

Good and bad answers in IELTS Speaking Part Three

Take turns asking each other these questions, not looking here when you are answering:

- Are people in your country generally interested in learning foreign languages, do you think?
- Are people in your country worried about light pollution?
- Are there times when it's better to just accept stress rather than try to fight it?
- At what age do you think children should be put into different classes depending on their academic ability?
- Can you contrast the dangers of driving with those of taking a plane?
- Can you compare young people's attitude to marriage to that of previous generations?
- Can you explain why some people are naturally more cheerful?
- Can you give some examples of ways in which ordinary people could do more to help save the environment?
- Can you think of any bad effects of dams?
- Could you describe how people in your country find out about politicians before voting?
- Do you believe that starting foreign language lessons from very young is a good idea?
- Do you believe that people your age in your country are too risk averse?
- Do you think environmental controls in your country are getting better or worse?
- Do you think being forced to mix with people is always a good thing for people who lack social skills?
- Do you think it is okay for families to make unwilling children continue studying music?
- Do you think it is possible for adults to pick up foreign languages without conscious effort?
- Do you think it's good for boys and girls to be taught different ways?
- Do you think that people's energy consumption is changing?
- Do you think that primary schools' approach to education is about right?
- Do you think that schools should use more technology in class?
- Do you think the government should tell people when there is even a small chance of an earthquake the next day?
- How important are genes in deciding someone's intelligence, do you think?
- Do you think there is a danger that rising sea levels could directly affect this city?
- How have people's views on divorce changed over the last 50 years in your country?
- How much do you think the government should get involved in how parents raise their children?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of wind turbines?
- What can be done to stop global warming, do you think?
- What is the biggest mental problem in your country, do you think?
- Why do some people resist road safety measures like seatbelts and strict speed limits?

Ask about any questions you can't understand, are not sure how to answer, etc.

Listen to your teacher read questions from the list above and some ways that people might answer them. Write down or call out the best answer (depending on what your teacher tells you). The other options are usually clearly bad, so if you aren't sure which is best, choose the one which is left when you have eliminated the others.

Circle the best answer to each of the questions below. If you aren't sure, cross off as many bad answers as you can and choose from the ones which are left.

Are people in your country generally interested in learning foreign languages, do you think?

- A) Yes, I'm really interested in learning foreign languages.
- B) Yes, people in my country are interested in learning foreign languages.
- C) Yes, almost everyone I know wants to learn how to speak English, Chinese, etcetera.
- D) I'm not sure about people generally, but almost everyone I know wants to learn how to speak English, Chinese, etcetera.

Are people in your country worried about light pollution?

- A) What?
- B) Light what?
- C) I've never heard of light pollution.
- D) Sorry, I've never heard of light pollution. Could you explain what it is?
- E) I'm afraid I've never even heard the term light pollution before. Please define it for me and give me some examples.

Are there times when it's better to just accept stress rather than try to fight it?

- A) No, there aren't.
- B) To be honest, I don't think so. In my limited experience, stress is always a bad thing.
- C) I'm really sorry to disagree with you, but I think you are wrong. In my limited experience, stress is always a bad thing.

At what age do you think children should be put into different classes depending on their academic ability?

- A) Ten years old.
- B) I'm no expert on this.
- C) I'm no expert on this, but I would probably say that ten is about right.

Can you contrast the dangers of driving with those of taking a plane?

- A) Actually, I saw a TV programme on this just a couple of weeks ago. It said that driving a car is much more dangerous, a hundred times riskier or something.
- B) According to Fred Smith on the documentary entitled "The Risks of Real Life", broadcast on NHK television at 9 p.m. on July 2nd 2016, driving is 134.34% riskier than travelling by air.

Can you compare young people's attitude to marriage to that of previous generations?

- A) Sorry, what does young people mean?
- B) Sorry, does young people mean people in their twenties?
- C) I'm not certain about teenagers, but if that includes people in their twenties I would say that it isn't very different. I get the impression that most people still believe that everyone should get married and that it is natural for men and women to have very different roles.

Can you explain why some people are naturally more cheerful?

- A) I've never really thought about that before.
- B) I've never really thought about that before. I guess DNA is the main cause, but upbringing could well be almost as important.
- C) I've never really thought about that before. I believe that it is fifty three percent genes and forty seven percent upbringing.

Can you give some examples of ways in which ordinary people could do more to help save the environment?

