

IELTS Reading tactics discussion and reading

Look at an IELTS Academic Reading exam paper and discuss what you would do in the (real) exam from the minute you open the paper, and in what order, including:

- A) The difficulties of IELTS Reading
- B) Time management
- C) What to do first
- D) Answering the first question
- E) Guessing
- F) Avoiding wrong answers
- G) Double checking
- H) Transferring your answers

Discuss these IELTS Reading exam tactics, putting a tick for things you'd definitely always do, X for ones you'd never do, and ? for others, e.g. to mean "it depends".

1. Most students find that IELTS Reading is the easiest paper
2. The main reason why IELTS Reading is difficult is because of its similarity to real English-language academic texts
3. The main reason why IELTS Reading is difficult is due to how different it is to real English-language academic texts
4. You should highlight key words in the instructions of each reading task
5. It's best to read all the questions before reading the text
6. If the questions are given before the text, that is a sign that you should probably read them first
7. You could quickly read the text before you look at the questions
8. If you read through the text before the questions, you should do so in under 5 minutes
9. The purpose of reading through the text first is to get a general understand of the ideas in it
10. If you read through the text first, you can often skip to the next paragraph after the first sentence or two
11. If anything isn't clear when you read through the text first, you should reread and/ or highlight the difficult parts
12. As you try to answer the questions, you should highlight info that helped you decide
13. The ability to scan quickly for key words from the questions really helps
14. If you aren't sure about an answer, you should write something before moving onto the next question
15. You have ten minutes extra at the end to transfer your answers, so you should only write your answers on the question sheet in the first 60 minutes
16. If you aren't sure about any of your answers, you should double check them before you move onto the next text
17. If you have extra time, you can check that the other options aren't possible

Look at a text about IELTS Reading and match the topics at the top of this page to the paragraphs. For example, topic 1 is paragraph A. Some topics are not needed. Then read the text to check if the statements above agree with the views of the writer and write:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| YES | if the statement agrees with the view of the writer. |
| NO | if the statement contradicts the view of the writer. |
| NOT GIVEN | if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this |

Tactics in the IELTS Academic Reading test

Section 1: _____

Although most IELTS preparation classes concentrate on speaking and writing, many students find the reading to be at least as challenging. This is partly because of how realistic IELTS Reading is, including authentic texts written for native speakers and the kind of deep understanding that university lecturers might expect. There are also issues with IELTS Reading which are not common in real academic reading, such as the lack of section headings and not being able to scan the text for specific words because the questions use different wording to the text. Furthermore, deciding on the best tactics is controversial and can vary from candidate to candidate.

Section 2: _____

Although the instructions are usually very similar, there are some variations and not following the instructions can lead to losing points, so it is always worth a few seconds to underline important words in the description of what you should do. After that, some people prefer to start by reading through all the questions, while others find that it is better to quickly read through the whole text quickly first. However, if the questions are given before the text, this means that it is probably better to read the questions first.

If you do read through the whole thing first, it is important to take no more than 3 or 4 minutes. Unlike real life reading, this should be done with the purpose of getting to know where the information is rather than understanding what you read, for example by only reading the first couple of sentences of each paragraph. You shouldn't bother reading again at this point and you certainly should never underline words you don't understand or which appear to be important, because it might well be that you don't need to understand that word or sentence to answer the questions.

Section 3: _____

When it comes to starting to answer the questions, if you have read through the text first, you will often find that one of the questions jumps out at you because you already know the answer or at least where that information is in the text. You should do this question first. With most kinds of tasks, you will then have more idea of where the information to answer the other questions is because the questions are usually in the same order as the text. You should therefore underline the information that could help you answer the question each time. This is usually a sentence or just a few words. If you have read through the questions before reading the text, you should quickly skim through the text until you read something that seems like an answer to one of the questions. To help with this, it is best to keep a few questions in your head at the same time in case you miss the answer to the first question. Unfortunately, it is very rarely possible to scan for key words in a question, as the question is usually in different words to the text.

Section 4: _____

If you are not sure of the right answer, crossing out wrong options is always a good idea. If you still can't decide, you could come back to it later if you have time. In that case, there is a danger that you will have forgotten your thought process by the time you come back to it. It is therefore best to write something such as a question mark next to possible answers to help you remember. In any case, you should always guess rather than leaving blanks on the answer sheet, even if that means writing random words!

Section 5: _____

You don't have any extra time at the end of the exam to transfer your answers, so for time management reasons it is probably best to do so after you finish each text. You can still easily change those answers with a pencil and eraser if you need to.

Section 6: _____

Whenever you have written some kind of answer for all the questions with one text, it's best to move onto the next text as quickly as possible. If you have time after doing all 40 questions in the test, you should go back to any questions which you wrote a question mark next to. After that, you could double check that the other options aren't possible. This is most useful with matching tasks, e.g. taking the paragraph heading that you haven't used and checking that it really doesn't match any of the paragraphs. Although most people are unlikely to have to time, you can also do the same thing with the other options in multiple choice questions.

Answer this summary question:

What point is the writer trying to make in the text?

