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The Band 7.0 Blueprint

What Band 7 actually requires in each of the four skills, how the overall band is calculated, and where most candidates actually lose it.

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The Band 7.0 Blueprint

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What this book is

IELTS gives you four scores, not one. Most candidates know that somewhere in the back of their mind and still study as if there were a single "English level" to raise. This book explains, skill by skill, what a band 7 answer actually looks like next to a band 6 or 6.5 one — so you know what to fix before you spend a month practising the wrong thing.

This is not a training course. It is the map you read before picking a route. Other books on this site already go deep on a single skill — the table at the end of Part 7 lists them. This book tells you, honestly, which skill is worth that deeper work first.

Who this is for

Anyone who has not sat the test yet, or has sat it once and does not know why the four numbers on the results page came out the way they did. If you already know your weakest skill and just want to fix it, you can skip ahead to the chapter for that skill, or go straight to the deeper book on this site if one exists for it.

How to use it

Read Part 1 first. It explains how the overall band is actually calculated, and that arithmetic changes which skill is worth your time — most of the

rest of the book depends on it. If you sat the test before 2026, or you're reading older prep advice, Part 1.4 covers exactly what changed in the test itself that year.

Then read the four skill chapters in any order. Each one is short on purpose: enough to tell you what band 7 requires and what typically holds a band 6–6.5 answer back, not enough to replace real practice.

Part 6 is the diagnostic — the handful of failures that show up across three or four skills at once, not just one. Part 7 turns everything before it into a plan you can actually follow.

One honest note

No book can promise you a score. What this book can do is show you, plainly, what the standard actually is — the writing, the speaking, the listening and the reading are still yours to do.

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Part 1 — How Band 7 is actually scored



1.1 Four skills, four scores

You sit one test, but you leave with four separate marks: Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking. Each is scored on its own, against its own rules, before anything is combined.

Listening and Reading are the more mechanical two. You answer 40 questions in each, and the number you get right — your raw score — is converted onto the 9-band scale using a table. Get 30 out of 40 in Listening and you land on band 7. The table shifts slightly test to test, so a slightly harder paper does not quietly punish everyone who sat it. Even so, 30/40 sits at band 7 reliably enough to plan around.

Writing and Speaking work differently. There is no raw score to convert. An examiner marks your essay, or your interview, against four written criteria — different criteria for each skill — and your band for that skill is the average of those four marks. This is the part most candidates have

never had explained to them: your Writing score is not one judgement, it is four, quietly averaged into one number before it ever reaches you.

1.2 How the overall band is calculated

Your overall band is the average of the four skill scores, rounded.

The rounding rule surprises people. A score ending in .25 rounds up to the next half band; a score ending in .75 rounds up to the next whole band. So:

Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Average	Overall band
6.5	7.0	6.5	7.0	6.75	7.0
6.5	6.5	6.5	7.0	6.625	6.5
7.0	7.0	6.0	7.0	6.75	7.0

Look at the second row. Three skills at 6.5 and one already at 7 still lands on an overall 6.5 — the average falls just short of the .75 line that would round it up. The third row shows the other side of it: one skill sitting a full band below the other three barely costs anything, because the average still clears .75.

The number that decides your overall band is not "am I good enough overall" — it is whether your average reaches the .75 line or falls just short of it. That is worth knowing before test day, not after.

1.3 Why "weakest skill first" beats "favourite skill first"

Because the four scores are averaged, moving a low score up changes the average more than moving a high score up by the same amount — there is nowhere higher for the high score to go, but the low one has real room.

Raising a 6.0 to a 6.5 moves your average by a quarter band. Raising a 7.5, your strongest skill, up to an 8.0 moves it by the same quarter band. But that last quarter band is usually harder to find. The mistakes holding back a strong skill tend to be small and stubborn. The mistakes holding back a weak skill are usually bigger and easier to fix.

Most candidates study their favourite skill, because practising something you are already good at feels better than practising something you are not. It also moves your overall band the least. Part 7 turns this into an actual plan; for now, remember the direction: find the lowest of the four, and start there.

