



IMPROVING THE IELTS SPEAKING SCORE from bands 5 to 7

This study is in two parts and will focus on two subskills:

Part A) Fluency and Coherence

Part B) Lexical Resource

A) Fluency and Coherence

Fluency and Coherence

5

Usually able to keep going, but relies on repetition and self-correction to do so and/or on slow speech.

Hesitations are often associated with mid-sentence searches for fairly basic lexis and grammar.



Overuse of certain discourse markers, connectives and other cohesive features.

More complex speech usually causes disfluency but simpler language may be produced fluently.



5

Overuse of certain discourse markers, connectives and other cohesive features.



Fluency and Coherence

6

Able to keep going and demonstrates a willingness to produce long turns.

Coherence may be lost at times as a result of hesitation, repetition and/or self-correction.

Uses a range of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features though not always appropriately.

6

Uses a range of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features though not always appropriately.

Fluency and Coherence

7

Able to keep going and readily produce long turns without noticeable effort.

Some hesitation, repetition and/or self-correction may occur, often mid-sentence and indicate problems with accessing appropriate language. However, these will not affect coherence.

Flexible use of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features.

7

Flexible use of spoken discourse markers,
connectives and cohesive features.

Examples of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features for part 1:

Agreeing

Oh yeah, Absolutely, Definitely, Sure...

Casual

Actually, To be honest, I *do* actually, I can actually, Actually, I have / haven't / can / can't

Yeh, well... if I'm totally honest, To tell you the truth...Do you know, I

Practical application in part 1:


Study

- What do you study?
- Where do you study?
- Why did you choose that subject?
- What are the main topics?
- Is it a popular subject in your country?
- If you could, would you change subject?
- Do you get on well with the other students?
- Do you plan to get a job in the same field as your subject?



Workshop part 1: work in pairs and practice answering the questions with connectives.

Hometown

- Where is your hometown?
 - Do you like your hometown?
 - Do you often visit?
 - Do you like your hometown?
 - What's your hometown like?
 - What is there for a visitor to do or see in your hometown?
 - How could your hometown be improved?
 - Are there many foreigners in your hometown?
 - Do you think your hometown is a good place to bring up children?
 - Has your hometown changed much since you were a child?
 - Is there good public transport?
- 

Examples of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features for part 2:

Opening: *OK, let's make a start / OK, let's get down to business* (idiom).

Introduce each section:

Firstly / First of all, let me tell you why... let me tell you about... I'd like to tell you... I want to tell you about...

Secondly / Next let's explore... I'm going to tell you...

Thirdly / Now let's think about... Let me tell you about...

Next / Now let's examine... I'm going to explore...

Finally / Lastly, let me finish by saying... I'd like to conclude / sum up by telling you...

Practical application in part 2:

Internet (object)

Describe a useful website.

You should say:

- what it is
- how often you visit it
- what kind of site it is
- what kind of information it offers
- and explain why you think it is useful.

Workshop part 2:

Respect (person)

Describe someone you respect.

You should say:

- who the person is
- how you know about this person
- what this person does
- what this person is like
- and explain why you respect this person.

Examples of spoken discourse markers, connectives and cohesive features for part 3:

Multi word expressions:

To be honest, In my opinion, Without a doubt, From my perspective, The way I see it, I would say... Well, I have to say that... I guess...

Compliments

That's a *good / great / excellent / interesting* question. Vary and modify with adverbs: *very / really*.

Delay tactics

I've never given that much thought. Let me think about that for a second. Hmmm, let me think.

That's a *tricky / difficult / tough /* question.

Practical application in part 3:

Language

- At what age should children start learning a foreign language?
- Why do some people struggle to learn a new language?
- Do you think it's easier to learn a new language if you are in the country where the language is spoken?
- What kinds of dictionaries do people use to learn a language?
- Why do some people want to learn a new language?
- Do you think it is important to learn the language of a country that you are visiting on holiday?

