IELTS Speaking: the three parts, criteria, how to prepare

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One-page cheat sheet · answer length, cue card, Part 3 patterns, band 6 vs 7

> **The examiner is a host working from a script, not someone to convince. Extend every answer, keep talking until stopped, and let pauses fall between ideas — not inside a sentence.**

Format in brief

- **11–14 min**, one-to-one with an examiner, audio-recorded; same day as the written sections or within a week.
- **3 parts:** short questions · cue-card monologue · abstract discussion. Same for Academic and GT; computer test still has an examiner.
- **Score:** whole band on 4 criteria, average rounded to 0.5.
- The examiner keeps time by the clock: being cut off mid-sentence is the procedure, not a judgement.

Part 1 · 4–5 min · short questions

ID check, then 3 topics × 3–4 questions: work/study, home town, then everyday (food, weather, transport, music, gifts, sleep…)

- **2–3 sentences:** answer + reason + detail/example.
- *"Do you like cooking?" "Not really, to be honest. I can cook a few basic dishes, but after work I'd rather order something. At weekends, though, I sometimes make plov for the family."*
- Naturalness over correctness; memorised answers are obvious.
- Answer in the tense of the question.
- Didn't understand? "Sorry, could you say that again?" (once or twice; words are not explained).

Part 2 · 3–4 min · cue card: 1 min to prepare, 1–2 min to speak, then 1–2 short questions

The card: "Describe a…" + three prompts under "You should say:" + "and explain why…". Topics: a person, place, event, object, experience. Truthfulness is not tested — an invented trip is fine.

The preparation minute

- Keywords, 2–3 per prompt, not sentences.
- Choose in 10 seconds the example you have **most to say** about.
- Leave room for "explain why" — the richest sentences.

Talking for two minutes

- Prompts = your plan: *The first thing I should mention is… What made it special was… Looking back, the reason I…*
- One concrete scene, not a list; keep going until stopped.
- Show past forms: *had been, was going to, used to, would have*.

Part 3 · 4–5 min · discussion about people and society — where 7.0 is decided

Type	Example	Answer plan
Opinion	Should governments fund the arts?	position → reason → example → concession, "having said that…" (AREA)
Comparison	How is family life different from 50 years ago?	then → now → why it changed
Reasons	Why do people move to big cities?	2–3 reasons: "the main reason is… another factor is…"
Prediction	Will people still read books in 30 years?	"I imagine…, it's likely that…, unless…"
Evaluation	Is it good that children use tablets?	pros → cons → where you stand

- Talk about people: "In my country, most families…"; personal example only to illustrate.
- **4–6 sentences.** Follow-ups "Why?" / "Can you give an example?" mean it was short.
- "That's a difficult one. I suppose it depends on…" buys seconds; silence buys nothing.
- Don't refuse: "I've never thought about it", then a version anyway.

Typical mistakes

✗ Do I think cities will grow? Yes, I think cities will grow. →
✓ Whether they'll keep expanding? I'd say so, yes.
✗ memorised answers · monologue in Part 1 · too quiet or fast · silence after "I don't know" · yes/no in Part 3.

The four criteria — band 7 vs band 6

Criterion	Band 7	Band 6 / what lowers it
Fluency & Coherence	flows without noticeable effort; flexible linking. Thinking pauses OK even at 8	talks at length but loses coherence, repeats, self-corrects; pauses to find a word or verb form
Lexical Resource	collocations, less common words used appropriately; paraphrases when a word won't come	enough for extended answers, precision suffers; memorised idioms out of context pull it down
Grammar Range & Accuracy	complex sentences often, mostly error-free	complex structures attempted, errors usually don't block understanding
Pronunciation	understood without effort — intelligibility, not accent	wrong stress (comFORTable, deVELopment), flat intonation, "letter by letter" words

6.0 → 7.0: what changes

	6.0	7.0
Extension	one sentence each	3 in Part 1, 5 in Part 3
Pauses	inside a sentence	between ideas
Complex	"If I would have…"	mostly right
Linking	firstly, secondly, in conclusion	well, actually, the thing is, I mean, having said that
Abstract	back to personal	causes and consequences

Preparing alone — checklist

- **Record and transcribe** 2 min on a cue card.
- **Bank of 10–15 stories** (trip, person, decision, skill, place, gift, failure): 5–6 keywords + one unusual detail.
- **1 + 2 minute drill** against a timer, one card a day.
- **Vocabulary by topic:** 20 topics × 10 phrases you'd use — "become part of everyday life", not "ubiquitous".
- **Shadowing:** podcast, 1-second delay, 10 min a day.
- **Five structures** (e.g. conditionals, which/who, passive, used to) in every Part 3 answer.