

IELTS Study Plan: Find Your Preparation Pathway

A practical IELTS preparation guide based on your starting level, target band and time before test day.

[FREE IELTS STUDY GUIDE](#) | [LEAP ENGLISH PATHWAYS](#)

WHAT THIS GUIDE WILL HELP YOU DO

1. Choose a realistic study plan for your preparation timeline
2. Identify what to prioritise across IELTS Listening, Reading, Writing and Speaking
3. Use practical advice from LEAP to prepare with greater purpose

A Note from LEAP

“How long should I prepare for IELTS?” It’s one of the questions we hear most often from students who consult with us.

The answer is rarely black and white. We’ve worked with candidates who needed months to develop their English, and others who were already close to their target and benefited from a few weeks of focused practice. Your starting level, target band and available time all matter.

At LEAP, we encourage learners to practise with a purpose. More mock tests do not automatically mean more progress. Understanding your weaknesses, choosing suitable activities and acting on feedback make a real difference.

Choose your IELTS preparation pathway

Select the timeframe that fits your test date. Each link takes you directly to the relevant section.

- [Know your starting point](#)
- [More than 3 months](#)
- [Around 3 months](#)
- [Around 1 month](#)
- [Less than 1 month](#)

[Weekly review](#) [Final guidance](#)

1. Before You Start: Know Your Starting Point

Before committing to a study schedule, we always advise students to consider five questions:

Current level. Have you taken IELTS before? If so, look at your scores in each skill, not just your overall band. If not, start with a realistic diagnostic. Feedback on Writing and Speaking is particularly useful.

Target. What overall band do you need? Do you have minimum scores in individual skills? Universities and employers often specify both. Overall 7.0 with no skill below 6.0 is different from 7.0 in every skill.

Timeframe. When is your test booked? Is the date flexible if you need more preparation?

Availability. How many hours can you genuinely sustain each week? A realistic routine beats an ambitious plan you abandon.

Main challenge. Are you developing your English, learning unfamiliar task types, or struggling to perform under time pressure? These are different problems.

LEAP'S TIP

Start with evidence, not assumptions. If Writing feels like your weakest skill, ask what is actually holding you back: ideas, organisation, vocabulary, grammar or time management? The more specific the diagnosis, the more focused your preparation can be.

You can start with a diagnostic on LEAP Exam. Check the platform for the current free mock-test offer and feedback available with your first attempt.

[Explore LEAP Exam](#) →

2. More Than Three Months: Build Your Foundation

If you have several months, you have room to strengthen your general English while gradually learning how IELTS works. This is especially useful if you are new to the exam or there is a sizeable gap between your current and target scores.

Stage 1. Understand the test and establish a baseline

Learn what each component involves and how it is assessed. Review the Writing and Speaking criteria, then complete a diagnostic. You do not need a full mock test every week at this stage.

Stage 2. Develop the language itself

For Listening, try interviews, podcasts, lectures and discussions with different accents and topics. For Reading, get familiar reading articles and notice how arguments and vocabulary work together. For Writing, practise expressing and organising ideas before insisting on strict time limits. For Speaking, get comfortable discussing unfamiliar topics, explaining opinions.

Stage 3. Introduce IELTS-specific practice

Work through individual task types, study assessment criteria and review recurring errors. Then gradually add time limits. In our experience, students sometimes perform quite differently once the clock is running, so timed practice matters, but it should come at the right stage.

Final four to six weeks. Simulate exam conditions

Increase timed practice and complete occasional full mocks under realistic conditions, without translation tools, outside assistance or interruptions. Review patterns in your errors rather than simply counting how many tests you have finished.

LEAP'S TIP

When you have time, don't let IELTS practice materials become your only source of English. Broad exposure to authentic language builds comprehension, vocabulary and flexibility that carry over into the test.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Build your English with a clearer plan.

Explore LEAP's preparation options and choose the level of support that suits your timeline.

[Explore IELTS preparation](#) →

3. Around Three Months: Prepare Systematically

Three months can be a sweet spot if you already have a reasonable English foundation. You have enough time to identify weaknesses, practise the main task types and make meaningful adjustments before test day.

Weeks 1–2. Diagnose and plan

Take a diagnostic, compare each skill with your target and learn the assessment criteria. LEAP Exam is one option for an initial mock and feedback. Build a weekly routine that includes practice and review, not just test-taking.

Weeks 3–6. Get into the details

This is when you should get into the nitty-gritty of IELTS tasks. For Writing, focus on planning, task response, paragraph development, coherence and accuracy. For Speaking, work on natural elaboration, pronunciation and fluency. For Reading and Listening, practise paraphrase recognition, information location and time management.

