Preparing for IELTS on your own on a small budget

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One-page cheat sheet · target, diagnostic test, resources, weekly plan

> **You don't need every website, video and book. You need an honest picture of your level, a simple plan and regular full practice tests.**

Four steps to start

1. Work out the score you need

Check the specific university or programme: overall band + minimum per section, e.g. `6.5 with no less than 6.0 in each`. Check the test type: study usually needs **Academic**; work and migration often accept **General Training**. Aim to pass first time — preparing well is cheaper than a retake.

2. Take one full practice test first — not a textbook

Listening, Reading, Writing back to back, timer, no dictionary. It shows:

- your approximate band per section vs. your target;
- your weakest section — where most of your time goes;
- whether you have enough time and where you lose it.

Around **4.0 or below**? Too early for tests: strengthen grammar, core vocabulary and listening, come back in a couple of months.

3. Pick one resource per skill

Stick with it for **at least a month**. Don't jump between a dozen websites.

Format	official IELTS website — how each section works
Listening	podcasts and talks (e.g. BBC Learning English) daily, first with subtitles, then without
Reading	popular science articles (Academic style) — one a day, note new words
Writing, Speaking	write and speak yourself, with a timer; feedback matters most
Full tests	one platform, exam format, automatic scoring

4. Build a simple week

An hour a day beats five hours on Sunday.
A full test every week or two is your main benchmark. After every test write down your band for each section — after a month you'll see what is improving and what isn't.

Low energy on Friday? Five minutes on the Task 1 **overview** alone: the main features of a graph in two sentences, no numbers.

Sample week (for someone who studies or works) — print and tick

Day	What to do	Time	Wk 1	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4
Mon	Listening: one part of a test + a podcast	45–60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Tue	Reading: one timed test passage + an article	45–60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Wed	Writing Task 2: an essay in 40 minutes	60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Thu	Speaking: timed answers out loud, recorded on your phone	30–45 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fri	Writing Task 1 + review of the week's mistakes	60 min	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sat	Full practice test in exam conditions	~2.5 hours	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sun	Rest or review new words	—	☐	☐	☐	☐

Band log — after every full test

Date	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Overall	Weakest / change next
Target						

Don't cut corners on Writing and Speaking

Listening and Reading can be fully self-taught: answers are clear-cut and the key shows where you went wrong. Marking your own essay is almost impossible. Options:

- a friend with a high score or a teacher — at least a few essays;
- a conversation club or a speaking partner;
- automated feedback against the IELTS criteria — cheapest, but a guide, not an examiner's mark.

How not to drown in materials

✗	✓
hunting for "the best website"	a decent resource you actually use
collecting PDF books (20 downloaded)	one test you complete
changing the plan by how you feel	max once a month, based on full test results

Full article: tilmashq.com/en/blog/ielts-self-study-plan

Full tests in exam format, scored automatically: app.tilmashq.com