for prefixes and suffixes you recognise. Often the unfamiliar word is a morphological variant of a familiar root, and decoding the morphology gives you the meaning without a dictionary.

## Inferring Meaning from Context

Even with strong vocabulary, you will encounter words you do not know. The skill of inferring meaning from context allows you to make an educated guess that is usually sufficient for answering the question. Look for four signals: definition (the passage defines the word in the same sentence), example (the passage gives examples that illustrate the word's meaning), contrast (the passage contrasts the unknown word with a known word), and cause-effect (the passage describes what the unknown word does, from which you can infer its meaning).

For instance, a passage might say 'The creature was nocturnal; it hunted only at night and slept during the day.' Even if you do not know 'nocturnal', the examples ('hunted only at night', 'slept during the day') allow you to infer that 'nocturnal' means active at night. This kind of inference is rarely perfect, but it is usually close enough to answer the question. The mistake to avoid is treating an unknown word as a barrier; in

IELTS Reading, almost every unknown word can be inferred or bypassed.

## **Building Your Vocabulary Deliberately**

Effective vocabulary building is targeted, not general. Do not study random word lists; study the words that actually appear in IELTS passages. After each practice passage, identify five to ten words that you did not know or that appeared in an unfamiliar sense. Look up their meanings, find two or three common collocations for each, and write a single sentence using each word. Review the list once a week. Over a four-week preparation period, this routine adds roughly two hundred high-yield words to your active vocabulary.

More importantly, this routine builds the habit of noticing vocabulary in context, which is itself a major component of paraphrase recognition. A candidate who has internalised the collocations and morphological patterns of academic English will recognise paraphrases that a candidate relying on memorised synonym lists will miss. Vocabulary is the raw material; the habit of contextual awareness is the skill that converts raw material into Reading score.

## CHAPTER 8

# Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

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## The Twelve Mistakes That Cost the Most Marks

Across thousands of IELTS Reading scripts, the same twelve mistakes recur with depressing regularity. Each is avoidable with awareness and discipline. Read through this chapter honestly, identify the mistakes you currently make, and target them in your next practice session. Most candidates discover that two or three of these mistakes account for the bulk of their lost marks; fixing those two or three typically lifts their score by half a band within a few weeks.

### Mistake 1: Confusing Not Given with False

The single most expensive mistake in IELTS Reading. A candidate reads a statement, scans the passage, cannot find explicit confirmation, and concludes the statement is False. It is Not Given. The rule: False requires explicit contradiction in the passage. If the passage simply does not address the claim, the answer is Not Given. Test yourself: if you cannot point to a specific sentence that contradicts the statement, the answer is Not Given, not False.

### Mistake 2: Confusing Not Given with True

The mirror image of Mistake 1. A candidate reads a statement that matches their real-world knowledge, scans the passage, finds nothing that contradicts it, and concludes the statement is True. Without explicit confirmation in the passage, the answer is Not Given. The rule: True requires explicit agreement in the passage. If you cannot point to a specific sentence that supports the statement, the answer is Not Given, not True.

### Mistake 3: Reading the Passage in Full Before the Questions

Some candidates spend ten minutes reading the passage in full before looking at the questions. They retain perhaps thirty percent of what they read, and they have used a third of their passage time without answering a single question. The correct approach is a two-minute skim to build a structural map, then move directly to the questions. Detailed reading happens at the located spot for each question, not in advance.

### Mistake 4: Treating Every Question as Intensive Reading

Related to Mistake 3. A candidate reads each question, then reads the relevant paragraph intensively from start to finish, looking for the answer. This works but takes too long. The correct approach is scan to the keyword, then intensive-read only the sentence containing the keyword (and the sentences immediately

before and after if needed). Most questions can be answered with intensive reading of one to three sentences, not an entire paragraph.

### **Mistake 5: Keyword Matching Without Comprehension**

A candidate spots a keyword from the question in the passage, assumes that is the answer location, and selects the option that contains the keyword. IELTS distractors are deliberately seeded with keywords from the question, so this strategy fails repeatedly. The correct approach is to scan for the keyword, then read the surrounding sentence intensively, then compare each option against the meaning of that sentence. Keywords point to the location; they do not provide the answer.

### **Mistake 6: Choosing Headings Based on Detail**

Matching Headings asks for the main idea of each paragraph. Candidates often choose a heading because it mentions a keyword that appears in the paragraph, even though the paragraph's main idea is different. The correct approach is to read the first and last sentence of the paragraph, identify the central point, and select the heading that captures that point. Headings that focus on a single detail are usually distractors.

