

IELTS Speaking: How to Improve Your Band Score

Practical advice on fluency, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation, whether you're working towards Band 6, 7 or higher.

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What you'll find in this guide

IELTS Speaking can feel nerve-racking, especially when you're speaking to an examiner under time pressure. This guide explains what examiners assess and how to make your practice more purposeful.

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A Note from LEAP

For many students, IELTS Speaking is the most nerve-racking part of the test. Unlike tests that rely entirely on computer-based responses, IELTS retains a human interaction: you speak with an examiner in person or, at some centres, through a video link.

We often hear two concerns: "I'm not confident speaking English, let alone speaking to an examiner under pressure," and "I can speak quite comfortably, so why isn't my Speaking score higher?"

If either sounds familiar, you're certainly not alone. Some learners manage everyday conversations well but struggle with unfamiliar or abstract topics. Others know plenty of vocabulary and grammar but find it difficult to organise their ideas in real time. And some become so focused on avoiding mistakes that their answers sound rehearsed.

IELTS Speaking is not simply about talking more. It is about communicating effectively across different topics and tasks. Understanding what examiners listen for is a useful starting point.



01. Understanding the Four Assessment Criteria

IELTS Speaking is assessed using four equally weighted criteria.

a. Fluency and Coherence

The central question: Can you keep speaking and develop ideas in a way that makes sense?

Fluency concerns the flow of your speech, including hesitation, repetition and self-correction.

Coherence concerns how clearly your ideas are organised and connected. Speaking as fast as possible is not the goal.

Less developed: "I think working from home is good because it's convenient and, yeah, you save time and it's good for people."

More developed: "I think working from home offers greater flexibility, particularly for people with long commutes. Instead of spending an hour travelling each way, they can use that time more productively."

The second response communicates a more specific idea and explains why it matters.

LEAP'S TIP

Not every pause is a problem. Natural speakers pause to think and organise ideas. What matters is whether frequent or prolonged hesitation gets in the way of communication.

b. Lexical Resource

The central question: Can you choose vocabulary flexibly and appropriately?

We don't mean a collection of fancy words. Strong vocabulary means expressing ideas precisely, paraphrasing when needed and using natural word combinations.

Less specific: "I like this city because there are many convenient things."

More specific: "I enjoy living here because public transport is reliable and most amenities are within walking distance."

LEAP'S TIP

Learn vocabulary in context. Notice collocations and how expressions are used in conversations, interviews and discussions, rather than memorising isolated word lists.

c. Grammatical Range and Accuracy

The central question: Can you use different structures accurately and flexibly?

IELTS considers both the variety of structures you use and how well you control them. Not every sentence needs to be complex.

Simple: "I used to live in a small town. Now I live in Melbourne. I prefer Melbourne."

More flexible: “Although I grew up in a small town, I’ve come to prefer living in Melbourne because there are more opportunities to meet people from different backgrounds.”

The second version connects contrast and reasoning. But complexity only helps when it is used accurately and naturally.

d. Pronunciation

The central question: How easily can listeners understand you?

Pronunciation includes individual sounds, word and sentence stress, rhythm, intonation and connected speech. You absolutely do not need to acquire a British, American or Australian accent. There is no single “native-speaker accent” to imitate.

Instead, prioritise intelligibility: how easily a listener can follow your meaning. Stressing key words and using appropriate intonation can make a real difference.

LEAP’S TIP

Don’t make accent elimination your goal. Work on pronunciation features that help listeners understand you without unnecessary effort.

02. Why Speaking Faster Isn’t Always Better

Some candidates assume that faster speech demonstrates greater fluency. But speed and fluency are not the same thing. Rushing can make ideas harder to organise, increase avoidable grammatical errors, reduce clarity and leave little room to develop a point.

What about fillers?

Expressions such as “well”, “actually” and “I suppose” occur naturally in conversation. They are not automatically a problem. But frequent “um”, “you know” or “like” can make an answer difficult to follow when they repeatedly replace meaningful content.

TRY THIS YOURSELF

Record a one-minute response to an unfamiliar question. Was your main point clear? Did you explain it? Were your pauses helping you think, or were you searching for basic language?