1.4 What changed in the test itself in 2026

None of the arithmetic above changed. The four skills, the four writing and speaking criteria, and the 9-band scale are the same test they have always been. What changed is how and where you sit it.

From mid-2026, IELTS began retiring the paper-based test worldwide — every test moves to computer delivery, though the exact timeline still varies by market, so check what applies where you are sitting it rather than assume the switch has already reached your test centre. In some markets you can still choose to handwrite the Writing section on paper while sitting Listening and Reading on a computer, an option called Writing on Paper. If you are sitting IELTS for a UK visa (the UKVI

version), that track has been computer-only for longer, with no paper option at all.

Two changes are worth knowing about even if neither affects you directly.

One Skill Retake: once a candidate has sat a computer-delivered test, they can retake a single skill — just Listening, or just Writing, whichever one went badly — within 60 days, instead of sitting the whole test again. It is a standard option for every computer-delivered candidate now, not a special case. **The paper-to-computer switch lands differently on each skill**, not just as one uniform change: Listening loses its old 10-minute paper transfer time in exchange for a 2-minute check window at the end, since answers are typed live rather than copied across afterward (*Listening 7.0: The 30-Correct-Answers Playbook*, this site's own dedicated Listening book, covers exactly what that costs a candidate who leaves an answer blank). Reading, by contrast, barely changes shape at all — it never had a separate transfer block either way, so typing an answer live instead of writing it by hand is close to the whole of it (*Reading 7.0: The 30/40 Question-Type Priority Map* covers this in full).

Check what applies in your country before you book — delivery details vary by test centre, and this page will not always be the newest word on it. The official page is **ielts.org/news-and-insights/updates-to-ielts-test-delivery**.

Part 2 — Listening 7.0

2.1 What 30/40 actually requires

Band 7 in Listening needs 30 correct answers out of 40. That is not "understand everything" — it is a hit rate, and the test is built assuming you will miss some.

Section 4 in particular is designed to be hard to follow completely: one speaker, an academic topic, no second voice to break it up or repeat an idea in different words. Even strong listeners lose answers there. The candidates who reach band 7 are not the ones who understood every word of Section 4 — they are the ones who did not let three missed answers in Section 4 cost them answers in Section 1, which is usually the easiest section on the paper and the one with the least excuse to lose marks on.

2.2 The four sections, in plain terms

Section 1 — a conversation about something everyday: booking something, filling in a form, arranging a visit. The easiest section, and the one where losing marks costs the most relative to the effort required not to.

Section 2 — one speaker, a monologue about something practical: a talk about a place, an event, a set of facilities. Often paired with a map or a plan, which is its own skill — following spoken directions onto a diagram in real time, not just listening for facts.

Section 3 — a conversation between two or more people, usually students or academics discussing something related to study. The

information moves between speakers, which means missing who is speaking costs you as much as missing what they said.

Section 4 — one speaker, an academic monologue. No second voice, no natural pause for a question. This is where the pace feels fastest, because nothing interrupts it.

Each section plays once. There is no second listening, and that single fact is why prediction — reading the questions before the audio starts and guessing the shape of the missing information — matters more in Listening than in any other skill.

2.3 The single habit most 6.0–6.5 listeners share

Losing the thread after missing one answer.

The audio does not wait. A listener who spends three seconds mentally re-running a missed question loses the next one too, because the audio has already moved on to it. The candidates who reach band 7 have trained themselves to let a missed answer go immediately — mark a guess and move on — rather than chase it.

This same pattern shows up in Reading, Writing and Speaking too, in different clothes: one small setback derailing everything after it rather than costing just itself. Part 6 comes back to it.

Part 3 — Reading 7.0

3.1 What 30/40 actually requires

Like Listening, band 7 in Reading needs roughly 30 correct answers out of 40 — the exact number moves slightly test to test, but 30 is the number to plan around. And like Listening, this is a hit rate under time pressure, not a requirement to read and fully understand three long passages in 60 minutes. Very few candidates finish with time to spare and full comprehension of everything they read. The band 7 candidates are the ones who spend their limited time on the questions that pay, not the ones who read fastest.