### **Mistake 7: Paraphrasing Sentence Completion Answers**

Sentence Completion requires copying words directly from the passage. Candidates who paraphrase ('the answer means X, so I'll write Y instead of the passage's word') lose marks even when their meaning is correct. The instruction 'using words from the passage' is meant literally. Copy the exact words, in the exact form, within the word limit. Do not change anything.

### **Mistake 8: Exceeding the Word Limit**

If the instruction says 'NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS', an answer of three words is wrong, even if the content is correct. Articles ('a', 'the') and prepositions count towards the word limit. If the answer is 'the rapid decline', that is three words and exceeds the limit; write 'rapid decline' instead. Always check the word limit before writing the answer.

### **Mistake 9: Spending Too Long on Hard Questions**

A candidate spends four minutes on a difficult Matching Information item, gets it wrong, and now has only twelve minutes for Passage 3. The cumulative cost is enormous. The correct discipline is a three-minute ceiling per question. If you cannot answer within three minutes, mark a guess, circle the question, and move on. Return only if you have buffer time at the end.

## **Mistake 10: Misaligning Answers on the Answer Sheet**

A candidate writes the answer to question 14 in the box for question 15, then continues this misalignment for the rest of the test, losing ten or more marks even though every answer is correct. The fix is a three-second check at each page turn: confirm that the box you just filled corresponds to the question you just answered.

## **Mistake 11: Misspelling Answers**

Correct spelling is required. A candidate who knows the answer is 'environment' but writes 'enviroment' loses the mark. The fix is to copy the spelling from the passage, not from memory. When you locate the answer in the passage, look at the spelling carefully and reproduce it exactly. Two minutes of spelling review at the end of the test is worth one or two marks to most candidates.

## **Mistake 12: Leaving Blanks**

There is no negative marking. A blank scores zero; a wrong answer scores zero; a correct guess scores one. Therefore, never leave a blank. If you cannot answer, guess. For Multiple Choice, pick one letter consistently (C is a common choice). For True/False/Not Given, avoid Not Given in your guesses because it appears least frequently. For completion questions, you cannot guess, so leave the blank only if you genuinely have no candidate answer.

## **Self-Diagnosis**

After each practice test, audit your wrong answers against this list. Most candidates find that two or three mistakes account for the majority of their errors. Focused practice on those two or three mistakes, over two to three weeks, typically lifts the Reading score by half a band. Use the four-week study plan in Chapter 12 to structure this focused practice.

## CHAPTER 9

# Band Descriptors Decoded

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## How the Band Descriptors Work

The IELTS Reading band descriptors, published by Cambridge Assessment English, define what each band score from Band 5 to Band 9 represents in terms of candidate performance. The descriptors are not used by markers to score individual questions; they are used as a calibration framework to ensure that the raw-score-to-band conversion is statistically valid across different test forms. As a candidate, however, the descriptors give you a concrete target: they tell you exactly what you must be able to do to achieve your target band.

The descriptors cover four dimensions: overall understanding (the candidate's grasp of the passage as a whole), detailed understanding (the candidate's ability to extract specific information), inference (the candidate's ability to read between the lines), and writer's attitude (the candidate's ability to identify the writer's viewpoint). Each band is described in terms of these dimensions, with specific language indicating the level of competence expected.

## Band 5: The Survival Reader

A Band 5 candidate can handle the main idea of straightforward factual passages but struggles with anything more complex. They can locate explicitly stated information, but paraphrase throws them off. They often misjudge Yes/No/Not Given and True/False/Not Given items, defaulting to False when the answer is Not Given or to True when the answer is Yes. They struggle with inference and rarely identify the writer's attitude unless it is signalled explicitly. Vocabulary gaps are a constant obstacle: they encounter unknown words every few sentences and lose comprehension as a result. Raw score: approximately 14 to 18 out of 40.

To move from Band 5 to Band 6, focus on paraphrase recognition and the True/False/Not Given logic. Most Band 5 candidates have the basic reading skill to handle Band 6 material but lose marks to paraphrase misreading and Not Given confusion. Two weeks of focused paraphrase drills, using the technique in Chapter 5, typically lifts the score by half a band.

## Band 6: The Competent Reader

A Band 6 candidate handles straightforward passages well but struggles with the third, hardest passage. They locate information reliably in passages 1 and 2, but in passage 3 they often misjudge inference questions and Yes/No/Not Given items. They recognise common paraphrases but miss subtler ones. They identify the writer's attitude when it is signalled by obvious evaluative language but miss it when it is embedded in tone. Vocabulary is generally adequate for the topic but they encounter occasional gaps that cost them marks. Raw score: approximately 23 to 26 out of 40.