- A) There is one best way of doing IELTS Reading that everyone should follow
- B) Different things work for different people when doing IELTS Reading, but you can still make statements about what works best for most people
- C) It's impossible to say anything about the best way of doing IELTS Reading, so different people should do whatever works for them

Check your answers with the key or as a class.

Discuss any tasks that were in the past paper and not in this worksheet (e.g. completing a diagram, short answers or multiple choice) as a class.

What are the best ways of improving your IELTS Academic Reading skills outside class?

Choose a top five from this list:

- ✧ Doing lots of official IELTS test papers
- ✧ Doing the same IELTS test paper again later
- ✧ Learning academic vocabulary with a self-study book like Academic Vocabulary in Use
- ✧ Learning speed reading techniques
- ✧ Learning the whole Academic Word List
- ✧ Practising skimming
- ✧ Practising scanning
- ✧ Reading academic journals (e.g. Nature or The Lancet)
- ✧ Reading English-language postgraduate-level textbooks
- ✧ Reading English-language school textbooks
- ✧ Reading English-language undergraduate-level textbooks
- ✧ Reading fiction
- ✧ Reading financial and business news
- ✧ Reading graded readers, e.g. an Upper Intermediate level version of Oliver Twist from Penguin Readers
- ✧ Reading news magazines like Newsweek and Time
- ✧ Reading newspapers
- ✧ Reading popular science magazines
- ✧ Reading the non-business parts of business publications like The Economist and The Financial Times weekend magazine
- ✧ Reading Wikipedia and other encyclopaedias
- ✧ Using an IELTS textbook
- ✧ Using an IELTS vocabulary book
- ✧ Watching documentaries

Cross off any which won't (really) help.

How should you do an IELTS Reading exam task at home? What should do after finishing actual exam practice?

Put these stages into order:

- ✧ Check you understand why each answer is so, including ones which you got right (as you might just have got lucky)
- ✧ Check your answers with the answer key
- ✧ Do a whole Reading exam timed, including transferring your answers
- ✧ Learn the most useful vocabulary from the text
- ✧ Read the text slowly and carefully, using a dictionary
- ✧ Read through the IELTS exam reading in a fairly relaxed way for general understanding/ for interest

How can you choose which vocabulary is and isn't suitable to learn?

How should you go about reading other things in the list above?

Use those tactics on an IELTS Reading text or test, and/ or try the self-study tips you discussed, then report back on how it went.



Suggested answers

Paragraph 1: A: The difficulties of IELTS Reading

Paragraph 2: C: What to do first

Paragraph 3: D: Answering the first question

Paragraph 4: E: Guessing

Paragraph 5: H: Transferring your answers

Paragraph 6: G: Double checking

1. Most students find that IELTS Reading is the easiest paper – NOT GIVEN
2. The main reason why IELTS Reading is difficult is because of its similarity to real English-language academic texts – NOT GIVEN
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4. You should highlight key words in the instructions of each reading task – YES
5. It's best to read all the questions before reading the text – NOT GIVEN
6. If the questions are given before the text, that is a sign that you should probably read them first – YES
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13. The ability to scan quickly for key words from the questions really helps – NO
14. If you aren't sure about an answer, you should write something before moving onto the next question – YES
15. You have ten minutes extra at the end to transfer your answers, so you should only write your answers on the question sheet in the first 60 minutes – NO
16. If you aren't sure about any of your answers, you should double check them before you move onto the next text – NO
17. If you have extra time, you can check that the other options aren't possible – YES

What point is the writer trying to make in the text?

B) Different things work for different people when doing IELTS Reading, but you can still make statements about what works best for most people

The top five and in bold and the least useful and in italics.

- ✧ **Doing lots of official IELTS test papers**
- ✧ **Doing the same IELTS test paper again later**
- ✧ *Practising scanning*
- ✧ *Reading academic journals (e.g. Nature or The Lancet)*
- ✧ *Reading English-language postgraduate-level textbooks*
- ✧ **Reading English-language school textbooks**
- ✧ *Reading fiction*
- ✧ *Reading financial and business news*
- ✧ *Reading graded readers, e.g. an Upper Intermediate level version of Oliver Twist from Penguin Readers*
- ✧ **Reading popular science magazines**

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Stages in order:

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2. Read the text slowly and carefully, using a dictionary
3. Check your answers with the answer key
4. Check you understand why each answer is so, including ones which you got right (as you might just have got lucky)
5. Learn the most useful vocabulary from the text
6. Read through the IELTS exam reading in a fairly relaxed way for general understanding/ for interest

How can you choose which vocabulary is and isn't suitable to learn?

- Use a paper-based dictionary and ignore any words which aren't in it.
- Mainly learn vocabulary which is necessary to actually answer questions.
- Also learn any vocabulary which you think you can use in your writing.
- Ignore other vocabulary, especially any which is defined in the text, is in the glossary or is in italics.

How should you go about reading other things in the list above?

- Read for interest, not stopping but underlining unknown vocabulary to look up later
- Look up the vocabulary and decide which is useful
- Transfer the vocabulary to a vocabulary list and memorise it
- Read again later to revise the vocabulary