- A) Well, I suppose most people rarely buy organic food. More of that would probably be a little help.
- B) Well, I suppose most people rarely buy organic food. More of that would probably be a little help. And we certainly use far too many plastic bags.
- C) Firstly, people should buy organic food. Secondly, people should use fewer plastic bags. Thirdly, people should travel less. Fourthly, people should switch off all electrical items when they aren't using them.

Can you think of any bad effects of dams?

- A) They block fish and animals from following their usual routes up and down the river.
- B) So many! To give just one example, they block fish and animals from following their usual routes up and down the river.

Could you describe how people in your country find out about politicians before voting?

- A) It's very difficult to generalise.
- B) It's very difficult to generalise, but I assume that television news is still the most common place for the majority of people.

Do you believe that starting foreign language lessons from very young is a good idea?

- A) Absolutely! I really think it is incredibly important. Personally, I have found it really difficult to learn English at this age, so I wish I had started earlier.
- B) Hmmm, that's a difficult question. I really think it is incredibly important. Personally, I have found it really difficult to learn English at this age, so I wish I had started earlier.

Do you believe that people your age in your country are too risk averse?

- A) Sorry, can you say that again a little more slowly?
- B) Sorry, I didn't understand the last word. You said risk something.

Do you think environmental controls in your country are getting better or worse?

- A) I'm afraid I know absolutely nothing about this subject.
- B) I'm afraid I know absolutely nothing about this subject. However, the air seems to be cleaner than when I was a child.
- C) I'm afraid I know absolutely nothing about this subject. However, the air seems to be cleaner than when I was a child, so that would seem to suggest that they are improving at least a little.

Do you think being forced to mix with people is always a good thing for people who lack social skills?

- A) I am totally against this idea. This is because I strongly believe that being made to do this will lead to them hating social situations more.
- B) There are both advantages and disadvantages to this approach. The main advantage is that they will get a chance to improve their social skills. I am totally against this idea. This is because I strongly believe that being made to do this will lead to them hating social situations more.

Do you think it is okay for families to make unwilling children continue studying music?

- A) I don't have any personal experience of this, but I would imagine that it's fine. Most kids change their minds about what they like and don't like all the time anyway.
- B) Hmmmm. Let me think. Let me see. That's a difficult question. That's a tricky one. No one has ever asked me that before. I've never thought about that before. Well, I would imagine that it is fine.

Do you think it is possible for adults to pick up foreign languages without conscious effort?

- A) In my personal experience, it definitely isn't. I've tried it, but I found that actual study was much more effective, at least for me.
- B) In my personal experience, it definitely isn't. I started learning English when I was thirteen and studied for 6 years in school but I only seriously started when I was 22. I tried to just do free conversation for the first eighteen months, but that didn't work. Then I bought some grammar books and studied much harder and that worked much better. Since 2011 I have always used that technique, including in the last twelve months when I was trying to prepare for IELTS.

Do you think it's good for boys and girls to be taught different ways?

- A) What? Are you serious? No way! You've got to be kidding!
- B) Absolutely not. That would almost certainly result in an unfair advantage for either males or females.
- C) Although I can understand your point of view, I'm afraid I have to disagree with you. That would almost certainly result in an unfair advantage for one group or the other.

Do you think that people's energy consumption is changing?

- A) How would I know? That's not something I've ever read about or heard anything about.
- B) That's not something I've ever read about or heard anything about but I would hope that people think more about the environment nowadays and so cut down on their use of electricity at least a little.

Do you think that primary schools' approach to education is about right?

- A) Well, there are some discipline problems nowadays and some of the materials are a bit out of date. Nevertheless, in my opinion it mostly has a good balance between serious studying and more creative lessons.
- B) Well, there are some discipline problems nowadays and some of the materials are a bit out of date. On the other hand, in my opinion it mostly has a good balance between serious studying and more creative lessons.

Do you think that schools should use more technology in class?

- A) That's a good idea.
- B) That could possibly be a good idea. It can't hurt, anyway.

Do you think the government should tell people when there is even a small chance of an earthquake the next day?

- A) Without a doubt. I strongly agree with your idea.
- B) Without a doubt. I'm positive that it would have a good effect on people's peace of mind.

How important are genes in deciding someone's intelligence, do you think?

- A) Hmm, no one has ever asked me that before. I'd tend to say that it's not so important. For one thing, twins often have totally different characters.
- B) Hmm, I've never thought about that before. I'd tend to say that it is not so important. For one thing, twins often have totally different characters.

Do you think there is a danger that rising sea levels could directly affect this city?