To move from Band 6 to Band 7, focus on time management and the harder question types. Band 6 candidates typically lose marks not from lack of skill but from lack of time on Passage 3. The 20-20-15-5 framework in Chapter 6, combined with focused practice on Matching Headings and Yes/No/Not Given, is the most reliable path to Band 7.

### **Band 7: The Good Reader**

A Band 7 candidate handles all three passages competently, including the harder Passage 3. They recognise most paraphrases, including subtle ones. They identify the writer's attitude reliably, including when it is signalled by tone rather than explicit evaluative language. They make occasional errors on inference and on Not Given items, but their overall accuracy is high. Vocabulary is broad enough to handle most academic topics, though they may encounter occasional unfamiliar words. Time management is solid: they complete all three passages with a few minutes to spare. Raw score: approximately 30 to 32 out of 40.

To move from Band 7 to Band 7.5 or 8, focus on accuracy on the hardest question types. Band 7 candidates lose marks disproportionately on Yes/No/Not Given and on subtle paraphrase in Summary Completion. Targeted practice on these question types, combined with vocabulary expansion in academic collocations, typically lifts the score to Band 7.5 or 8 over four to six weeks.

### **Band 8: The Very Good Reader**

A Band 8 candidate reads with near-native fluency. They handle all question types reliably, including the subtlest inference and viewpoint items. They recognise paraphrases across all three levels (lexical, grammatical, conceptual) without conscious effort. They identify the writer's attitude even when it is implied rather than stated. Vocabulary is comprehensive across most academic disciplines. Time management is comfortable: they complete the test with five to ten minutes to spare. Raw score: approximately 35 to 36 out of 40.

Band 8 candidates lose marks almost exclusively to careless errors: a misread question, a misspelled answer, an over-confident guess on a Not Given item. The path from Band 8 to Band 8.5 or 9 is not about skill acquisition but about consistency and error elimination. Practice under timed conditions, audit every error against the twelve mistakes in Chapter 8, and develop a pre-test routine that minimises careless errors.

### **Band 9: The Expert Reader**

A Band 9 candidate handles every aspect of the Reading module with full competence. They make no errors of comprehension, recognise every paraphrase, identify every inference, and decode every viewpoint. Raw score: 39 or 40 out of 40. Band 9 is rare, achieved by roughly one percent of candidates, and is typically the result of long-term immersion in academic English rather than short-term test preparation.

Most candidates who target Band 9 are already at Band 8 and need to eliminate the one or two errors per test that separate Band 8 from Band 9. The error is usually a single misread question stem or a single

over-confident True/False/Not Given judgement. The remedy is not more practice but more discipline: read every question stem twice, and on True/False/Not Given items, force yourself to articulate the specific sentence in the passage that confirms your answer before committing.

## Using the Descriptors for Self-Assessment

After each practice test, map your raw score to a band using the conversion table, then read the descriptor for that band and the band above. The descriptor for the band above tells you exactly what you need to add to your performance to move up. If you are at Band 6, the Band 7 descriptor tells you that you need to handle Passage 3 more reliably, which means practising time management and the harder question types. This targeted approach is far more efficient than undifferentiated practice.

The descriptors are also useful for diagnosing specific weaknesses. If your raw score is 28 (Band 6.5) but you scored perfectly on Passage 1 and poorly on Passage 3, your issue is time management on the hardest passage, not overall reading skill. If your raw score is 28 but you scored evenly across all three passages, your issue is overall accuracy, not passage-specific difficulty. The descriptor framework helps you convert a single number into a specific, actionable diagnosis.

## CHAPTER 10

## Practice Passage: Academic

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### How to Use This Passage

This chapter contains a complete Academic-style Reading passage, followed by eight questions across three question types, followed by a full walk-through of the answers and reasoning. Attempt the questions under timed conditions (about fifteen minutes for the passage and questions) before reading the walk-through. The walk-through is the most valuable part of this chapter: it demonstrates how a Band 7+ candidate thinks through each question, and that thinking is what you are trying to internalise.

### Passage: The Rediscovery of the Coelacanth

The coelacanth is a large, lobe-finned fish that was believed to have gone extinct around sixty-six million years ago, at the end of the Cretaceous period. Fossil specimens had been known to science since the nineteenth century, and the fish was considered a textbook example of evolutionary dead-end: a creature that had once thrived in ancient seas but had ultimately been outcompeted by more modern fish lineages. That understanding was overturned in December 1938, when a living coelacanth was caught off the coast of South Africa.

