

Speaking

IELTS Academic

What the examiner is listening for

Speaking is 11 to 14 minutes with a real examiner, in three parts, and it is recorded. You are marked on four criteria, each 0 to 9, averaged into your Speaking band.

Criterion	What it means in practice
Fluency and coherence 流利度与连贯性	can you keep going, at a natural speed, with ideas that follow each other? Self-correction is fine; long silences and constant restarting are not
Lexical resource	can you talk about a topic you did not prepare, and paraphrase when a word will not come?
Grammatical range and accuracy	do you use more than one tense and more than one clause type, and how often do errors appear?
Pronunciation 发音	can a listener understand you without effort?

- **Pronunciation is a quarter of the band.** Most candidates spend none of their preparation on it, which makes it the cheapest quarter to improve.
- **You are not marked on your opinions.** There is no right answer. An interesting answer and a dull one score the same if the English is the same.
- **Fluency is not speed.** Speaking fast with no structure scores below speaking steadily with visible organisation.
- The examiner follows a script and controls the time. Being interrupted is normal and is not a bad sign.

Part 1 — answer, then add one reason

Four to five minutes of questions about yourself: home, family, work, study, and two or three familiar topics.

- **Never answer in one word.** *Do you like cooking?* — *Yes* is a band-4 answer. The pattern is **answer + one reason or example**, two or three sentences.
- *Yes, I do* — *I cook dinner most evenings because it's the one part of the day I'm not looking at a screen.* That is the whole technique, and it works on every Part 1 question.

- Do not give a speech either. Part 1 has many questions; a 40-second answer costs you the chance to show range on the next one.
- Expect present, past and future in this part: *do you...*, *did you...* *when you were younger*, *will you...*. Answer in the tense you were asked in.
- Prepare **topics, not scripts**. A memorised answer is audible and is discounted.

Part 2 — the two-minute long turn

You get a card with a topic and four prompts, **one minute to prepare** with paper and pencil, then you speak for **two minutes**. The examiner will not stop you early.

- **Most candidates dry up at 45 seconds.** That is the whole difficulty, and it is fixed by practice with a timer, not by better ideas.
- **Use the preparation minute to write nouns, not sentences.** Six to eight words, one or two per prompt. Sentences cannot be read aloud naturally; nouns trigger speech.
- **The four prompts are your paragraphs**, in order, and the last one — usually *and explain why...* — deserves the most time. Spend about 20 seconds on each of the first three and 50 on the last.
- If you finish early, go back and add detail: *what it looked like*, *who else was there*, *how I felt at the time*, *what I would do differently*. Detail is always available.
- Past tenses dominate this part, because most cards ask you to *describe a time when...*. Get the irregular verbs right; they are the errors an examiner cannot miss.
- It is fine to invent. Nobody is checking whether the story is true.

Part 3 — develop, hedge, disagree politely

Four to five minutes of abstract discussion about the Part 2 topic, at a higher level.

- **A one-sentence answer is the standard failure here.** Part 3 is where the higher bands are won, and the skill is **developing**: state a view, give a reason, name an example, then consider the other side.
- **Fluency** here means continuity and organisation, not speed.
- **Hedging** 委婉表达 is grammar as well as politeness, and it shows range: *it tends to be*, *it depends on*, *broadly speaking*, *I'd say*, *on the whole*, *that's probably truer of... than of...*
- Disagree with the examiner when you want to; it is not rude, and it shows language: *I see why people say that, but I'd argue...*, *That's true up to a point, although...*
- Expect **comparison** (*how has this changed?*), **speculation** (*what will happen...?*) and **evaluation** (*is that a good thing?*). Each needs a different tense, which is exactly what criterion 3 is measuring.

- If you do not understand, ask: *Sorry, do you mean... ?* That costs nothing. Answering a question you did not understand costs marks.

Pronunciation for Chinese speakers

Chinese-L1 pronunciation errors come from a small, enumerable set. Working on these four is worth more than any amount of general “speaking practice”.

- **Final consonants.** Mandarin syllables end in a vowel, -n or -ng, so English final consonants get dropped or a vowel is added. *Wanted* becomes *wan*; *desk* becomes *des*. This one change does more for intelligibility than anything else on the list.
- **-ed and plural -s.** These are grammar **and** pronunciation. Dropping them is heard as a tense or number error as well as a pronunciation one, so it costs two criteria at once. *Walked* ends in a /t/ sound, *needed* gains a whole extra syllable, *lived* ends in a /d/ sound — three different endings.
- /θ/ **and** /ð/ (*think, this*) do not exist in Mandarin and usually become /s/ and /z/. Put the tongue tip between the teeth; it feels exaggerated and sounds correct.
- /l/, /n/ **and** /r/ at the start of a word, and /v/ **versus** /w/ — *light* / *night*, *very* / *wery*.
- A **syllable** 音节 is the unit stress sits on.
- **Word stress** 重音 in long words. *phoTOgraphy*, *phoToGRAPHic*, *ecoNOMic*, *eCONomy*. A word with the stress on the wrong syllable is often not recognised at all, even when every sound is right.
- **Intonation** 语调 is the tune of a sentence; **sentence stress** 句重音 is which words carry the weight.
- **Sentence stress and intonation.** English stresses the content words and reduces the rest, and a flat, evenly-stressed delivery is heard as monotonous. Rising intonation on a list, falling at the end of a statement.
- Record yourself for two minutes and listen back. It is uncomfortable and it is the fastest diagnostic available.

Exam tips

- **Arrive with topics, not scripts.** Memorised answers are recognised and discounted, and they fall apart when the follow-up question comes.
- Practise Part 2 with a **timer**, out loud, standing up, until two minutes is comfortable. That single habit is worth half a band.
- If you make a mistake, correct it once and move on. Repeatedly restarting a sentence damages Fluency more than the original error did.
- Speak at your normal pace. Speed is not fluency, and a nervous rush makes every

pronunciation problem worse.

- Sources, checked on 19 September 2026: Speaking format, scoring in detail.