IELTS Reading: format, timing and task types

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One-page cheat sheet · 60 minutes, three passages, paraphrase, 14 task types

> **The question almost never repeats the passage. Find a key that cannot be paraphrased (name, date, number, term, place), locate the spot, then compare the meaning.**

Format (Academic, computer)

Duration	60 min, no extra time to transfer answers
Passages	3, ~2,200–2,750 words in total, harder each time
Questions	40 (usually 13 + 13 + 14), 1 mark each
Scoring	correct answers → band 0–9; no penalty for wrong answers
On screen	right after Listening, no break; passage left, questions right; Review flag; highlight and notes via right click; **no spell-checker**

Timing — not equal thirds

Passage	Time	What is in it
1	15–17 min	facts, descriptions; easy to locate — lose nothing here
2	20 min	paragraphs A–H, tasks on text structure
3	23–25 min	densest; writer's views and reasoning

- Hard deadline per passage: move on even with empty fields.
- Max 1.5 min per question: best guess, flag Review, move on.

Paraphrase by sight

- **Synonyms:** purchase / buy, sufficient / enough, decline / fall
- **Word class:** the discovery of X / X was discovered; growing rapidly / rapid growth
- **Restructure:** A caused B / B was the result of A

Passage: *the population fell sharply* → question: *a dramatic decline in the number of inhabitants*.

Routine for one passage

- **2–3 min overview:** title, first sentence of each paragraph, last sentence; one phrase per paragraph.
- Read questions **as a group**.
- Locate by the key; read 2–3 sentences around it slowly.
- Answer, move on; next ordered answer is further down.

Order of answers

In text order: T/F/NG, Y/N/NG, all Completion, Short-answer, single-answer MC, Sentence Endings.
Any order: Matching Headings, Information, Features, MC with several answers — do these after the ordered tasks of the same passage. Unknown words are normal; if one is the gap word, just copy it.

Task types — tactics

Type	Key tactic
True / False / Not Given	FALSE needs a **contradiction**; silence or a different topic = NOT GIVEN. Watch qualifiers: *all, only, the first, always* vs *many, one of, often*. Not from your own knowledge. Can't find it in a minute → almost always NG.
Yes / No / Not Given	The writer's views (Passage 3). "Some researchers believe X" ≠ the writer agrees. Evaluative words carry the position: *clearly, it is a mistake to, there is little evidence that*.
Matching Headings	Main idea, not a detail — spare headings are built from vivid details. Main idea is in the first/last sentence, or mid-paragraph after *however*. Easiest paragraphs first, cross off.
Matching Information	Details, often mid-paragraph; a paragraph can be used twice or not at all. Do it last. "Where is the reason given?" → *because, due to, led to*.
Matching Features	Mark every mention of each name first (capitals scan fast; surname / "the researcher" / "she"). One item can be used several times.
Sentence Endings	Filter endings by grammar first; check the meaning of the whole sentence.
Completion (sentence, note, table, flow-chart, diagram)	Decide the word class first (*a* + gap → singular noun). Limit is strict; hyphenated word = one. Copy letter for letter: *rivers*, not *river*.
Summary Completion	Find which 1–2 paragraphs it covers. **With a list:** synonym, grammar rules out half (*profit* / *profitable* / *profitably*). **Without:** exact copy.
Multiple Choice	Every wrong option is in the passage too. Form your own answer before reading options. Traps: true but answers another question; one word distorted (*always* for *often*).
Short-answer	*who* → name, *when* → date, *what material* → noun. Added articles count as words.

Marking

✗	✓
a misspelt word	copied letter for letter
over the word limit	within it — an article counts
empty field at the end	most likely option — no penalty

Capitals don't matter; British and American spelling both accepted.

Prepare

- Full timed sections; analyse every mistake by cause.
- Paraphrase notebook: "question word / passage word".
- 15–20 min of academic reading daily; drill weak types (often T/F/NG, Headings); practise on a screen.

Correct answers → band (reference)

Correct	Band	Correct	Band
39–40	9	23–26	6
37–38	8.5	19–22	5.5
35–36	8	15–18	5
33–34	7.5	13–14	4.5
30–32	7	10–12	4
27–29	6.5		

Exact boundaries vary slightly by test. 7.0 = ten wrong allowed; 6.5 = thirteen. Do Passages 1–2 almost without losses — then half of Passage 3 is enough.