The specimen was landed at the port of East London by a fishing trawler captain named Hendrik Goosen, who routinely kept unusual bycatch for inspection by Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, the young curator of the local museum. Courtenay-Latimer immediately recognised the fish as something exceptional: its heavy, armoured scales, its strange lobed fins, and its overall anatomy did not match any species she knew. She sent a sketch and a description to J. L. B. Smith, an ichthyologist at Rhodes University, who identified it from the sketch alone as a coelacanth, a fish previously known only from fossils. Smith later described the moment as the most astonishing of his career.

Despite an intensive search along the South African and Mozambican coasts, no further specimens were found for fourteen years. Then, in 1952, a second coelacanth was caught off the Comoros Islands, in the Indian Ocean between Madagascar and the African mainland. Local Comoran fishermen had long known the fish, which they called gombessa, and regarded it as a poor-quality food fish, generally returned to the sea when caught. The discovery that this species, thought extinct for tens of millions of years, was in fact a routine (if unwelcome) bycatch in a small fishery was a watershed moment in marine biology.

Subsequent research has shown that the coelacanth is not a single species but at least two: the original Comoran population, formally described as *Latimeria chalumnae* in honour of Courtenay-Latimer, and a second species, *Latimeria menadoensis*, discovered in Indonesian waters in 1997. Both species live in deep marine caves during the day and emerge at night to hunt, primarily on squid and small fish. They are large, slow-growing, and long-lived; some estimates suggest individuals may live for sixty years or more.

The coelacanth's scientific importance lies in its relationship to the ancestor of land vertebrates. Lobe-finned fishes, the group to which the coelacanth belongs, share with early tetrapods a number of anatomical features including robust, limb-like fins and a particular skull structure. While the coelacanth itself is not directly ancestral to land animals, it represents a lineage that diverged from the tetrapod lineage relatively recently and retains many primitive characteristics. Studying the living coelacanth therefore provides biologists with a window into the biology of an ancient lineage that would otherwise be inaccessible.

Despite its scientific significance, the coelacanth remains poorly protected. Both known species are classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN, primarily because of their extremely small population sizes and their vulnerability to deep-water trawling. Estimates of the total Comoran population vary widely but are generally in the low hundreds, making it one of the rarest fish species on Earth. Conservation efforts are hampered by the fish's deep-water habitat, its low reproductive rate, and the limited economic incentive for the nations whose waters it inhabits to invest in its protection. The rediscovery of the coelacanth was a triumph of scientific observation; its continued survival, however, remains an open question.

## Questions

### Questions 1-3: Multiple Choice (choose the correct letter A, B, C, or D)

1. Before 1938, scientists believed the coelacanth was:
  - A. a fish that lived only in freshwater habitats.
  - B. an ancestor of modern sharks.
  - C. a species that had been extinct for millions of years.
  - D. a fish that had never existed outside of fossils.
2. Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer first became aware of the coelacanth because:
  - A. she was conducting research on rare fish species.
  - B. a fishing captain routinely brought her unusual specimens.
  - C. J. L. B. Smith asked her to inspect a particular fish.
  - D. she was looking for new exhibits for her museum.
3. The Comoran fishermen's attitude to the gombessa was that:
  - A. they considered it a valuable food source.
  - B. they were afraid of it and avoided catching it.
  - C. they used it as bait for larger fish.
  - D. they did not value it highly as food.

**Questions 4-6: True, False, or Not Given**

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage? Write TRUE if the statement agrees with the information, FALSE if the statement contradicts the information, or NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this.

4. The first living coelacanth specimen was found off the coast of Mozambique.
5. J. L. B. Smith had previously discovered other supposedly extinct species.
6. The two known coelacanth species live in geographically separated regions.

**Questions 7-8: Sentence Completion (NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the passage)**

7. The coelacanth's \_\_\_\_\_ led scientists to consider it an evolutionary dead-end before 1938.
8. The coelacanth hunts at night primarily on squid and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Answer Walk-Through****Question 1: C**

Locate the keyword 'before 1938' or 'believed' in the passage. The first sentence says the coelacanth 'was believed to have gone extinct around sixty-six million years ago'. This is a direct match for option C ('a species that had been extinct for millions of years'). Options A and B introduce details (freshwater habitats, sharks) that are not in the passage, so they are distractors. Option D is a stronger distractor because the passage does mention fossils, but option D claims the fish 'never existed outside of fossils', which is contradicted by the discovery of the living specimen. C is the correct paraphrase of the first sentence.

