

Different kinds of IELTS Reading tasks advice and practice

Take the IELTS Reading exam (and maybe answer sheet) that your teacher gives you, but don't open it yet.

Optional: Share your general advice on doing IELTS Reading tests, taking a quick look at the test if you don't know or have forgotten what it is like (how many questions, etc).

Read the general advice below and ask about anything you don't understand, anything that you do differently, etc.

Without reading the text or the actual questions, very quickly look at what question types the first reading text in the test has (e.g. matching headings then yes/ no/ not given), and discuss with your partner how to do those kinds of tasks (and perhaps how not to do those tasks), including any relevant general advice such as things in the text you read before.

Read the advice below on those kinds of tasks, and ask about anything you don't know the reason for, have seen different advice on online, etc. Don't do the accompanying exam tasks yet.

Do the exam task that comes on the pages following the advice that you just read and discussed (which is the same kind of task as the text is talking about).

Check your answers, asking about anything that you got wrong, are not sure about the reasons for, etc.

Use the tactics that you discussed and read about to do all the questions that come with the exam Reading text that you looked at earlier. Stop after exactly 18 minutes, or 20 minutes if your teacher tells you to also transfer your answers to the answer sheet. You can look at the related advice below again if you forget how to do the tasks, but there won't be extra time for this.

Compare answers with a partner, each time also telling each other where each answer is in the text (by comparing what you underlined in the text).

Check your answers, then try to find any answers that you missed.

Ask about answers that you still can't find, questions which you have different answers to, words or phrases you don't understand, etc.

Compare what tactics you used, including how similar or different they are to what you discussed before and to the advice below.

Do the same steps for the second text.

Do the same stages for the third text.

General advice on IELTS Reading (to read and ask about before opening the test)

You never need to read the whole IELTS Reading text. You should only skim through the text before looking at the questions if you can do so in under four minutes, and if you are absolutely certain that you can finish the whole test in under 60 minutes.

If you do decide to read through before looking at the questions, that should be simply to know where the information is, not really to understand the content. You therefore only usually need to read the first sentence or two of each paragraph, continuing until you know what the topic of that paragraph is or until it seems too difficult to work the subject out, then skipping to the beginning of the following paragraph. You shouldn't underline anything before you look at the questions, because you won't yet know what information is important. However, as mentioned above, most people should start by underlining words in the questions without skimming the text first.

Especially in the paper-based test, you should use lots of underlining to help you. Specifically, underline the key words in the questions, and underline the answers when you find them. As with IELTS Listening, the aim is to underline as few words as possible while not missing anything important. If it is too time consuming to underline on a computer, underlining with your finger on the screen might at least help you focus on the right parts.

Underlining will really help with one of the most important IELTS Reading tactics, which is to skip questions that you find too difficult and to come back to those tricky questions later. Most questions are in the same order as the text. Therefore, if you underline the answer to gapfill question 3, skip gapfill question 4 and then underline the answer to gapfill question 5, the answer to question 4 will always be between the two answers that you have underlined. This is often true even when the task type changes. For instance, if questions 3 and 4 are multiple choice and question 5 is a short answer question, those three answers are usually in that order in the text. However, that is not always the case, and you sometimes need to go back to earlier in the text when the type of task changes.

Scanning is less useful in IELTS Reading than you might think, because key words in the questions are usually worded differently in the text. The main exception is scanning for names, e.g. in who said what tasks. However, other kinds of tasks sometimes have things that can be scanned for like words with capital letters, long words which can't be rephrased, words in *italics*, and numbers such as years.

All IELTS Reading questions count for one point and question 40 could possibly be the easiest question in the whole paper. You should therefore make sure that you spend the same amount of time on each of three texts. If you are running out of time, transfer your answers, then quickly fill any gaps on the answer sheet with guesses in the last few minutes.

If you have extra time after completing the answer sheet, you could check that all the other options are incorrect, e.g. that the extra headings don't match any of the sections, or that the other multiple-choice options are all wrong. It can also be useful to read through summary tasks to make sure that they make sense.

Advice on each kind of IELTS Reading task

Advice on matching tasks

Advice on matching headings to paragraphs/ sections tasks

A: All candidates should read through these questions before looking at the text (which is why this task is always given before the text). As with every task, underline important words while you are reading the instructions and questions.

