

About the test

IELTS Academic

What IELTS is and who takes it

IELTS is the English test most Chinese students sit before studying abroad. It is not a test of what you know about English; it is a test of whether you can **use** it — listen to a lecture, read an argument, write a case, and hold a conversation with a stranger.

- There are two tests, and you choose one when you book. **IELTS Academic** 学术类 is for study at degree level and above, and for professional registration 职业注册 in fields such as medicine and nursing. **IELTS General Training** 培训类 is for migration 移民 and for study below degree level.
- Almost every Chinese student applying for a Bachelor's or Master's degree needs **Academic**.
- Four skills are tested on one day: Listening, Reading and Writing back to back, then Speaking, which may be the same day or a few days either side.
- You can sit it on **paper** or on **computer**. The questions are the same. On computer you get your result in three to five days instead of thirteen, and — this matters later — only a computer test qualifies for One Skill Retake.

The four parts and the clock

Part	Time	What it is
Listening	about 30 minutes, 40 questions	4 recordings, played once only
Reading	60 minutes, 40 questions	3 long texts, 2,150–2,750 words in total
Writing	60 minutes, 2 tasks	Task 1 at least 150 words, Task 2 at least 250
Speaking	11–14 minutes	a face-to-face interview 面试 in three parts

- The whole test takes about **2 hours 45 minutes**.
- **Listening on paper gives you 10 extra minutes** to copy your answers onto the answer sheet 答题卡. On computer you type straight in and get 2 minutes to check.
- **Reading gives you no extra time at all.** You write on the answer sheet as you go. Students who plan a transfer 誊写 at the end lose marks discovering this on test day.

- Writing Task 2 is worth **twice** as much as Task 1, so budget 20 minutes for Task 1 and 40 for Task 2 — and if you run out of time, run out of it on Task 1.

How the band score works

- Each skill is reported as a **band** 分数档 from 0 to 9, in whole and half steps: 5.5, 6.0, 6.5.
- The **overall band** 总分 is the average of the four skills, rounded to the nearest half band. An average ending in .25 rounds **up** to the next half band; one ending in .75 rounds up to the next whole band.
- So 6.5, 6.5, 5.0 and 7.0 averages 6.25 and is reported as **6.5**.
- △ Universities usually set a minimum overall band **and** a floor on each skill. An overall 7.0 with a 5.5 in Writing is not the same offer as a flat 7.0 — the weakest skill decides the result. Work on the lowest number, not the average.
- In Listening and Reading each correct answer earns one mark, and your mark out of 40 becomes a band. IELTS publishes only four points on that scale — on Academic Reading, 15 marks reaches band 5, 23 reaches band 6, 30 reaches band 7 and 35 reaches band 8 — so a practice score tells you which band you have reached, not a precise number.
- Writing and Speaking are judged by a trained examiner 考官 against four criteria 评分标准 each, which are set out in the Writing and Speaking sections of these notes.

Academic, General Training and UKVI

- **Listening and Speaking are exactly the same test** in Academic and General Training. Two of your four skills need no separate preparation at all.
- **Reading differs.** Academic uses three long texts from books, journals and newspapers written for a general reader. General Training starts with everyday notices and advertisements, moves to workplace texts, and ends with one longer general text.
- **Writing Task 1 differs.** Academic asks you to describe a graph, table, chart or diagram. General Training asks you to write a letter. Task 2 is an essay in both.
- **IELTS for UKVI** is the same test again — same questions, same format, same difficulty, same scoring. Only the administration differs: a UKVI session, and a Test Report Form 成绩单 that says so. If a UK university or visa route asks for it, book that session and prepare identically.
- **IELTS Life Skills** is a different, much smaller test: Speaking and Listening only, at CEFR A1, A2 or B1, marked Pass or Fail rather than banded. It is for certain visa routes, never for university study.

One Skill Retake

This rule should change how you prepare, so it is worth knowing before you book.

- If one skill lets you down, you may retake **that skill alone** instead of the whole test.
- Any one of Listening, Reading, Writing or Speaking — **one skill, once** for each full test.
- Two conditions: the full test must have been **IELTS on computer** at a centre that offers the service, and the retake must be **within 60 days** of it.
- You then receive a new Test Report Form carrying the new score for that skill and the original scores for the other three.
- △ The practical consequence: find out **which single skill** is short of your target and repair that one. For most Chinese candidates it is Writing, and the repair is a fortnight of marked essays rather than a whole second test.

Exam tips

- Book the **computer** test unless you have a reason not to. Faster results, and the retake option exists only there.
- Learn the question types until they are automatic, then practise under the clock. The types never change; only the topic does.
- Write your target for each skill on the first page of your notebook. Prepare against the lowest number, not the average.
- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: IELTS Academic, General Training, scoring in detail, One Skill Retake, IELTS for UKVI.