**Question 2: B**

Locate 'Courtenay-Latimer' in the passage. The second paragraph explains that Hendrik Goosen 'routinely kept unusual bycatch for inspection by Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer'. This matches option B ('a fishing captain routinely brought her unusual specimens'). Option A is a distractor: she was a museum curator, not a researcher. Option C reverses the chronology: it was Courtenay-Latimer who contacted Smith, not the other way around. Option D is plausible but not stated; the passage does not say she was actively seeking new exhibits.

**Question 3: D**

Locate 'Comoran fishermen' or 'gombessa' in the passage. The third paragraph says Comoran fishermen 'regarded it as a poor-quality food fish, generally returned to the sea when caught'. This matches option D ('they did not value it highly as food'). Option A is the opposite of what the passage says. Options B and C are not mentioned and are distractors.

**Question 4: FALSE**

Locate 'first living coelacanth' and 'Mozambique'. The passage says the first specimen was caught 'off the coast of South Africa', specifically 'at the port of East London'. East London is on the South African coast, not the Mozambican coast. The statement says the specimen was found off Mozambique, which contradicts

the passage. The answer is FALSE.

### **Question 5: NOT GIVEN**

Locate 'J. L. B. Smith' in the passage. The passage describes his role in identifying the coelacanth but says nothing about whether he had previously discovered other supposedly extinct species. The statement is plausible but not addressed by the passage. The answer is NOT GIVEN. Note the temptation to answer FALSE here: a candidate might think 'well, the passage doesn't say he did, so it must be false'. That is the trap. The rule is strict: if the passage does not address the claim, the answer is NOT GIVEN.

### **Question 6: TRUE**

Locate 'two known coelacanth species' or 'geographically separated' in the passage. The fourth paragraph says *Latimeria chalumnae* is found in the Comoros Islands (Indian Ocean off East Africa) and *Latimeria menadoensis* was discovered 'in Indonesian waters'. The two locations are geographically separated. The answer is TRUE.

### **Question 7: 'evolutionary dead-end'**

The question asks what led scientists to consider the coelacanth an evolutionary dead-end before 1938. The first paragraph says 'the fish was considered a textbook example of evolutionary dead-end: a creature that had once thrived in ancient seas but had ultimately been outcompeted by more modern fish lineages.' The phrase 'evolutionary dead-end' is used in the passage; the question is essentially asking you to identify the same phrase. However, reading the question more carefully, it asks what led to this view. The answer is the fossil record: the fish was known only from fossils and was therefore assumed extinct. The most accurate two-word answer from the passage is 'fossil specimens' (the first paragraph mentions 'Fossil specimens had been known to science since the nineteenth century'). Acceptable answers: 'fossil specimens' or 'fossils'.

### **Question 8: 'small fish'**

The question asks what the coelacanth hunts at night, in addition to squid. The fourth paragraph says the coelacanth emerges at night 'to hunt, primarily on squid and small fish'. The exact words are 'small fish'. The answer is 'small fish' (two words, within the limit). A candidate who writes 'small fishes' would be wrong because the passage uses the singular 'fish' as the collective noun, not the plural 'fishes'.

## **Scoring Your Attempt**

Score one mark for each correct answer. The conversion is approximate, but on a full test of forty questions, scoring 6 out of 8 on a passage of this difficulty corresponds roughly to Band 7. If you scored 4 or 5 out of 8, focus on paraphrase recognition (Chapter 5) and the specific question types you missed. If you scored 6 or 7 out of 8, your main opportunity is time management (Chapter 6). If you scored 8 out of 8, attempt Chapter 11 under timed conditions to confirm your consistency.

## CHAPTER 11

## Practice Passage: General Training

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### How to Use This Passage

This chapter contains a General Training Section 3-style passage: a long-form magazine article on a topic of general interest, accompanied by eight questions across three question types. The structure and difficulty mirror what you will encounter in the actual General Training test. Attempt the questions under timed conditions (about eighteen minutes) before reading the walk-through.

### Passage: The Curious History of the Public Library

The public library, as a civic institution open to all citizens free of charge, is a surprisingly recent invention. For most of recorded history, libraries were private collections, housed in monasteries, palaces, or the homes of wealthy scholars, and access was a privilege granted to a select few. The idea that a community should collectively fund a collection of books and make them available to anyone who wished to read them did not take root until the nineteenth century, and even then it met with considerable resistance.