B: When you start reading the texts, the aim is to find the topic of each paragraph as quickly as possible. Quickly skip to the next paragraph if you have found the topic but it isn't obvious which heading it matches, or if you have read the first two or three sentences and are still not sure what the topic is. This method will mean that you do the easiest matches first, and so have fewer options to choose from when you go back and spend more time on the more difficult matches.

C: Definitely don't work through the headings in the order that they are given, as that will make you spend time on an extra heading that doesn't match any section. Extra options are often similar to something that is said in one of the sections, but you have to choose headings that match the topic of the whole paragraph, not just something mentioned in them (unlike the which section contains this information task below).

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Choose the correct heading for each paragraph above from the list of headings below.

- i. What to do
- ii. What not to do
- iii. What to do first
- iv. How to skim
- v. How to finish the task quickly and easily

Advice on which section contains this information tasks

A: This task looks similar to the matching headings to sections task above, but it is asking for something that is included in each section, not a summary of the subject of the whole paragraph or section. For that reason, the answer could be in anywhere in each paragraph, not necessarily in the first one to three sentences like headings tasks.

B: This means that you might sometimes have to read until the end of a paragraph to find the answer (unlike paragraph heading tasks). However, skimming the start of the paragraphs can still be useful to tell if you are looking in the right paragraph or not.

C: Unlike with matching headings tasks, with this kind of task there are never extra statements that don't match any of the paragraphs. Each statement should only match one paragraph, and there are rarely tricks like similar statements in different paragraphs.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Which paragraph above contains the following information? Write the correct letter A-C.

1. It is not common for the task to try to trip you up with the same or similar info in two or more paragraphs
2. There may be times when you need to search until the last sentence of the paragraph
3. You are not asked to sum up the entire section (in contrast to matching headings)

Advice on who said what tasks/ match the statements to the people tasks

IELTS Jacky lists the difficulties of this kind of task as being the different order of the statements and of the text, the different wording of the statements and the matching parts of the reading passage, the different possible ways of referring to the people, that the instructions can vary from test to test, and that the opinions could appear before or much later than the name. IELTS Advantage gives details on how the instructions may vary, including that sometimes you are told that the names may be used more than once. Its example task also has more names than statements.

IELTS Jacky recommends first underling key words in the statements and then scanning the text for all the names given as options, looking for the capital letters to make scanning quicker and more efficient (and making sure not to scan for names which are not mentioned in the task). IELTS Simon agrees with scanning in this way before actually reading the text, and in fact says that name matching is perhaps the only IELTS Reading task for which scanning is always useful. Both IELTS Jacky and IELTS Advantage say that using different colours to highlight each name is an option, but this sounds time consuming and is probably not possible in the computer-based test.

IELTS Advantage advises test takers to start with the easiest questions first. They and IELTS Jacky suggest starting with names which only appear once, but these are not necessarily easier as they might be referred to in other ways like “this researcher”. IELTS Simon has the more precise advice that names spread over several places in the task will be more difficult to match and so should be left until last. All three sources are in favour of underling key words in what those people say and then searching the statements for something similar (rather than working your way through the statements and searching for something similar to each one). However, move on quickly if you don't find anything suitable, and some tasks have options which are not correct answers.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

*Look at the following statements and the list of websites below. Match each statement with the correct website, **A**, **B** or **C**. You may use any letter more than once.*

1. What you are told to do is not always the same from test to test
2. You might not be limited to using each name a single time
3. Its sample exam has a greater number of names than things which you should match to them
4. You should scan for names straightaway, making it maybe the sole task where scanning is definitely of use
5. Names which are repeated with gaps between each mention should be tackled after matching to the other names

A: IELTS Jacky
B: IELTS Advantage
C: IELTS Simon

Advice on matching the words to the gaps tasks/ summary with options given tasks

Like gapfill summary tasks with no options given, these could be a summary of most or all of the text, but more often are a summary of just a part such as two paragraphs. Unlike gapfill summary tasks, the options given are often not words actually in the text. In fact, finding one of the words in the options in the text might be a warning sign that it is a trick, because the wording of the summary is different to the reading passage.

What makes this task easier than it could be is that only some of the words given will make sense in and match grammatically to each gap. You should therefore start with the easiest gaps to fill, then come back to the hard gaps when fewer options are left. If you are lucky, there might eventually be only one possible match for each remaining gap.

Some of the words below the gapped text are not correct in any gap (even though they would fit into one or more of them), so don't do this task by working your way through the given options. However, this could be a useful way of using any extra time that you have after finishing the whole test, or of filling the last gap if you are not in a rush.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Complete the summary using the list of words and phrases A-H below.

