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STRATEGIES FOR THE LISTENING TEST OF IELTS

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IELTS Listening – Task Type 1 – Form/Notes/Table/Flow-chart/Summary Completion

Task Description

What are candidates required to do?

Candidates have to fill in gaps in an outline of part or of all of the listening text. The outline will focus on the main ideas in the text. In all cases except the summary, note form can be used when completing the gaps. This means that articles, auxiliary verbs etc. may be omitted when they are not necessary for the meaning. The summary is written in connected sentences and so it must be grammatically correct.

What variations are there on this task type?

The outline may be

1. A form: often used to record factual details such as names, addresses, numbers, etc.
2. A set of notes: used to summarise any type of information using the layout to show how different items relate to one another.
3. A table: used as a way of summarising information which relates to clear categories – e.g. place/time/price
4. A flow-chart: used to summarise a process which has clear stages. The direction of the process is shown by arrows.
5. A summary: used to summarise any information in the form of a complete text.

Candidates may have to

1. Select their answers from a list on the Question Paper.
2. Identify the missing words from the recording which fit into the form/notes etc. In this case, they should not change the words from the recording in any way, and should keep to the word limit stated in the instructions.

How many words or numbers can be used to fill the gaps?

Candidates should read the instructions very carefully as the number of words or numbers they should use to fill the gaps will vary.

Form filling

How to approach the task

- Try to work out the context of the conversation, since this is usually non academic in nature, notice the role you will be playing in this conversation: The interviewer or the interviewee? Normally, you take the role of the person who makes the questions.
- Predict all the information you will be listening to, and also try to make them into questions. Is it a name? An address? A telephone number? A card number? A Post code? A date?
- Listen carefully and try to follow each section trying not to get lost.

Note Completion

How to approach the task

- Try to work out the context of the conversation, notice the role you will be playing in this conversation.
- Predict all the information you will be listening to, and also try to make them into questions. Is it a name? An address? A telephone number? A card number? A Place? A date?
- There are two basic forms of note completion:
 - **Type 1:** Prompts are given in note form, not in full sentences, which means that you will listen to a place, address, name, a number, a time, etc.

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- **Type 2:** Prompts are given in the form of sentences which you must complete using missing words. Sometimes the missing words come in the middle of the sentence, but more often they come at the end.

Table Completion

How to approach the task

- Look at the table and figure out what the topic of the conversation might be.
- Read the words at the top or side of each column or row and turn them into a full question. This will help you to follow the conversations. Also, try to predict the direction in which the information will be given (horizontally or vertically).
- For each question decide what type of information you need to listen for, e.g. a type of food, a subject, a noun, a verb, a time, a number (money), etc.
- How many speakers do you expect to hear?

Flow Chart Completion

How to approach the task

- The flow chart can be seen as a variation of the note completion task, but the difference is that this represents a sequence of events. Since the events are signalled by arrows, it may be easy to follow the conversation and not get lost.
- Follow the guidelines for note completion on this task.

Summary Completion

How to approach the task

- For each line or segment of the summary decide what sort of information you should listen for.
- Try making questions to ask about the information you need.
- Make some notes about what type of information.
- Be careful about the stem of the sentence. You may probably have to change the wording of the listening to fit it in the sentence in the booklet, e.g. in the listening the sentence is said in active voice but the pattern in the booklet is in passive form, so you should make the proper changes and write your answer in the passive voice.

IELTS Listening – Task Type 2 – Multiple Choice

Task Description

What are candidates required to do?

There is a question or a sentence beginning followed by three possible answers or sentence endings. Candidates have to choose the one correct answer A, B or C.

What form do the questions take?

They may involve sentence completion – the stem gives the first part of a sentence and candidates choose the best way to complete it from the options. The stem could also be worded as a complete question; with the candidates choosing the option which best answers it.

What variations are there on this task type?

Sometimes candidates are given a longer list of possible answers and told that they have to choose more than one. In this case they should read the question carefully to check how many answers are required.

What skills are being tested?

Multiple Choice items are used to test a wide range of skills. They may require the candidate to have a detailed understanding of specific points or an overall understanding of the main points of the listening text.

How to approach the task

- Analyse the questions and underline the key words of each one. Also take into consideration all the previous prediction techniques, and context identification applied in the previous tasks.

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- Look at the different options given; sometimes there are 3 options, sometimes 4. But the analogy to be made is the following:
 - The trick of the multiple choice questions is to identify the minimal differences between the options. Sometimes these differences are the key to the correct answer. The underlying analogies are crucial here; these analogies can be by extreme similarity or dissimilarity.

For example: (Minimal Differences)

- 9 The caller's number is
- A 020(7997) 9909
 - B 020(7989)7182
 - C 020(8979)7182

In this question, three numbers are given, **A**, **B** and **C** are similar in the first 3 digits. **A** and **B** are similar in the first 5 digits, but **B** and **C** are more similar because they are the same number with the variation in position of the 4 numbers in the middle (7989 – 8979). IELTS will evaluate your ability to recognize these small differences. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the correct answer should be **B** or **C**, because **A** would be too easy to identify.

Example: (Direct Opposition in wording)

- 27 The tutor recommends that Frances should do
- A a PhD but not an MPhil.
 - B an MPhil or a PhD.
 - C another project.
 - D her work more carefully.

