
IELTS Speaking Strategies for Parts 1, 2, and 3

Part 1

Expand your answers

You may get questions that only require a very simple answer. The answer may be “yes” or “no,” but you shouldn’t stop there. Always expand your answers and say more.

Example:

“Does your family have any special traditions?”

“Yes. Every year my relatives travel to my family’s house to celebrate Thanksgiving.”

Paraphrase the question

It can be very helpful to begin your response by restating a portion of the question. Try your hardest to paraphrase the question in your response rather than simply repeating what the examiner said. You can use synonyms where possible, but you can also rearrange the sentence structure of the question.

Example:

"Who helped you with your homework when you were in school?"

Poor response: “My sister helped me with my homework when I was in school.”

(The words and structures are almost exactly the same as the question.)

Better response: “My sister helped me study when I had difficult assignments in school.”

(Good use of synonyms, but the sentence structure is very similar to the question.)

Best response: "When I had a difficult school assignment, my sister was always there to assist me." (Good use of synonyms and changes to the sentence structure.)

Stay on topic

Don't allow your responses to wander away from the question the examiner asks you in Part 1. Your answers do not need to be long—a few sentences is fine. When you've answered a question, stop talking and let the examiner ask the next question.

If you're feeling nervous, it can be very easy to lose focus and take the conversation away from the original question. You may lose points for this. Also, the more you say beyond what's necessary, the more likely it is that you will make mistakes!

Part 2

Answer all of the questions

Don't skip any of the questions listed on the topic card. Otherwise, you will be marked down for missing information.

Stay focused

Make sure you respond very directly to the prompts on the page, and don't discuss unrelated topics.

Timing

Use your preparation time to develop an answer to Feature 3 of your topic card. This part of the card requires an extended response with main points and supporting details. Do not waste time writing out notes for the first questions (Features 1 and 2). Use the topic card as a reminder of what you should say.

Write simple notes

You don't have time to write out lengthy notes in one minute. Even if you had more time, your examiner would penalize you for reading responses that you wrote out ahead of time. Write notes as reminders of what to say.

Paraphrase

As with other sections of the Speaking test, make sure you paraphrase anything that is similar to the language on your topic card. You will be marked down if you use too much language taken directly from the card.

Part 3

Say what's easiest

Part 3 questions normally require you to respond with your perspective on a topic. There are no “wrong” or “right” answers to these questions. Furthermore, keep in mind that your examiner is not grading your ideas. You are only graded on your ability to answer the questions appropriately in English.

Say what demonstrates your English

Your Part 3 responses must always answer the questions directly, and they must be reasonable and logical. However, you are not required to express your “true” opinions. Since you don’t have much time to think during Part 3, it is often better to go with the first thing that comes to mind. Your goal should be to provide fluent responses. That’s it. As much as possible, respond by discussing ideas you know how to express in English so you can display your skills. Avoid saying things that you can’t discuss fluently, even if those ideas would represent your perspective more accurately.

When necessary, buy some time to think

The speed of Part 3 can be challenging. Sometimes, it may help you to slow things down so you can gather your thoughts before speaking. This is especially true if you don’t fully understand the examiner’s question.

It can lower your score if you have too many long pauses, or if you stumble over a lot of words. It can also lower your score if you simply repeat the examiner’s question as you think of your answer.

Try to avoid this by using one of the tips below. They can help you to gain a few precious seconds to think about what you want to say! **NOTE:** You should only use these when truly necessary. Try your best not to use any of these tips more than once.

You can:

1. Ask the examiner to repeat the question.

Example: “I want to make sure I understood the question. Could you please repeat it?”

2. Comment on the question.

Example: "That's an interesting question. I would say that...."

3. Introduce your idea.

Examples:

"Well, the first thing I would say is...."

"I haven't considered that before, but one thing that comes to mind is..."

"People have many opinions about that in my country. I believe..."

4. Ask about the meaning of a word. (Note: Only ask about the meaning of a word if you truly don't understand.)

Example: "I didn't understand the meaning of _____. Could you please explain what that word means?"

Just answer

No matter what, you must attempt an answer to each question. Don't give up!