This task is **1** _____ to a summary task without any options to choose from, due to it regularly being a summary of less than the **2** _____ text. Not all of the options will fit in each gap, which makes the task **3** _____ difficult than it might have been. It is recommended to **4** _____ to the tricky gaps to complete after having completed the less challenging ones, since that will mean fewer options to select from.

- A:** begin
- B:** different
- C:** less
- D:** more
- E:** return
- F:** similar
- G:** whole

Advice on matching questions... to... with statements A to... tasks

As for the similar tasks in IELTS Listening, the information in the reading passage should be in the same order as the questions (so answer to question 21, then the answer to question 22, etc), meaning that the options (A, B, C, etc) will not be in that order in the text. This is quite easy, so expect to find the information in completely different words in the text, and don't expect to see this task very often.

Match each topic with the description of it in the text above, A, B, C or D. You may use any letter more than once.

1. Numbered questions
2. Options with letters
3. The reading text
4. This whole task

A: Fairly unchallenging

B: Wording that is not similar to the questions

C: Order that is usually identical to the text

D: Order that is mixed compared to the reading passage

Advice on choosing two options tasks/ choosing two from options A to E tasks

Like multiple choice tasks, the wrong options which should be left after selecting two tend to be a mix of things that you can eliminate because they are contradicted in the text, trick options which look similar to what the text says, and things you shouldn't waste time looking for because they aren't mentioned at all.

There is sometimes just one question of this type, but it is more common for there to be two in a row. In this case, the answers will be in the same order as the questions. However, the options might not be in the same order as the text (e.g. the information to choose correct option B maybe coming after the text related to correct option D, and/ or what contradicts option C coming before option B in the reading passage).

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Write the two correct letters for each question below to match the text above.

1. Which TWO descriptions of wrong options are included in the text above?

A: things which are mentioned in the text but are unimportant so can be ignored

B: things for which text has information which shows that the options are not true and so can be crossed off

C: things which you should check are not included in the text in any way

D: things which look like what the text states but are actually meant to make the task hard

E: things which you should already know are not true

2. Which TWO points are made about the order of questions and options?

A: the numbered questions may be in a different order in the reading passage

B: the options from A to E could be in a different order to the info in the reading passage

C: the lettered options are usually not in identical order to the info in the text

D: the info showing that option C is wrong always follows that related to option B

E: option B could be later in the text than option D

Advice on true/ false/ not given tasks and yes/ no/ not given tasks

“False” and “No” mean things which are contradicted in the text. “Not given” means something that might be true or might not be, because we don’t have the right information in the text to decide on it.

There are two kinds of “Not given” statements. The most common is similar to something in the text (e.g. has the same key words), but is actually not quite on the same topic. There are also some which are “Not given” because nothing similar is mentioned in the passage at all. This makes it especially important to underline the answers that you can find and to skip questions that you can’t quickly find the answer to. For example, you could underline the answer to question 21, skip 22 when you can’t find it, then underline the answer to 23. As these sorts of questions are always in the same order as the text, you will then only have a limited amount of space to check for any info related to question 22.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Do the following statements agree with the information given in the passage above? Write:

TRUE if the statement agrees with the information
FALSE if the statement contradicts the statement
NOT GIVEN if there is no information on this

1. Most “False” and “No” answers are the opposite of what is said in the text
2. “False”/ “No” answers are more common than “Not given” answers
3. “Not given” answers which aren’t similar to anything in the text are less common than “Not given” answers which might appear to be related to thing there
4. It’s more important to underline in this kind of IELTS Reading task than in any other sort
5. These kinds of tasks are sometimes in a different order to the text.

Advice on multiple choice tasks/ choosing from answers A, B, C or D tasks

The numbered multiple-choice questions are always in the same order as the text, but answers related to each question could be mixed up. For example, the answer to question 32 always follows that of question 31 and precedes the info related to question 33, but things connected to 32 A, 32 B, etc might not be in that order.

If you are not sure which is the right option, you should be able to cross off at least one of the wrong options because it is contradicted in the text. However, there could also be options which aren't mentioned at all, so you shouldn't waste too much time searching for things related to each option.

Because some options are designed to confuse you, some people find it better to look for the answers before looking at the options, then see which option is the same as what you have underlined in the text. What can make this task easier is that which paragraph to look at is often mentioned in multiple choice questions.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

For each question 1 to 3, choose the correct option, A, B, C or D, to match the text above.

