# Why IELTS preparation needs practice tests

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One-page cheat sheet · constraints, what practice trains, the computer format, how to practise

> **Knowing English and passing IELTS are different skills. Many people lose a band not on language but because they meet the format for the first time on exam day.**

## The constraints you are tested under

| Section | Constraint | What it means for you |
|---|---|---|
| **Reading** | 60 minutes, three long academic passages, 40 questions | About a minute and a half per question, including the reading |
| **Listening** | The recording plays only once | No second chance to catch an answer |
| **Writing** | One hour for two texts; Task 2 counts twice as much as Task 1 | Stuck on the chart in Task 1 → no time for the essay |
| **All three** | Listening, Reading, Writing back to back, about 2.5 hours without a break | Concentration drops noticeably by Writing if you are not used to the load |

Good readers still lose marks by **running out of time**, **misreading the question type** or **writing the answer in the wrong form**.

## What practice actually trains

### 1. Timing

Only comes after several full tests: how many minutes one Reading passage takes, when to skip a hard question and come back, how much time to leave for checking your essay.

### 2. Question types

Each format has its traps. You get FALSE vs NOT GIVEN not from explanations but after dozens of those questions. Same for matching headings, table completion, choosing two answers out of five.

### 3. Answer format

Word limits ("no more than two words"), spelling, singular or plural decide whether an answer counts. The right idea in three words instead of two scores **zero**.

### 4. Stamina

About two and a half hours of Listening, Reading and Writing without a break. Your brain has to get used to the load.

## Computer-delivered IELTS: know the screen

- Official centres use the same platform — the screen looks the same in any country; only room conditions differ.
- Passage and questions sit **side by side**.
- Move between questions with the **numbers at the bottom**.
- The **timer is always visible**.
- Some answers are **dragged with the mouse**.
- Writing: **no spellchecker**, but a **word counter**.
- Distracting on your first test; by the fifth you no longer notice it.

## How to practise effectively

| Do | How / why |
|---|---|
| **Full tests in exam conditions** | No pauses, no dictionary, no replaying the audio. Separate exercises help, but only a full test trains stamina and timing. |
| **Review every mistake** | Not the number of correct answers — why each was wrong: misheard, ran out of time, confused the question type. |
| **Track your band per section** | Shows where you lose the most marks and where to spend your time. |
| **Get feedback on Writing & Speaking** | You cannot mark your own essay: review against the criteria — task response, coherence, vocabulary, grammar. |
| **Speak out loud, with a timer** | Two minutes in Part 2 feels long until you try to fill it. |

## Common mistakes

| ✗ | ✓ |
|---|---|
| Only textbooks and separate exercises | Regular full tests |
| Counting correct answers | Finding why each answer was wrong |
| Right idea, three words for a two-word limit | Obey the word limit, spelling, number |
| Long Task 1, rushed essay | Task 2 counts double — protect its time |
| Marking your own essay | Criteria-based feedback |

## Before exam day — checklist

- ☐ Several full tests done in exam conditions
- ☐ I know my minutes per Reading passage
- ☐ FALSE vs NOT GIVEN practised on dozens of questions
- ☐ Answers checked for word limit, spelling, singular/plural
- ☐ Used to the computer screen, drag-and-drop, no spellchecker
- ☐ Band tracked per section; weakest section targeted
- ☐ Part 2 talk practised aloud with a two-minute timer
- ☐ Started with free official sample questions