Workshop part 3:

Language

- At what age should children start learning a foreign language?
- Why do some people struggle to learn a new language?
- Do you think it's easier to learn a new language if you are in the country where the language is spoken?
- What kinds of dictionaries do people use to learn a language?
- Why do some people want to learn a new language?
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B) Lexical Resource



Lexical Resource

5

Resource sufficient to discuss familiar and unfamiliar topics but there is limited flexibility.

Attempts paraphrase but not always with success.

Lexical Resource

6

Resource sufficient to discuss topics at length.

Vocabulary use may be inappropriate but meaning is clear.

Generally able to paraphrase successfully.

Lexical Resource

7

Resource flexibly used to discuss a variety of topics.

Some ability to use less common and idiomatic items and an awareness of style and collocation is evident though inappropriacies occur.

Effective use of paraphrase as required.

Paraphrasing, Idioms and Collocations

I believe cycling is environmentally friendly.

Are you one of those tree embracers?

No, but I'm a tree hugger!



1. Paraphrasing:

There are two techniques:

1. Change the form
2. Use Synonyms

Change the form

VERB



NOUN

NOUN



ADJ

Change the Form

Example:

Q. What can be done *to* **alleviate** poverty?

To alleviate = Verb. Noun = **alleviation**. Present Participle / Gerund: **alleviating**.

A1. The alleviation of poverty is a serious problem that needs addressing.

A2. Alleviating poverty requires both urgent action and a long term plan.

Synonyms

Q. What can be done **to alleviate** poverty?

Synonyms:

To reduce / reduction

To impact

To relieve / relief

To eradicate (destroy/wipe out) / eradication

To ease (the burden of poverty / the suffering caused by poverty)

Let's answer the question with these synonyms.

Synonyms

Q. What can be done to alleviate **poverty**?

Which synonyms could we use in place of 'poverty' ?

Possible answers:

Financial hardship / struggling financially / impoverished people / impoverished communities / suffering economic hardship / suffering economically

Change the Form

Example 1:

Q. What **social problems** are there in your country?

1. Social = *Adjective*. Noun = **society**

A: Chinese society faces a number of problems.

2. Problems = Noun. Adjective = **problematic**

A: There are a number of issues in Chinese **society** that are **problematic**.

Synonyms

Q. What **social problems** are there in your country?

Social: societal local communities, people, the population

Problems = issues, challenges, difficulties

A1. There are many **serious issues** facing **local communities** in China.

A2. **People** in China face many **societal challenges** on a daily basis.

2. Idioms

Idioms are essential skill if students want to score above 6 in IELTS. There are somewhere between 25,000 - 50,000 English idioms. I recommend students learning and practice using 50 so that, during a test, a few will pop into the student's mind naturally, without too much thought. Let's think about an idiom we could use when talking about social issues and poverty:

3 idioms relating to social problems:

What is the meaning of these idioms?

1. Make ends meet

Many local people struggle to make ends meet.

2. A rising tide lifts all boats.

A rising tide doesn't always lift all boats. We need investment into grassroots projects.

3. Tip of the iceberg

You might see a beggar on the streets, but that's the tip of the iceberg. Whole communities are suffering.

Application part 1: Idioms

Now see if you can answer this question on poverty, using at least 1 of the idioms. If you can, use all 3.

Work with your partner.

Q. What can be done to alleviate poverty?

Possible answer:

Many poor people in the mountainous regions of Mongolia struggle to *make ends meet*. Economic investment isn't always the answer. *A rising tide doesn't always lift all boats*. Farmers need direct support to become sustainable. And farming is just *the tip of the iceberg*. I would say 90% of the rural population are suffering hardship.

Application part 2: Paraphrase + Idioms

Next, answer the same question including both the idioms and the words we paraphrased:

Work with your partner:

Q. What can be done to alleviate poverty?

Possible answer:

Many poor people in the mountainous regions of Mongolia struggle to *make ends meet*. Economic investment isn't always the answer. *A rising tide doesn't always lift all boats*. Farmers need direct support to become sustainable. And farming is just *the tip of the iceberg*. I would say 90% of the rural population are suffering hardship. Therefore investment at grassroots level would help *reduce financial hardship*. I believe this would have a huge impact on those communities who are suffering economically.