The first recognisable public library in the English-speaking world opened in the town of Peterborough, New Hampshire, in 1833. Funded by a local trust and governed by a board of trustees drawn from the community, the Peterborough Town Library established the model that would later be adopted across the United States and the United Kingdom: a collection owned by the community, governed by representatives of the community, and accessible to any member of the community in good standing. The model was radical for its time. It assumed that ordinary citizens, given free access to books, would choose to read them, and that the community as a whole would benefit from the resulting diffusion of knowledge.

The idea crossed the Atlantic and took root in the United Kingdom with the Public Libraries Act of 1850, which gave local authorities the power to levy a small tax to fund public libraries. The Act was the project of William Ewart, a Liberal MP who had campaigned for decades on the issue. Ewart faced fierce opposition from conservatives who argued that public libraries would encourage the working classes to read dangerous material, and from publishers who feared that free access to books would destroy their market. The Act passed, but in a heavily watered-down form: only towns with populations above a certain threshold could establish libraries, and even then only after a local referendum approved the necessary tax.

Despite these restrictions, the public library movement spread rapidly. By 1900, there were roughly three hundred public libraries in the United Kingdom, and the figure continued to grow throughout the early twentieth century. A major catalyst was the philanthropy of the Scottish-American industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who funded the construction of more than two thousand five hundred public libraries across the English-speaking world between 1883 and 1929. Carnegie's grants came with conditions: the recipient town had to provide the land, maintain the building, and commit to ongoing funding from public sources. The conditions were designed to ensure that libraries became permanent civic institutions rather than temporary

philanthropic gestures, and in this they were largely successful.

The twentieth century saw the public library evolve in response to changing social needs. Children's sections, story hours, and school holiday reading programmes were introduced in the 1920s and 1930s. Audiovisual materials, including records and later films, were added from the 1950s. Public internet access, now a core service, was introduced in the 1990s and transformed the library into a primary point of digital access for those without home internet. Throughout these changes, the underlying mission has remained remarkably consistent: to provide free access to information and cultural materials for any member of the community who wishes to use them.

The public library today faces a different set of challenges. Funding cuts have reduced opening hours and collection budgets in many countries. The rise of digital media has changed how people access information, with e-books and online search now competing with the traditional printed book. Yet the library remains a uniquely democratic institution, and its role as a community space, a place of quiet study, and a refuge for those without other access to information continues to give it a relevance that purely commercial information providers cannot match. The curious history of the public library is, in many ways, the history of a simple idea: that knowledge should be shared, not hoarded, and that a community which invests in the reading of its members invests in its own future.

## Questions

### Questions 1-3: Matching Headings (choose the correct heading i-vi for each paragraph)

Headings: i. The Carnegie Philanthropy and its Conditions, ii. Resistance to the Public Library Movement, iii. Origins of a Radical Idea, iv. The Library in the Digital Age, v. The UK Public Libraries Act, vi. The Twentieth-Century Evolution

1. Paragraph B (the Peterborough library)
2. Paragraph D (Carnegie)
3. Paragraph E (the twentieth century)

### Questions 4-6: Yes, No, or Not Given

Do the following statements agree with the views of the writer? Write YES if the statement agrees with the views of the writer, NO if the statement contradicts the views of the writer, or NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks.

4. The writer believes that public libraries have outlived their usefulness in the digital age.
5. The writer considers the conditions Carnegie attached to his grants to have been effective.
6. The writer argues that opposition to public libraries in the nineteenth century was primarily motivated by economic concerns.

### Questions 7-8: Short Answer (NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the passage)

7. What type of institution was the Peterborough Town Library the first of in the English-speaking world?

8. What did Carnegie require recipient towns to provide, in addition to ongoing funding and maintenance?

## Answer Walk-Through

### Question 1: iii. Origins of a Radical Idea

Paragraph B introduces the Peterborough library and explains that its model was 'radical for its time'. The main idea is the introduction of a new, radical model for libraries. Heading iii ('Origins of a Radical Idea') captures this. Headings i, ii, iv, v, and vi all refer to events or themes that appear in later paragraphs and are distractors for this question.

### Question 2: i. The Carnegie Philanthropy and its Conditions

Paragraph D introduces Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy and devotes most of its content to describing the conditions he attached to his grants. The main idea is the Carnegie philanthropy and its conditions. Heading i captures this precisely. Heading v (UK Public Libraries Act) might tempt you because the paragraph mentions the UK, but the paragraph's focus is Carnegie, not the Act.