3.2 The question type that separates 6.5 from 7.0

True/False/Not Given, and its close relative Yes/No/Not Given, cause more band 6.5 candidates to stay at band 6.5 than any other question type. The confusion is almost always between **False** and **Not Given**. A statement that contradicts the passage is False. A statement the passage simply never mentions is Not Given. In normal reading, "the text doesn't say" and "the text says the opposite" barely feel different. That is why this distinction trips people up. It is not that their English is weak.

The fix is not more vocabulary. It is a habit: before marking an answer False, find the exact sentence that contradicts it. If you cannot point to a sentence that disagrees, the honest answer is Not Given, however confident the passage's silence makes you feel.

3.3 Paraphrase recognition

Reading questions rarely reuse the passage's exact wording — a question about a study's "financial support" might be answered by a sentence in the passage about its "funding". This is not the test trying to trick you. It is testing whether you can recognise the same idea in different words, which is most of what reading in English actually is once you are past a certain level.

Skimming for the exact words in the question, rather than the idea behind them, is the single most common reason a capable reader runs out of time before finishing. Practising paraphrase recognition directly — reading a sentence and writing three different ways to say the same thing — does more for this skill than reading more passages does.

3.4 Time as the real constraint

Sixty minutes, three passages, 40 questions, one answer sheet, no extra transfer time. A reader who would score every question correctly given unlimited time can still land at band 6 under exam conditions, because the constraint is not comprehension — it is finishing.

Roughly 20 minutes per passage is the plan to build toward, spent as: two or three minutes skimming for structure, the rest answering questions in the order the passage presents its information rather than the order the questions are printed in, since the two usually match.

Part 4 — Writing 7.0



4.1 The four criteria, in plain terms

Every piece of writing you submit is marked against the same four things, whether it is a short Task 1 report or a full Task 2 essay.

Task Achievement / Task Response — did you do what the question actually asked? Task 1 asks you to describe or summarise data, a process, or a diagram; Task 2 asks you to answer a question with your own developed position. Answering a different, easier question than the one printed is the single most expensive mistake in Writing, because it caps every other criterion's usefulness — beautiful sentences that answer the wrong question do not rescue the score.

Coherence and Cohesion — can a reader follow your writing once, at normal speed, without going back? This is about order and paragraphing more than it is about linking words. One idea per paragraph, in an order the reader can predict, does more for this criterion than any number of

stock connector phrases stitched between sentences that were not organised to begin with.

Lexical Resource — do you use the right word, not the impressive one? A common word used exactly beats a rare word used almost correctly. Range still matters, but precision is what a band 7 examiner is actually listening for.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy — can you vary your sentences without breaking them? This criterion punishes two opposite failures at once: only ever writing short simple sentences, and writing long complex ones that fall apart under their own weight.

4.2 Task 1, in outline

Task 1 asks you to describe something objectively — a chart, a table, a diagram, a map, or (in General Training) to write a letter — in at least 150 words, in about 20 minutes.

The single biggest gap between a band 6 and a band 7 Task 1 is selection. A band 6 answer tries to mention every number on the chart, in the order they appear, and ends up as a list with sentences around it. A band 7 answer picks the two or three most significant features — the highest, the lowest, the clearest trend, the most striking comparison — and organises the report around those, mentioning supporting detail only where it serves one of them. Every number does not need a sentence. The overall shape does.

No dedicated Task 1 book exists on this site yet, so this section carries slightly more of the weight than the equivalent Task 2 section below — treat it as the fuller word on Task 1 until a deeper one is published.

4.3 Task 2, and where to go deeper

Task 2 asks for a full essay responding to a question, in at least 250 words, in about 40 minutes. It is worth roughly twice what Task 1 is worth toward your Writing band, which is one more reason "weakest skill first" from Part 1.3 still leaves room to weigh Task 2 more heavily within Writing itself.