1. In paragraph 1, what is written about what order things are in?

A: The information in the text invariably follows the same order as the numbers of the questions

B: The order of what is written in the text is generally consistent with how the options are arranged in the questions

C: There is no chance of the related information in the reading passage being in the same order as the four given options

D: If another task follows the last multiple-choice question, that will deal with the following part of the text

2. In paragraph 2, what is said about eliminating incorrect options?

A: Crossing off things because they aren't mentioned at all is not good use of your time

B: One or more options can usually be eliminated because information in the text shows that they are untrue

C: All three wrong options are sometimes contradicted in the reading passage

D: After you choose the right option, spend a little time making sure that the others are not possible answers

3. What point is made in paragraph 3?

A: For the majority of candidates, it is better for finding the answer in the text to precede looking at the options

B: Scanning is important for finding which paragraph in which to look for each answer

C: It is possible to find at least some answers without needing to scan or skim

D: It is common for questions to state which of the paragraphs contains the relevant answer

Advice on gapfill tasks (with no options given)

Most official IELTS Reading gapfill tasks have recently asked for “one word only” or “one word and/ or a number” in each gap. However, other variations like “no more than two words” and “no more than three words or a number” have also occurred, so make sure that you underline the instructions.

Unlike IELTS Listening, in IELTS Reading you are told to use words given in the text to complete the table, bullet points, sentences, or summary. This means that words which are not in the text will get no points due to not following the instructions, even if they make factually and grammatically correct statements. The gaps will always be in the same order as those words are in the text, but the next answer could be any distance from the previous one, from the same sentence to the next paragraph.

If you have enough time after you finish, it is useful to read through the completed statements, summary, etc to ensure that they make sense and are grammatically correct.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Complete the summary. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** from the passage above for each answer.

The majority of official IELTS Reading gapfill tasks in recent years have demanded a single word, sometimes with one **1** _____ as another option. As that can vary, you should ensure that you **2** _____ the words telling you what to do.

To follow the instructions, you have to use words included in the **3** _____ to fill the gap in the table, etc. Other words will obtain **4** _____ marks (in contrast to the Listening test). The **5** _____ of the gaps and of the words for them will be identical, but the **6** _____ between them can widely vary. Given sufficient **7** _____, reading the finished summary etc can be worthwhile to check the meaning and grammar.

Advice on writing short answers to questions tasks

Candidates usually find these kinds of task quite easy, perhaps because they are similar to the kinds of reading comprehension questions that they are used to from school and textbooks, because you don't need to rephrase your answers, and/ or because these tasks don't usually have any tricks in them. The instructions saying to use "words from the passage" makes the tasks even less difficult, as long as you underline them to make sure you stick to them (as words not in the text will get no points, even if the answers are linguistically and factually correct). The same also ought to be done with the instructions saying how many words to use.

Maybe because they are so simple easy, these sorts of tasks are very rare in IELTS.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Answer the questions below. Choose NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS from the passage above for each answer.

1. Where should the words in your answers come from?
2. To ensure that you don't go against what the instructions say, what should you do to them?
3. How common are these kinds of questions in the IELTS Reading exam?

Advice on labelling diagrams tasks

Don't panic if you get this kind of task. Although diagrams to label look very different from other tasks, they are no more difficult than any other kind of question. The answers are not usually in the same order as the numbered gaps on the diagram (as that would be too easy), but there tends to be little or no rephrasing, and all the answers are usually close together in the text. The answers are either given mixed up or can be taken directly from the text without any changes needed (as with all IELTS Reading gapfill tasks).

Although these tasks are rare, a little bit of preparation can make them one of the easiest tasks to complete, and may also help with related tasks like Writing Task 1 and Listening labelling tasks.

First, try to find the right part of the text by scanning the text for words which are already written on the diagram. If that isn't possible, skim through to text to find a paragraph which is describing the parts of something such as a machine or a process. Underline words in the text which are already written on the diagram, highlight words which explain how those things are related to other parts such as "after that" and "below this", then do the same for the things that are explained with those words and are not on the diagram yet. That should be enough to work out which of the third of those categories of underlined things should go in each gap and so to write your answers on the diagram.

-----cover, fold or cut-----

Write the missing words in the flowchart below. Choose **ONE WORD ONLY** for each answer from the passage above.

