

IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors

Master English Australia | Simplified study guide, not official descriptors | Bands 4–9

Band	FLUENCY AND COHERENCE Can you keep speaking clearly?	LEXICAL RESOURCE Do you have enough words to express yourself?	GRAMMATICAL RANGE AND ACCURACY Can you use different sentences correctly?	PRONUNCIATION Are you easy to understand?
9	- You speak very smoothly. - You almost never repeat or correct yourself. - If you pause, it is to think about your ideas, not because you cannot find the English. - You give full answers with clear explanations, details and examples.	- You use a very wide range of words naturally and correctly. - You can express exactly what you mean on any topic. - You use natural expressions and idioms correctly.	- You use many different sentence structures naturally and correctly. - Your grammar is consistently correct. - Only very rare small slips occur.	- You are effortless to understand. - You pronounce sounds and words clearly. - You use word stress, sentence stress, rhythm and the rise and fall of your voice naturally. - Your words connect naturally when you speak.
8	- You speak smoothly with only occasional repetition or self-correction. - You usually pause to think about your ideas, not because you cannot find the English. - You give full answers and explain your ideas clearly.	- You use a wide range of words naturally and correctly. - You can choose specific words that express exactly what you mean. - You use less common words and idioms well. - If you do not know a word, you can explain the meaning another way.	- You use a wide range of sentence structures. - Most sentences have no grammar errors. - Only occasional grammar mistakes occur.	- You are easy to understand all the time. - You pronounce individual sounds and words clearly. - You use stress and the rise and fall of your voice well. - You can still have an accent. It rarely makes you difficult to understand.
7	- You can give longer answers without much difficulty. - Your answers remain clear and easy to follow. - You may sometimes pause, repeat yourself or correct your English. - You use different linking words to connect your ideas.	- You have enough vocabulary to discuss many different topics. - You can use some less common words and natural expressions. - You usually choose words that naturally go together. - If you do not know a word, you can usually explain it another way.	- You use different types of complex sentences. - Many sentences have no grammar errors. - Some grammar mistakes still occur, but your meaning is generally clear.	- You are generally easy to understand. - You show the clear pronunciation described at Band 6 and some of the stronger control described at Band 8. - Your sounds, stress and the rise and fall of your voice are becoming more natural.
6	- You can give longer answers, but your speaking is not always smooth. - You may pause, repeat yourself or correct yourself. - You use different linking words, but not always correctly.	- You have enough vocabulary to talk about everyday topics and more general topics. - You sometimes choose the wrong word. - If you do not know a word, you can usually explain it another way.	- You use both simple and complex sentences. - Your complex sentences contain more grammar mistakes. - These mistakes rarely stop the listener understanding you.	- People can generally understand you. - Some words or sounds are not clear. - Your word stress or sentence stress is sometimes wrong. - The rise and fall of your voice may sometimes sound unnatural.
5	- You can usually keep speaking, but you may speak slowly, repeat yourself or correct yourself often. - Short, simple answers can be smooth. - Longer or more difficult answers cause more problems. - You may use the same linking words again and again.	- You have enough vocabulary for everyday topics, but your vocabulary is limited for more general or abstract topics. - You may struggle to say exactly what you mean. - Sometimes you can explain an unknown word another way, but not always.	- You can make basic sentences with reasonable accuracy. - You use only a limited range of complex sentences. - Complex sentences usually contain mistakes and can sometimes be difficult to understand.	- Your pronunciation is between Bands 4 and 6. - Some parts are clear, but pronunciation problems happen often enough to affect understanding. - See Bands 4 and 6 to understand the difference.
4	- You cannot keep speaking smoothly without noticeable pauses. - You speak slowly and often repeat or correct yourself. - You can connect simple ideas, but your linking is basic and repetitive. - Your answers can be difficult to follow.	- You can talk about everyday topics with basic vocabulary. - You have difficulty finding words for more general or abstract topics. - You often choose the wrong word. - You rarely manage to explain an unknown word another way.	- You mainly use basic sentence structures. - You use very few complex sentences. - Grammar mistakes are frequent. - Some mistakes cause misunderstanding.	- People sometimes have difficulty understanding you. - You often pronounce words or individual sounds incorrectly. - Word stress and the rise and fall of your voice are often unclear or incorrect. - Pronunciation problems frequently make your meaning harder to understand.

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What do these words mean?

IELTS term	What it means for you
Linking words	Words and phrases that connect your spoken ideas, such as and, but, because, so, however, for example, also and on the other hand. Use different ones naturally rather than repeating the same one.
Give a full / longer answer	Say more than one short sentence when the question allows it. Explain why, add a detail, give an example or describe an experience. It does not mean talking for as long as possible.
Develop your answer	Say more about your answer: explain why, give a reason, add a detail, give an example or describe an experience.
Everyday / familiar topics	Subjects you probably know well, such as your family, home, work, studies, hobbies, food, transport and hometown.
More general / less familiar topics	Subjects you may not talk about every day or that need more thought, such as technology, advertising, education, the environment, society or the future. You do not need expert knowledge.
Less common words	More specific or less basic words. Instead of always saying good, you might use useful, enjoyable, effective, convenient or beneficial when one of these gives the meaning you want. It does not mean using strange or extremely difficult words.
Idioms / natural expressions	Expressions whose meaning is not always the same as the individual words, for example once in a while, a waste of time or get the hang of it. Do not force idioms into every answer.
Correctly / accurately	Using a word or grammar structure correctly: the correct meaning, form and natural word combination.
Precisely	Choosing a word that expresses exactly what you mean. For example, exhausted is more precise than tired if you mean very tired.
Explain a word another way	If you cannot remember a word, describe it using other English words. This is called paraphrasing.
Individual sounds	Producing English sounds clearly enough for the listener to recognise the word.
Word stress	Making the correct part of a word stronger, for example Table and imPORtant.
Sentence stress	Making the important words in a sentence stronger so your meaning is clear.
Rise and fall of your voice / intonation	How your voice moves up and down when you speak. Natural intonation helps show meaning and attitude.
Connected speech	How words naturally join together when people speak.
Accent	The way your pronunciation is influenced by where you come from or the languages you speak. You do not need a British or Australian accent; you need to be easy to understand.

Band 9: This does not mean perfect English. Very rare small mistakes can still happen. Below the lowest band shown: Pauses, limited vocabulary, grammar mistakes and pronunciation problems become more serious and increasingly make communication difficult.

An examiner assesses your complete performance across all four criteria. This guide cannot guarantee a score.

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