The same four criteria apply, but the shape of a band 7 essay is specific: a clear position stated in the introduction and held to the end, one idea developed properly per body paragraph rather than several ideas listed thinly, and a conclusion that restates the position rather than introducing a new one. Five distinct Task 2 question types recur across the test — opinion, discussion, advantages/disadvantages, problem/solution, and two-part questions — and each rewards a slightly different essay shape.

That distinction, and a full model essay for each of the five types with the marking made visible, is exactly what *Band 7 Writing Task 2*, this site's dedicated Writing book, covers. If Writing is your weakest skill, that book is the next thing to read.

Part 5 — Speaking 7.0

5.1 The four criteria, in plain terms

Speaking is marked live, by the examiner sitting across from you, against four criteria that mirror Writing's but ask different questions of you.

Fluency and Coherence — do you speak at a natural pace, in a natural order, without long pauses to search for words or restart sentences? This is not about speed. A slower speaker who develops one idea clearly outscores a fast speaker who jumps between half-finished thoughts.

Lexical Resource — the same rule as Writing: the right word beats the impressive one. In Speaking this also covers paraphrasing — being able to say the same thing a second way when the first way does not land, rather than repeating yourself or going silent.

Grammatical Range and Accuracy — can you use a range of sentence structures under the pressure of speaking live, without most of them breaking? Nobody speaks with zero mistakes; the criterion rewards range that mostly holds together over safety that never risks anything complex.

Pronunciation — not an accent requirement. It is about whether a listener can understand you without effort: word stress, sentence stress, and intonation that makes your meaning clear, not imitation of any particular native accent.

5.2 The three parts, briefly

Part 1 — short questions about familiar topics: your home, your work or study, your interests. Roughly four to five minutes. The examiner is forming a first impression here, and short, underdeveloped answers cost more in Part 1 than candidates expect, because there is little else in this part to balance them against.

Part 2 — the cue card. You get one minute to prepare, then speak for one to two minutes on a given topic without interruption. This is the part candidates over-rehearse: a memorised answer delivered to a slightly different cue card sounds exactly like what it is, and it costs Fluency and Coherence the moment it stops fitting the actual question.

Part 3 — a discussion connected to Part 2's topic, but more abstract: opinions, comparisons, speculation about the future or about society generally. This is where Lexical Resource and Grammatical Range are tested hardest, because abstract discussion demands more of both than describing something familiar does.

5.3 Where to go deeper

Full model answers for representative questions in all three parts, marked up the same way *Band 7 Writing Task 2* marks its essays, live in this site's dedicated Speaking book, *IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3*. If Speaking is your weakest skill, that book is the next thing to read.

Part 6 — Where most candidates actually lose the band



The four chapters above each look at one skill. This one looks across all four, because the deep-dive books on this site each see only the skill they cover — and some of the most expensive mistakes on this test show up the same way in every skill at once.

6.1 Running out of time, not running out of ability

Reading loses candidates who could answer every question correctly given no clock. Writing loses candidates who plan a strong essay and then have to cut the conclusion short to finish in time. Speaking has its own version: a Part 2 answer rehearsed to run the full two minutes leaves nothing in reserve, so Part 3's harder, unrehearsed questions get thinner answers than the candidate is actually capable of.

In every case, the skill was there. The clock beat it. Practising under real time limits — not "I'll finish this practice test whenever I finish it" — is

the single change most likely to move a candidate whose untimed work already looks like band 7.

6.2 Answering the question that was not asked

Writing's Task Achievement criterion punishes this directly, but it is not only a Writing problem. A Reading answer that is true, and clearly stated in the passage, still scores zero if it does not match what the specific question asked — a common trap in True/False/Not Given, covered in Part 3.2. A Speaking Part 3 answer that is interesting and well expressed still under-delivers if it drifts away from the actual question into a related point the candidate had prepared to talk about.

The habit that fixes all three versions is the same: before answering, restate the question to yourself in your own words, and check your answer against that restatement before moving on, not after.