- A) That's a difficult question. I'm not sure how much sea levels are supposed to rise, but if it's more than a metre that would definitely be an issue.
- B) I read something about that, but I'm afraid I can't remember what the conclusions were.
- C) I'm not sure how much sea levels are supposed to rise, but if it's more than a metre that would definitely be an issue.

How have people's views on divorce changed over the last 50 years in your country?

- A) I've never seen any actual research on this, but I'd say that they've changed quite a lot.
- B) I've never seen any actual research on this, but I'd say that they've become a lot more liberal.

How much do you think the government should get involved in how parents raise their children?

- A) Wow, that's a tricky one! There must be very different points of view on this, but I would say very little. In the vast majority of cases, it's better to let the parents decide.
- B) Wow, that's a tricky one! There must be very different points of view on this, but I would say that they should decide a policy on physical punishment of children because there is no reason why families should have different amounts of this.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of wind turbines?

- A) The good point is that they don't produce CO₂. The only drawback that I can think of is that they can spoil the view.
- B) The good points are that they don't produce CO₂ and don't give off other kinds of pollution. The only major drawback that I can think of is that they can spoil the view, but I suppose they also make some noise.
- C) Although there are both advantages and disadvantages, I think that overall they are a good thing because they don't produce CO₂ or pollution.

What can be done to stop global warming, do you think?

- A) Yes, I think it can definitely be halted. We just need to all work together.
- B) Well, we can do all kinds of things, both as individuals and as voters. For instance, we could make sure we stop buying things that we probably won't use.

What is the biggest mental problem in your country, do you think?

- A) There are several options, but stress appears to be the main issue.
- B) Actually, this is exactly what I have been researching. There are several options, but stress appears to be the main issue.

Why do some people resist road safety measures like seatbelts and strict speed limits?

- A) That's a good question! Because they are idiots?
- B) That's a good question! Because they are idiots? Only joking! The only thing I can come up with is that it makes them feel like a little child being told what to do by their parents.

Check as a class or with the suggested answers, making sure that you know why the other options are bad each time.

Suggested answers

*The ones in **bold** are the best answers. Make sure that you understand why the others are bad responses.*

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Yes, people in my country are interested in learning foreign languages.

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After doing the brainstorming task below, test each other on the language:

- Do the same listening for the best option activity
- Do the same, but repeating back the best option
- Listen to a question and a bad option and try to make a better answer
- Listen to a question and try to answer well
- Listen to the name of a category in the brainstorming below and try to make suitable phrases
- Listen to some vocabulary which is rephrased in the answer above and try to rephrase it (with other ways not above also possible)

Brainstorming stage

Without looking above for now, write at least two or three suitable phrases in each of the gaps below. Many answers not above are also okay.

Checking/ Clarifying phrases**Giving opinions phrases****Strong opinions phrases****Giving weak opinions phrases/ Hedging language****(Strongly and weakly) agreeing with the idea/ statement phrases****(Strongly or weakly) disagreeing with the idea/ statement phrases****Supporting your arguments phrases****Giving reasons/ Giving logical arguments (cause and effect, etc) phrases****Personal experience phrases**

Other people's experiences/ Explaining the sources of your knowledge phrases

Giving examples phrases

Talking about importance phrases

Generalising (about people in your country etc) phrases

Looking at both sides phrases

(Other) thinking aloud phrases/ filling silence phrases

Look above for suitable language. There is often also useful language in the wrong options and some things can go in more than one place above. Brainstorm more, then compare your answers as a class and/ or with a list of phrases.

Try to find examples of rephrasing (= different words in the answer which mean the same as the answers in the question) as you can above, then practise rephrasing in answers to some real exam questions.

Suggested answers

Phrases not in the example answers above are in italics below. Many more phrases are possible, so if you wrote something different, please check with your teacher.

Checking/ Clarifying phrases (when the meaning of the question isn't clear, etc)

Could you explain what... is?

Does... mean...?

If that includes..., then...

Sorry, can you say that again a little more slowly?

Sorry, does... include...?

Sorry, I didn't understand the last word. You said... something.

Sorry, I've never heard of...

Sorry, what does... mean?

By... do you mean...?

Can you give an example (of...)?

I'm afraid I'm not familiar with the word...

I'm sorry but I've never come across the word...

Sorry, can I just check? Would... be an example of...?

Sorry, can you repeat the first/ last part of the question?

Sorry, can you rephrase the question?

Sorry, could you say that another way?