PRACTISE WITH LEAP EXAM

LEAP Exam lets you review a word-by-word transcript of your spoken response and explore improvements based on your own answer, rather than memorising a generic sample that may not reflect your experiences.

[Practise IELTS Speaking on LEAP Exam →](#)

03. Developing Ideas Without Memorising Answers

Responding to unfamiliar questions, particularly in Part 3, is challenging. You might understand the question but struggle to go beyond one or two sentences. You're not alone.

Consider this IELTS-style question: "Do you think universities should focus more on practical skills than academic knowledge?"

Example A: Limited Development

"Yes, I think practical skills are important because students need jobs. Universities should teach more practical things to help students find employment."

The response is relevant, but the reasoning stays general.

Example B: More Developed Response

"I think practical skills should play a bigger role in university education, although I wouldn't say they should replace academic knowledge entirely. For instance, students studying business might benefit from working on real industry projects, since that gives them opportunities to apply theoretical concepts. At the same time, universities still need to provide a strong academic foundation."

The second answer states a position, develops an example and acknowledges a limitation. It sounds more nuanced without relying on a memorised script.

A NOTE FROM LEAP

These examples illustrate idea development; they are not official band-scored responses. IELTS examiners assess performance across the whole interview, not from a single answer.

WANT MORE GUIDED PRACTICE?

Knowing that you should develop an answer is one thing; doing it naturally under pressure is another. LEAP IELTS Guided covers these strategies in depth through structured instruction and guided practice across sessions.

[Explore IELTS Guided →](#)

04. Pronunciation: Beyond Individual Sounds

Pronunciation is more than getting individual consonants and vowels right. Several broader features influence how easily your speech is understood.

Word Stress

The stress pattern changes across PHOtograph, phoTOGraphy and photoGRAPHic. Unfamiliar stress placement can make otherwise familiar words harder to recognise.

Sentence Stress

“I wanted the BLUE one” highlights colour; “I WANTED the blue one” can emphasise the speaker’s preference or correct a misunderstanding. Stress changes what listeners notice.

Intonation

Intonation helps express attitudes, highlight information and organise a message. It does not simply mean raising your voice at the end of every question.

Connected Speech

In natural conversation, words link together and sounds may change. Familiarity with connected speech can support both your speaking and listening.

LEAP’S TIP

Listen to authentic English across accents, topics and settings. Podcasts, interviews, discussions and presentations help you notice rhythm, stress and intonation. You don’t need to copy a particular accent; aim for speech that is clear and comfortable for you.

05. Making Speaking Practice More Effective

Improvement takes more than answering familiar IELTS questions repeatedly. Good practice helps you identify what you can already do and what still needs attention.

Step 1. Choose an unfamiliar topic

Explain, compare, evaluate or speculate rather than relying only on familiar personal questions.

Step 2. Record your response

Aim for natural communication rather than a perfect performance.

Step 3. Listen critically

Notice idea development, hesitation, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

Step 4. Identify one or two priorities

Avoid trying to correct everything at once.

Step 5. Try again

Respond to a similar question and see whether you can apply what you noticed.

LEAP'S TIP

Automated speaking scores and feedback are estimates, not official IELTS examiner judgements. Use them to spot patterns and guide practice; seek qualified teacher feedback when you need a more detailed evaluation.

WHEN INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK MAKES A DIFFERENCE

In LEAP Performance Coaching, mock Speaking interviews are followed by customised, actionable feedback. We focus on your particular difficulties and help you develop clearer, more effective responses, rather than giving everyone the same advice.

[Explore Performance Coaching →](#)

A Final Word from LEAP

Strong IELTS Speaking isn't about talking as quickly as possible, using the most complicated vocabulary or sounding like someone from a particular English-speaking country. It is about communicating clearly, developing ideas, choosing appropriate language and demonstrating control over your speech

Some improvements may come from becoming familiar with the test. Others, particularly pronunciation habits and flexible language use, take sustained practice. Know what you're working towards, and make your practice purposeful.

Continue Your Preparation with LEAP

Want to practise independently? Use LEAP Exam to review your speaking transcript and receive detailed feedback based on your own responses.

Looking for personalised support? LEAP IELTS Guided and Performance Coaching offer structured preparation, guided practice and individual teacher feedback.

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