### Question 3: vi. The Twentieth-Century Evolution

Paragraph E describes how the public library evolved during the twentieth century, adding children's sections, audiovisual materials, and eventually internet access. The main idea is the twentieth-century evolution of the library. Heading vi captures this. Heading iv (the Library in the Digital Age) is a tempting distractor because the paragraph mentions digital access, but the paragraph covers the whole twentieth century, not just the digital age.

### Question 4: NO

The statement claims the writer believes public libraries have outlived their usefulness. The final paragraph says the library 'remains a uniquely democratic institution' and 'continues to give it a relevance that purely commercial information providers cannot match'. The writer's view is the opposite of the statement. The answer is NO. Note that this is a Yes/No/Not Given question, testing the writer's view, not a True/False/Not Given question testing factual information.

### Question 5: YES

The statement claims the writer considers Carnegie's conditions to have been effective. The relevant sentence in paragraph D is: 'The conditions were designed to ensure that libraries became permanent civic institutions rather than temporary philanthropic gestures, and in this they were largely successful.' The phrase 'in this they were largely successful' is the writer's evaluative judgement that the conditions were effective. The answer is YES.

### Question 6: NOT GIVEN

The statement claims the writer argues that nineteenth-century opposition was primarily motivated by economic concerns. The passage mentions two kinds of opposition in paragraph C: conservatives who feared dangerous reading material, and publishers who feared market loss. The writer lists both but does not argue that economic concerns were the primary motivation. The statement is plausible but not directly stated by the writer. The answer is NOT GIVEN.

**Question 7: 'public library'**

The question asks what type of institution the Peterborough library was the first of. Paragraph B says it was 'the first recognisable public library in the English-speaking world'. The exact phrase is 'public library'. The answer is 'public library' (two words, within the limit).

**Question 8: 'the land'**

The question asks what Carnegie required recipient towns to provide, in addition to ongoing funding and maintenance. Paragraph D says: 'the recipient town had to provide the land, maintain the building, and commit to ongoing funding from public sources.' The three requirements were: provide the land, maintain the building, and commit to ongoing funding. The question already mentions ongoing funding and maintenance (which covers 'maintain the building'), so the remaining requirement is 'the land'. The exact phrase from the passage is 'the land'. The answer is 'the land' (two words, within the limit). A candidate who writes 'land' (one word) would also be correct, since the article is not strictly necessary for the meaning.

**Scoring Your Attempt**

Score one mark for each correct answer. On a full General Training test of forty questions, scoring 6 out of 8 on a Section 3 of this difficulty corresponds roughly to Band 7. If you missed any Matching Headings items, review the technique in Chapter 4 (read the first and last sentences of each paragraph, identify the central point, ignore headings that focus on detail). If you missed the Yes/No/Not Given items, review the distinction between Yes/No (writer's view) and True/False (factual) in Chapter 4. If you missed the Short Answer items, the issue is likely paraphrasing instead of copying; review the rules in Chapter 4 and Chapter 8.

## CHAPTER 12

# Four-Week Study Plan

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## How to Use This Plan

This four-week plan is designed for a candidate currently scoring around Band 6 who wants to reach Band 7 by test day. It assumes you can dedicate roughly ninety minutes per day, six days per week, to focused IELTS Reading preparation. If you have more time available, expand the practice blocks rather than adding new content; if you have less, compress the diagnostic and consolidation phases rather than the skill-building phase.

The plan has four phases, each lasting one week: diagnostic, skill-building, practice, and rehearsal. Each phase has a specific goal, and the activities in that phase are calibrated to achieve that goal. Do not skip phases or rearrange them; the sequence is deliberate. By the end of the fourth week, you should be scoring consistently at Band 7 or above on full timed practice tests.

## Week 1: Diagnostic and Foundation

Goal: establish your baseline score and identify your two biggest weaknesses. The first three days of this week are spent on a single full timed practice test, taken under exam conditions, with no breaks and no dictionary access. The fourth day is spent auditing your performance: for every wrong answer, identify whether the error was a paraphrase miss, a Not Given confusion, a time-pressure guess, a misread question, or a careless mistake. Categorise all errors and identify the two categories that account for the majority of your lost marks.

Days five and six are spent reading Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 9 of this book. The goal is to internalise the test structure, the difference between Academic and General Training (if you have not yet decided which to sit, decide this week), and the band descriptors. You cannot target a band effectively if you do not know what the band requires. By the end of week 1, you should have a written one-page summary of your baseline score, your two priority weaknesses, and the band you are targeting.

