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Tips for the Reading section

What to do in the listening test

One of the main difficulties experienced by students doing the Reading Module is not having enough time to complete the test. It is, therefore, essential to read both efficiently and effectively.

There are a few main skills that you will need in order to do well in the IELTS Reading Module. It is useful to use the following procedure for each text that is given.

Previewing

(about 2 min for each passage)

(a) Study the passage by noting:

- titles
- headings
- illustrations
- diagrams
- any print in bold type or italics.

(b) Study key parts of the passage by skimming. Read the first paragraph which often focuses on the main idea. The first sentence of each paragraph usually expresses the key points of the paragraph. Generally, the concluding paragraph provides a summary of the given passage. You'd better underline these key points with a pencil.



Analysing the instructions and questions

Read each word in the instructions carefully and ensure that you understand exactly what is required and in what form. For example, the instructions may say, 'Choose no more than three words from the passage for each answer'. In this situation, it would not be acceptable to write four or more words. Often students find the right answer but present it in the wrong form and, unfortunately, do not score any marks for that answer. Understanding what is required, therefore, is just as important as finding the right answer in the passage.

Scanning the text for specific answers

Use your time wisely. Spend no longer than one minute on finding each answer. Only look in the given text, table, diagram or graph for the answer required. Locate key words in the question and find them, or synonyms for them, in the text. The sentences around these words are most likely to contain the answers you need.

If you are still unsure of the answer after you have spent approximately one minute on the question, make a sensible guess in the appropriate form. You may wish to mark the answers you are unsure of in some way so that, if you do have time at the end of the Reading Module, you can check these answers again.

Checking your answers

After you have completed your answers for each section, you need to check them. Check that you have followed the instructions exactly. If you have time, return to the answers you marked because you were unsure and see if the answers you have given are the best ones. This must be done immediately after that section, otherwise you will forget the context later on. Do not leave any answers blank as you do not lose marks for incorrect answers.

Working out unfamiliar vocabulary

When reading a passage in the IELTS test, it is most likely that you will come across words with which you are unfamiliar. Be prepared for this. You may not need to understand the exact meaning of an unknown word, unless there is a question directly related to it.

If you do need to know the meaning of an unfamiliar word, don't panic. There are various strategies that you can use to work out the meaning of the unknown words.

Check the context

Are there any clues in the surrounding words or phrases? Look particularly at the words just before and just after the unfamiliar words.

Look for a definition

Sometimes the writers realise that the word is an uncommon one so they define, restate, explain or give an example of it. Words that signal meaning often include 'is', 'means', 'refers to', 'that is', 'consists of'. For example, 'Snoring is a noise generated by vibrations of the soft parts of the throat during sleep.' The word 'is' signals a definition.

Remember, too, to check if there is a glossary.

Identify the word's place and purpose

Is it a noun, adjective, verb or adverb in the sentence? Are there any punctuation clues, for example, semicolons or question marks?

Look for connective words

They are often near the unknown words and will usually help to identify the general direction of the argument which will help to give some understanding of the unknown word.

Break the word down into syllables

Sometimes knowledge of common roots, affixes and possible similarity of words in your own language can help you to identify the meaning.

Treat the unknown word as an algebraic entity 'X'

Observe the relationship of the unknown word, 'X', to other words and concepts with which you are more familiar. Often this is enough to answer questions that include 'X'.



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