

Questions you can't exactly answer in IELTS Speaking Part One

Take turns asking and answering questions from below, not looking at the worksheet when it is your turn to answer.

Why did you choose your university major?

What is your typical day like?

How long have lived in this city?

Are you from the country or the city?

What do people your age do in their free time?

What's the most interesting part of your town?

Where is your family from?

What kind of jobs do people in your town do?

Can you tell me something about your hometown?

How is your hometown changing?

What changes would you like to make to your hometown?

What is your hometown famous for?

On what occasions do you eat special meals?

What's your main meal of the day?

What would be your perfect job?

Do you prefer cooking at home or eating in a restaurant?

Why did you choose to take IELTS?

Were there any questions which you couldn't answer, for example because you never eat special meals?

What could you say if the question didn't match your life and so couldn't exactly be answered, e.g. if you didn't go to university?

Match the answers below with the questions above.

- Actually, I was born here.
- Can I pick a third option? I prefer to buy takeout food and take it home, which is kind of between the two.
- Can I talk about Tokyo instead? I don't really remember much about where I was born.
- Frankly, there isn't anything interesting there. The surrounding countryside is nice enough, though.
- I can't speak for most people, but I know a lot of people in tourism.
- I don't think "special" is the right word for it, but we always have KFC on Xmas Day.
- I wouldn't describe it as a choice. Everybody in my company who wants a promotion has to take it, but I suppose I could choose not to be promoted!
- I'm not sure it's possible to generalise, but the people who I know mainly play computer games and go shopping.
- I'm not sure that it's changing right now. It grew a lot in the bubble years of the 1990s, though.
- In my country most people choose the university rather than the major and then just get on the best course they can, so it's not really possible to answer that question.
- Neither, really. I was brought up on the outskirts of a medium-sized town.
- There's no real main meal in my country. All three are about the same size. However, my mother always said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day.
- There's nothing I'd want to change, really. In fact, the exact opposite – I'd like to stop it changing!
- They moved around so much that it is difficult to say, but two of my grandparents were born in Kyushu, which is in the south of Japan.
- To be frank, I'd prefer not to have to work! If I had to choose though, I'd be a pilot.
- To be honest, I don't really have a typical day, but I'm a morning person, so I like to study from early in the morning if I can.
- To be perfectly frank, nothing at all. The nearest thing to a claim to fame is that a minor pop star of the 1980s was born there, but she left when she was very young.

Underline the phrases above that you could use to answer other questions, then brainstorm similar phrases.

Compare your answers with the answer key and/ or as a class.

Read out a question and the answer with one of the underlined words missing, and see if your partner can complete it.

Ask and answer the questions again, but this time using similar phrases to explain why you can't exactly answer the question (even if you could really answer the question).

Switch partners and ask and answer the questions naturally, only explaining why you can't exactly answer if that is really the case. This time do it like the exam, with one person asking the questions for three minutes and with follow-up questions if the first answer is short.

Suggested answers

- Why did you choose your university major? – In my country most people choose the university rather than the major and then just get on the best course they can, so it's not really possible to answer that question.
- What is your typical day like? – To be honest, I don't really have a typical day, but I'm a morning person, so I like to study from early in the morning if I can.
- How long have lived in this city? – Actually, I was born here.
- Are you from the country or the city? – Neither, really. I was brought up on the outskirts of a medium-sized town.
- What do people your age do in their free time? – I'm not sure it's possible to generalise, but the people who I know mainly play computer games and go shopping.
- What's the most interesting part of your town? – Frankly, there isn't anything interesting there. The surrounding countryside is nice enough, though.
- Where is your family from? – They moved around so much that it is difficult to say, but two of my grandparents were born in Kyushu, which is in the south of Japan.
- What kind of jobs do people in your town do? – I can't speak for most people, but I know a lot of people in tourism.
- Can you tell me something about your hometown? – Can I talk about Tokyo instead? I don't really remember much about where I was born.
- How is your hometown changing? – I'm not sure that it's changing right now. It grew a lot in the bubble years of the 1990s, though.
- What changes would you like to make to your hometown? – There's nothing I'd want to change, really. In fact, the exact opposite – I'd like to stop it changing!
- What is your hometown famous for? – To be perfectly frank, nothing at all. The nearest thing to a claim to fame is that a minor pop star of the 1980s was born there, but she left when she was very young.
- On what occasions do you eat special meals? – I don't think "special" is the right word for it, but we always have KFC on Xmas Day.
- What's your main meal of the day? – There's no real main meal in my country. All three are about the same size. However, my mother always said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day.
- What would be your perfect job? – To be frank, I'd prefer not to have to work! If I had to choose though, I'd be a pilot.
- Do you prefer cooking at home or eating in a restaurant? – Can I pick a third option? I prefer to buy takeout food and take it home, which is kind of between the two.
- Why did you choose to take IELTS? – I wouldn't describe it as a choice. Everybody in my company who wants a promotion has to take it, but I suppose I could choose not to be promoted!

Suggested extra phrases

- As a matter of fact,...
- In my case,...
- I can't exactly answer that question, but...
- It's impossible to say (for sure), but I guess...
- There's no way of knowing (for sure), but I suppose...
- Well, the nearest thing I can give to an answer is...