

Reading

IELTS Academic

The three passages and the 60-minute clock

Academic Reading is 40 questions on three passages, 2,150–2,750 words in total, taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers written for a general reader rather than a specialist.

- **There is no extra transfer time.** You write on the answer sheet as you go. Students who plan to copy their answers across at the end lose five or more marks finding out.
- **Twenty minutes per passage**, and the passages get harder. Use **skimming** 略读 for the shape of a passage and scanning for one fact.
- The **register** 语域 of the texts is a general reader's, not a specialist's. If passage 1 takes you thirty minutes, you will not finish passage 3, and passage 3 carries the same 13 or 14 marks.
- Put a **hard stop** at 20 and 40 minutes. Move on with blanks and come back; never let an early passage eat a later one.
- **Questions follow the passage in order** for most task types. If you have found question 17 in paragraph D, question 18 is almost never in paragraph B.
- You will not have time to read a passage properly and then answer. Read the questions, then **scan** 扫读 for the place each one is answered, then read that place carefully.

True, False, Not Given

This is the biggest single mark-loser for Chinese candidates, and it is lost in one specific way: **Not Given is confused with False.**

- **True** — the passage **says** it. The wording will differ; the meaning will not.
- **False** — the passage says the **opposite**. There is a specific sentence that contradicts the statement.
- **Not Given** — the passage does not say, either way. It may be obviously true in the real world. It may be something the writer would surely agree with. That does not matter.

The test:

1. Find the part of the passage the statement is about.
2. Ask: is there a sentence here that **contradicts** it? If yes → **False**.

3. If no: is there a sentence here that **states** it? If yes → **True**.
 4. If neither → **Not Given**. Do not reason further.
- △ The commonest mistake is to decide *the passage does not say this, so it is false*. That is exactly what Not Given means, and it is half the errors on this task type.
 - Watch **qualifiers** 限定词: *all, always, never, only, the main reason*. A statement saying *the main cause* against a passage saying *one cause* is **False**, not True.
 - **Yes / No / Not Given** is the same task applied to the writer's **opinion** rather than to facts. Ask what the writer thinks, not what is true.
 - Answer with the exact word — *TRUE, FALSE, NOT GIVEN*. Writing *T, F, NG* is accepted; writing *Not mentioned* is not.

Matching headings

- The trap is matching a **word**. A heading containing *pollution* and a paragraph containing *pollution* is the pairing the test expects you to make wrongly.
- A paragraph's **topic sentence** 主题句 usually carries its function.
- Match the paragraph's **function** instead: what is this paragraph *doing*? Introducing a problem, giving a history, presenting evidence against, drawing a conclusion.
- The first and last sentences of a paragraph carry its function far more often than the middle.
- Do the paragraphs you are sure of first and cross those headings off. There are always more headings than paragraphs, and eliminating is faster than matching.
- Two headings will usually be near-synonyms. Those two are the pair the item is testing; decide between them last, when the others are gone.

Completion tasks and the grammar of the gap

Sentence, summary, note, table, flow-chart and diagram completion all work the same way.

- **Obey the word limit.** *NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS* means a three-word answer is wrong even when it is the right idea. A hyphenated word counts as one; a number counts as one.
- **Words must come from the passage**, unchanged, in most completion tasks. Do not substitute a synonym 同义词 of your own.
- **Read the grammar of the gap** — its **word class** 词性 — before you look for the answer. If the gap follows *a*, you need a singular countable noun. If it follows *have been*, you need a past participle. This alone eliminates most wrong candidates.
- In summary completion, the summary paraphrases one section of the passage, not the whole thing. Find that section first.

- If a box of options is given, the answer is in the box — and the box will contain words that fit the grammar but not the meaning.

Matching information and matching features

- **Matching information** (“which paragraph contains...”) is the one task type that does **not** follow passage order, and a paragraph can be used more than once. Leave it until last: by then you know the passage.
- Look for the *specific* thing named — an example, a comparison, a date, a reason — rather than the topic.
- **Matching features** pairs statements with people, places or studies. Underline each name in the passage first; the names are the fastest thing on the page to find.
- **Matching sentence endings** is a grammar task as much as a meaning task. Only some endings fit each beginning grammatically, which cuts the list before you think about content.
- A **prefix** 前缀 or a **suffix** 后缀 often gives the sense without the dictionary.
- Vocabulary in context: guess from the **word parts** and from the sentence around it. You are never expected to know every word, and looking one up in your head costs time you do not have.

Exam tips

- **Never leave a blank.** There is no penalty for a wrong answer, and a blank is a mark given away. Fill every gap in the last two minutes even if you are guessing.
- Transfer answers **as you go**, in capitals, and check that the number on the answer sheet matches the number of the question.
- Practise the whole 60 minutes in one sitting. Reading three passages in three separate sessions trains none of the pacing the test is really measuring.
- If a question is taking more than ninety seconds, mark it, move on, and return. The last question of a passage is worth the same as the first.
- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: Reading format, scoring in detail.