Weeks 7–10. Apply, review and improve

Increase timed work. Practise Writing and Speaking regularly, seek useful feedback and revise your responses. For Reading and Listening, investigate why an answer was wrong, not just which answer was correct. Keep a record of recurring problems.

Weeks 11–12. Consolidate

Complete full mock tests under realistic conditions. Focus on consistency and time management. Avoid introducing a completely new strategy just before the test unless there is a compelling reason.

LEAP'S TIP

Keep an error log. "I got Question 18 wrong" tells you very little. "I missed the paraphrase", "I ran out of time" or "I misunderstood the question" gives you something concrete to work on.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Want a structured plan and regular feedback?

IELTS Guided combines independent practice, live teacher-led seminars and personalised feedback.

[Explore IELTS Guided](#) →

4. Around One Month: Prioritise What Matters

With four weeks left, you probably cannot address every weakness. The goal is to identify the few changes most likely to help you reach your target. This approach is especially useful when your English is already reasonably strong but your exam performance is inconsistent.

Week 1. Find your priorities

First things first: take a realistic diagnostic. You can check the first-mock offer on LEAP Exam, including the feedback currently available. Compare your performance with your target and choose two or three areas to work on. For example, if Reading is strong but your Task 2 arguments are underdeveloped, equal study time across skills may not make sense.

From our teaching experience, Writing and Speaking are often where students benefit most from expert-led instruction and specific feedback.

Week 2. Work on the weak spots

Analyse strong responses and revise your own. Record Speaking and review their clarity and organisation. For Reading and Listening, target the question types where you repeatedly lose marks.

Week 3. Add exam pressure

Practise under time limits. Monitor whether the strategies you have learnt still work when the clock is running. Keep getting feedback on Writing and Speaking where possible.

Week 4. Consolidate

Take a final mock early. Revisit recurring errors, confirm your test arrangements and keep the last few days manageable. Avoid trying to memorise unfamiliar expressions at the last minute.

LEAP'S TIP

Two essays that you review, receive feedback on and revise can be more valuable than five essays you write and never revisit. Quality matters more than volume.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Make your remaining preparation count.

Explore one-month Guided support if you want focused practice and feedback before test day.

[Explore 1-Month IELTS Guided](#) →



5. Less Than One Month: Focused Final Preparation

If this is you, you are not alone :) We have worked with plenty of candidates who knew they should have started earlier but found themselves preparing in the final weeks anyway. Don't panic. Studying as much as possible might feel reassuring, but it is not always the most productive response.

If you are already near your target, focused practice can improve consistency and reduce avoidable mistakes. If the gap is substantial, a few weeks may not be enough to build the skills you need.

Step 1. Decide what is achievable

Review your latest results or take a diagnostic. Separate language gaps from unfamiliar tasks, poor time management and inconsistent performance. Prioritise the weaknesses that can realistically change before your test.

Step 2. Practise with purpose

Choose high-impact tasks, practise under realistic conditions and review errors promptly. For Writing and Speaking, expert feedback can uncover problems that are difficult to spot on your own.

Step 3. Sort out test-day logistics

Confirm your test location, arrival instructions, identification requirements and booking details. We sometimes see students focus so much on preparation that they overlook basics. Test-centre availability can also be limited in some locations, so check early if you might need to reschedule.

In the final 24–48 hours, aim for light review, sufficient sleep and a clear head. Avoid exhausting yourself with repeated full mocks.

LEAP'S TIP

A short, intensive push can help when you are already close to your target. If you are far below it, consider whether changing the test date is possible. Retaking the test repeatedly without addressing underlying weaknesses can become expensive and frustrating.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Short on time? Let's focus on what matters.

Share your test date, current scores and target bands so LEAP can help you explore focused coaching options.

[Explore private coaching](#) →

6. Putting Your Plan into Practice

Whatever your timeframe, return to four habits: learn something useful, practise it, review what happened and adjust your next session. Progress does not always appear immediately as a higher mock-test score.

1. What did I practise this week?
2. What improved?
3. Which mistakes kept appearing?
4. What feedback did I receive?
5. What will I prioritise next week?

7. A Final Word from LEAP

There is no single preparation schedule that works for everyone. Some candidates need months of language development. Others need focused help with particular tasks. And yes, we have seen students prepare intensively for less than 30 days and still achieve their target. The difference is often their starting point and how they use the time available.

Whatever your situation, find out where you are, identify what needs improving and make your practice purposeful. Ideally, IELTS preparation should also help you become a more capable English user beyond the test.

Continue with LEAP

Ready to take the next step? Choose the option that fits where you are now.

EXPLORE IELTS PREPARATION →

TRY LEAP EXAM →

Questions about your IELTS preparation? contact@leapenglishpathways.com

This guide offers general preparation advice. Individual progress depends on your starting proficiency, learning needs and preparation quality. Always check your official IELTS test provider for current procedures and requirements.