Application 3: Idioms, Paraphrasing & Discourse Markers

Did you notice the *discourse marker* I used in the last answer?

Now work with a partner, and incorporate your connectives into your answers with your idioms and paraphrasing!

Speaking Part 2: Using Idioms

As we know students have 1 minute to prepare their two minute 'lecture.'

That 1 minute is valuable preparation time, but it isn't long!

I always tell my students to spend 30 seconds jotting down synonyms in order to paraphrase and spend the next 30 seconds thinking of relevant idioms.

30 seconds - paraphrasing

30 seconds - idioms

Idioms for Speaking Part 2.

Let's look at these part 2 topics, and try to think of some relevant idioms we could use:

1. Describe a language you have learned
2. Describe a person who is kind
3. Describe a journey that didn't go as planned
4. Describe a useful website
5. Describe an interesting hobby
6. Describe a gift you recently gave to someone
7. Describe a member of your family you get on well with
8. Describe an exercise you know
9. Describe a time you were embarrassed
10. Describe a time of day you like.

Work with your partner / group.

Some possible idioms (i)

1. Describe a language you have learned

Mother tongue / pick up / head nor tail / burn the candle at both ends / put your thinking cap on

2. Describe a person who is kind

Heart of gold / go the extra mile / old as the hills / mad as a hatter / give you shirt of their back

3. Describe a journey that didn't go as planned

Off the beaten track / play it by ear / middle of nowhere

4. Describe a useful website

Digital native / piece of cake / cutting edge / computer nerd / mouse potato

5. Describe an interesting leisure time activity

Couch potato / hang out / chill out / shoot some hoops / catch some rays / catch a movie / grab a bite

Some possible idioms (ii)

6. Describe a gift you recently gave to someone

My crush / the one / spent a fortune / cost an arm and a leg / over the moon / on cloud 9

7. Describe a member of your family you get on well with

Get on like a house on fire / besties / thick as thieves / birds of a feather / brother from another mother / peas in a pod

8. Describe an exercise you know

Couch potato / out of shape / get into shape / a wake up call

9. Describe a time you were embarrassed

Go beetroot / want the ground to swallow you up / put your foot in it / barking up the wrong tree

10. Describe a time of day you like.

let your hair down / chill out / chillax / hang out / have a blast / kill time / time to kill / couch potato

NOTE to STUDENTS:

IELTS band score 7 is not easy to achieve, but it *is* possible,
with a little study and a lot of practice!

PRACTISE TEST

**It's time to put our skills into practice.
Remember, practice makes perfect!**

Part 1a. Hometown

- Where is your hometown?
- Do you like your hometown?
- Do you often visit?
- Do you like your hometown?
- What's your hometown like?
- What is there for a visitor to do or see in your hometown?
- How could your hometown be improved?
- Are there many foreigners in your hometown?
- Do you think your hometown is a good place to bring up children?
- Has your hometown changed much since you were a child?
- Does your hometown have good public transport?

Part 1b: Work

- What is your job?
- Where do you work?
- Why did you choose that job?
- Is it a popular job in your country?
- Do you like your job?
- Do you get on well with your colleagues?
- What responsibilities do you have ?
- Do you consider yourself a good team player?
- If you had the chance, would you change your job?
- Do you plan to continue in the same job in the future?

Part 1c: Home

- Can you describe the place where you live?
- How long have you lived in your current home?
- What do you like most about your home?
- Are there any changes you would like to make to your home?
- Do you think it's better to live in a house or an apartment? Why?
- How important is it for you to feel comfortable at home?
- What is your favorite room in your home? Why?
- Do you enjoy decorating your home? Why or why not?
- What kind of neighborhood do you live in? Do you like it?

Part 2: Language

Describe a language you have learned

You should say:

- What language it is
- When you started learning it
- How you learned it
- What was difficult about it
- Why you decided to learn it

Part 3: Language

What age should children learn a new language?

Why do some people find it difficult to learn a new language?

What have you found most difficult when learning English?

What kind of dictionaries do people use?

Is it better to learn a new language in the country where it is spoken?

Do you think people should try to learn a new language before they go on holiday?

Why is learning a new language important?

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