## Week 2: Skill Building

Goal: address your two priority weaknesses with focused drills. Days one to three are spent on your top weakness. If your top weakness is True/False/Not Given, complete ten True/False/Not Given question sets from past papers, auditing each wrong answer against the rules in Chapter 4. If your top weakness is Matching Headings, complete ten Matching Headings sets, reading each paragraph's first and last sentence first and identifying the central point before scanning headings. If your top weakness is time management, complete five full passages under progressively tighter time limits (twenty minutes, then eighteen, then sixteen, then fourteen, then twelve).

Days four to six are spent on your second priority weakness, using the same focused-drill approach. Throughout this week, read Chapter 4 (question types), Chapter 5 (core skills), and Chapter 6 (time management). The reading should be interleaved with the drills, not done in a single sitting. Each day's session should consist of forty-five minutes of drills followed by forty-five minutes of reading and note-taking. By the end of week 2, your two priority weaknesses should be substantially improved, as evidenced by your drill scores.

### **Week 3: Full Practice**

Goal: consolidate your improved skills under realistic test conditions. This week consists of three full timed practice tests, taken on alternate days (days one, three, and five), with days two, four, and six spent on detailed audit and remediation. Each practice test should be taken under strict exam conditions: no breaks, no dictionary, no phone, a clock visible, and a printed answer sheet. The audit on the following day should identify every wrong answer, categorise the error, and compare the error pattern to your week-1 baseline.

By the end of week 3, you should see clear improvement in your raw score. A typical trajectory is from Band 6 at the start of week 1 to Band 6.5 by the end of week 2 to Band 7 by the end of week 3. If you are not seeing this trajectory, the issue is usually one of three things: insufficient drill volume (you have not done enough repetitions to internalise the skill), wrong diagnosis (your supposed weakness is masking a deeper weakness), or insufficient timing pressure (you are practising without time limits and therefore not building speed). Diagnose which of these applies and adjust.

### **Week 4: Rehearsal and Taper**

Goal: enter test day in peak condition. Days one and two are a final full timed practice test followed by audit. Days three and four are focused review of your two priority weaknesses using drills from week 2, to consolidate the gains. Day five is a half-length practice (two passages under timed conditions) to maintain rhythm without exhausting yourself. Day six is rest: no IELTS preparation at all. Day seven is test day.

In the final week, do not introduce new material or new strategies. The goal is to consolidate what you have already learned and to arrive at the test centre well-rested and confident. Cramming new material in the final days typically lowers your score because the new strategies are not yet internalised and they crowd out the strategies you have already mastered. Trust the work you have done over the previous three weeks; the rehearsal phase is about confirming your readiness, not adding to it.

### **Adjusting the Plan**

If you are starting from Band 5 rather than Band 6, extend the plan to six weeks: add two weeks of vocabulary building (using the AWL and the technique in Chapter 7) before week 1, and add an extra week of full practice before week 4. If you are starting from Band 7 and targeting Band 8, compress the plan to three weeks: skip the diagnostic (you already know your weaknesses) and combine weeks 2 and 3 into a single intensive skill-and-practice week.

If you have less than four weeks to your test, prioritise Chapter 4 (question types), Chapter 6 (time management), Chapter 8 (common mistakes), and Chapter 12 (this plan). Complete one full practice test per week, audit every wrong answer, and focus your remaining time on your single biggest weakness. Three weeks of focused work, even at reduced volume, is enough to lift most candidates by half a band.

## What to Do on Test Day

On test day, arrive at the test centre forty-five minutes early. Bring only what is permitted: your identification, pencils, eraser, and a clear water bottle. Eat a light meal an hour before; avoid heavy food that will make you drowsy during the test. In the fifteen minutes before the test begins, do not study. Close your books, breathe slowly, and visualise yourself working through the test calmly and efficiently. The mental rehearsal is more valuable than any last-minute vocabulary review.

During the test, follow the 20-20-15-5 framework. Skim each passage for two minutes before touching the questions. Scan to locate keywords, then intensive-read only the relevant sentence. Transfer answers to the answer sheet as you go. Never spend more than three minutes on a single question. Use the final five minutes to check your answer sheet for misalignments and misspellings. Then breathe, hand in your paper, and let the result take care of itself. You have done the work; trust the work.

## Beyond the Test

The skills you have built preparing for IELTS Reading are not just test skills. They are the skills of careful, efficient reading of academic and professional text: skills that will serve you in university, in your career, and in your ongoing engagement with written English. The test is a milestone; the skills are an asset. Continue to read widely after the test, ideally at least one substantial English-language article per day, and the gains you have made will compound rather than fade. The Typogrammar team wishes you the very best for your test, and for the reading life that follows it.

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*Master the words. Master the test.*