6.3 One strong skill masking three weak ones

Part 1.2's arithmetic makes this concrete. A confident, articulate Speaking performance can sit at band 7.5 or 8 while Listening, Reading and Writing each sit at 6 or 6.5 — and the overall band still lands at 6.5 or 7, not 8, because the average is pulled down by the other three.

This matters because confidence in one skill can quietly convince a candidate they are further along overall than they are. A candidate who feels strong in Speaking, because conversation comes naturally to them, may spend their preparation time on Speaking anyway — the skill they least need to — simply because it feels good to practise something you are

already good at. Part 1.3 already named this pattern; here it is the reason a candidate's *felt* level and their *overall band* can disagree by a full band or more.

Part 7 — Building your own plan

7.1 A ten-question self-assessment

Answer each question honestly, for your most recent practice attempt or the real test if you have sat it. These are not scored questions — they are aimed at finding your actual weakest skill, which is not always the one that feels weakest.

Listening

1. In your last full practice test, did you lose track of a question after missing the one before it, more than once?
2. Could you have predicted roughly what kind of answer (a number, a name, a place) most of the missed questions needed, before the audio reached them?

Reading 3. Did you finish all three passages with time to check your answers, or was the last passage rushed? 4. In True/False/Not Given questions, could you point to the exact sentence that made you choose False, or were some of those answers a guess?

Writing 5. In your last Task 2 essay, is your position in the final paragraph the same one you stated in the introduction? 6. In your last Task 1 report, did you select the two or three most significant features, or did you try to mention every number on the chart?

Speaking 7. In Part 2, did your answer stay on the actual cue card topic, or did it drift toward a topic you had rehearsed? 8. In Part 3, were your answers roughly the same length and depth as your Part 2 answer, or noticeably thinner?

Overall 9. Looking at your four most recent skill scores (or your honest estimate of them), which one is lowest? 10. Is the skill you have been practising most recently the one from question 9 — or a different, more comfortable one?

7.2 Turning one weak skill into a two-week focus

Take the skill from question 9. For two weeks, that skill gets the majority of your practice time — not all of it, but the majority. A simple split that works for most candidates: three sessions a week on the weak skill, one session a week on each of the other three, just enough to keep them from slipping.

Each session on the weak skill should end with one specific note: which one of that skill's recurring failures (from the chapter above) showed up this time. "I ran out of time on passage three again" is a useful note. "I need to get better at Reading" is not — it does not tell you what to change next session.

After two weeks, retake a full practice test in that skill alone and compare it honestly against where you started. If it has moved, keep going or move to the next-lowest skill. If it has not, the problem is more likely to be which specific failure you are practising against than how much you are practising — go back to the relevant chapter above and re-read it before starting week three.

Where to go next

Your weakest skill	What to read next
Writing	<i>Band 7 Writing Task 2</i> — full model essays for all five Task 2 question types, marked to show why each earns its band; and <i>Writing 7.0: The Four Criteria, Decoded Sentence by Sentence</i> — what separates a band-6.5 sentence from a band-7 one under each of the four criteria
Speaking	<i>IELTS Speaking: Parts 1, 2 and 3</i> — model answers for all three speaking parts, marked the same way; and <i>Speaking 7.0: What "Fluent Enough" Actually Sounds Like</i> — where the line between 6 and 7 sits under each of the four criteria, shown in transcripts with the pauses left in
Listening	<i>Listening 7.0: The 30-Correct-Answers Playbook</i> — what each of the six official question types tries to trip you up with, and the habit that beats it
Reading	<i>Reading 7.0: The 30/40 Question-Type Priority Map</i> — the eleven official question types, ranked by how many marks they carry and how cheaply each mark is won

This site keeps adding books — check **freeieltsbooks.net** for newer ones.

The end

You now know how the overall band is actually calculated, what band 7 requires in each of the four skills, the handful of failures that cost candidates marks across several skills at once, and which skill is worth your time first.

That is the map. The rest is practice — timed, honest, and aimed at the specific failure each session turns up, not just "more of it."

Good luck with the test.

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