When you say..., do you mean...?

Sorry, I didn't catch...

Giving opinions phrases

Giving strong opinions phrases

... certainly...

... obviously...

I really think...

I strongly believe that...

I'm positive that...

It definitely...

That would almost certainly...

To be honest,...

... clearly...

Frankly (speaking),...

I'm (absolutely) certain that...

I'm (completely) convinced that...

In my honest opinion,...

It seems clear to me that...

It seems obvious to me that...

There is (absolutely) no doubt that...

To be (perfectly) frank,...

Without (the shadow of) a doubt,...

Giving weak opinions phrases

... at least a little.

... at least for me.
... could well be...
... or something (like that).
Although there are both advantages and disadvantages,...
I assume...
I don't have any personal experience of this, but...
I don't know much about this but...
I get the impression that...
I guess...
I suppose...
I think that overall...
I would imagine that...
I would probably say that...
I'd tend to say that...
I'm afraid I know absolutely nothing about this subject. However,...
I'm afraid I know almost nothing about this topic, but...
I'm no expert on this, but...
I'm not certain about..., but...
I'm not sure about..., but...
I've never seen any actual research on this, but I'd say that...
In my humble opinion,...
In my limited experience,...
It's very difficult to generalise, but...
That could possibly...
That would seem to suggest that...
That's not something I've ever read about or heard anything about but...
There must be very different points of view on this, but...
We didn't really study this at school but...
As far as I know,...
I don't have much experience of this, but...
I personally feel that ...
I'm afraid I know very little about this, but...
I'm not (very) familiar with this topic, but...
My first thought on the top is...
My initial reaction is...
This is just my opinion, but...
This is only my opinion, but...
To the best of my knowledge,...

(Strongly or weakly) agreeing with the idea/ statement phrases

Absolutely!
I strongly agree with that idea.
Without a doubt.
... makes sense to me.
I partially agree with...
I partly agree with...

I share the opinion that...
I totally agree with...
I would support the idea of...

(Strongly or weakly) disagreeing with the idea/ statement phrases

Absolutely not.
Although I can understand that point of view,...
I am totally against this idea.
(To be honest,) I don't think so.
I can't agree with...
I don't agree with... at all.
I don't really agree with...
I don't really think that...
I have a different opinion to...
I really don't agree with...
I'm not sure that I agree with...
I'm sure many people feel that way, but...
There's no way I can accept that...

Supporting your arguments phrases

Giving reasons/ Giving logical arguments (cause and effect, etc) phrases

...lead to...
...result in...
It would have a (positive) effect on...
This happens because of...
This is caused by...
This is due to the fact that...
This is due to...

Personal experience phrases

I found that...
In my (personal/ limited/ own) experience,...
Personally, I have found...
I generally find that...
This happened to me when...

Other people's experiences/ Explaining the sources of your knowledge phrases

Almost everyone I know...
Actually, I saw a TV programme on this just a couple of weeks ago.
According to...
I read something about that, but I'm afraid I can't remember...
I read a book which said...
I saw on YouTube that...
I've never experienced this myself, but...
My friend/ teacher told me that...

Giving examples phrases

To give (just) one example,...

For instance,...

For one thing,...

... etcetera.

Probably the best example of this is...

... and so forth.

... and so on.

... and that kind of thing.

... and things like that.

..., *e.g.*...

..., *for example*,...

Talking about importance phrases

(absolutely) vital/ essential/ crucial

(incredibly/ very/ fairly/ not so/ not very/ not at all) important

Generalising (about people in your country etc) phrases

...mostly

In the vast majority of cases,...

Most...

The majority of...

... *often*...

... *usually/ generally*...

A great deal of...

A large number of...

Almost all...

In general,...

Many...

Looking at both sides phrases

Nevertheless,...

On the other hand,...

The good points are that...

The only drawback I can think of is...

It can also be said that...

Looking at it another way,...

Nonetheless,...

One advantage/ benefit/ selling point/ positive factor is...

One disadvantage/ drawback/ negative aspect/ bad point is...

There are both pros and cons.

(Other) thinking aloud phrases/ filling silence phrases

Hmmm,...

I've never (really) thought about that before.

Let me see.

Let me think.
No one has ever asked me that before.
That's a difficult question.
That's a good question!
That's a tricky one.
The only thing I can come up with is that...
Well,...

Wow, that's a tricky one!
How can I best say this in English?
It's difficult to say, but...
It's hard to say (for sure), but...
What's the best way to answer that?