Here, the most similar ones are **A** and **B**, since they oppose in meaning. These tricks of confusion are always present in the IELTS listening test, the answer is most likely to be between these two options, **C** and **D** would be too easy to identify, so they are excluded from the analysis. Also, remember that you will not probably listen to the conversation in the same order that appears in the answer. For this question, the tape script goes as follows:

TUTOR: Yes. That section needed a bit more work on it. But as I said, by and large it was very good. And Frances. Your project was excellent, so much so that we think you should take it further and perhaps do a PhD or at least an MPhil. What do you think?

The answer is obviously the option **B**, but if you notice, you might get confused by choosing letter **A**, since it has the same position of the recommendations. Do not just match words on the question paper to what you hear on the tape. Read the 'stem' of the question carefully to avoid being drawn to the wrong answer.

IELTS Listening – Task Type 3 – Short-answer Questions

Task Description

What are candidates required to do?

Candidates read a question to which they have to write a short answer using information from the listening text. A word limit is given, usually no more than three words and/or a number. (Candidates should check this carefully for each task.)

What variations are there on this task type?

Sometimes candidates are given a question which asks them to list two or three points.

Are candidates penalised for writing more than the stated number of words?

Yes. If candidates write more than the number of words asked for, they will lose the mark even if their answer includes the correct word(s). Words like 'the', 'a/an' are not counted, so they can be used to make four words.

What about contractions or hyphenated words?

Contracted words will not be tested. Hyphenated words count as single words.

How to approach the task

- Read the questions carefully and figure out the context of the conversation.
- Underline all the 'key words' that can help you to get the correct answer. Pay attention to the *Wh-* question word present, this will help you to predict what sort of information you need:
 - *What?* → *Something, it is related more with the rest of the key words*
 - *Where?* → *A place*
 - *When?* → *A time, a date, a day of the week*
 - *Who?* → *A person or people, an institution or organisation, someone*
 - *Why?* → *A reason*
 - *How?* → *A method of doing something*
 - *How much or how many?* → *Quantities*

IELTS Listening – Task Type 4 – Sentence Completion

Task Description

What are candidates required to do?

Candidates read a set of sentences summarising key information from all the listening text or from one part of it. They have to complete a gap in each sentence using information from the listening text. They usually have to write no more than three words and/or a number.

How are candidates asked to write their answers?

The words should be taken directly from the listening text and written in the space on their Question Paper to be transferred later.

Are candidates penalised for writing more than the stated number of words?

Yes. If candidates write more than the number of words asked for, they will lose the mark even if their answer includes the correct word(s). Words like 'the', 'a/an' are not counted, so they can be used to make four words.

What about contractions, or hyphenated words?

The rules for Short-answer Questions also apply here. Contracted words will not be tested. Hyphenated words count as single words.

How to approach the task

This is a variation of the notes completion task; they tend to be more similar to the Type 2, i.e. the answer normally goes embedded in the middle or at the end of the sentence. Pay extreme attention to the 'stem' of the sentence in the paper. You may probably have to change the wording of the listening to fit it in the sentence in the booklet, e.g. in the listening, the sentence is said in active voice but the pattern in the booklet is in passive form, so you should make the proper changes and write your answer in the passive voice.

For example:

15 Mr. Gold said he was if people had not seen him smoking.

The tape script related to this question goes as follows:

"...If anyone mentioned they hadn't seen me smoking I simply said I was cutting down. I had to be sure of success."

On this occasion, no changes are made in the answer. You should simply write 'cutting down' on the space corresponding question number 15 in the answer sheet. But notice the wording of both, the question in the paper and the one in the listening.

IELTS Listening – Task Type 5 – Labelling a Diagram, Plan or Map

Task Description

What are candidates required to do?

Candidates have to complete labels on a visual. The answers are usually selected from a list on the Question Paper. Candidates should transfer the letter of the option they have selected to the Answer Sheet in the time allowed.

What variations are there on this activity?

The visual may be

- a diagram (e.g. a piece of equipment)
- a set of pictures
- a plan (e.g. of a building)
- a map (e.g. of part of a town)

How to approach the task

This exercise will test your ability to follow a description, so extra attention must be paid to any adjectives used to make any kind of description made, in the case of maps, be careful you know how to follow directions. The listening will probably be longer, and the answers related to these questions may be concentrated in one section of it, so you do not need to pay attention to everything they say, only be aware when the description is started.

- Read and identify the parts of the diagram you need to label, and make sure you understand them.
- Try to figure out which part the description will start from. The rest should be easy if you are able to follow the direction of the talk.
- Be careful that the numbering of questions follows the descriptions on the tape; students may get lost if the numbers do not follow the same sequence of the listening.

IELTS Listening – Task Type 6 – Classification

Task Description

What are candidates required to do?

Candidates have to match a numbered list of items from the listening text to a set of criteria.

What skills are being tested?

This task type is designed to test candidates' ability to recognize relationships and connections between facts in the listening text, and is most often used with texts dealing with factual information. Candidates need to be able to listen for detail.

How to approach this task

- Read the questions to understand what you are expected to write.
- If an example is given, cross out immediately the corresponding option from the option list if the exercise in case is matching a set of facts with names or items in box. In the case of matching criteria, this cannot be done; it is preferable to make some symbols on the top of the columns to help you quickly identify the criterion used.
- Underlined the key words in each option and be aware of any paraphrase of them because they will not be exactly the same in the listening.

IELTS Listening – Task Type 7 – Matching

Task Description

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What are candidates required to do?

Candidates have to match a numbered list of items from the listening text to a set of items in a box.

What variations are there in this task type?

Many variations of this task type are possible as far as the types of options to be matched are concerned.

How to approach this task

Since this is a variation of the previous task type, follow the same guidelines.

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DOs and DON'Ts in the Listening Test

- ✓ Listen carefully to the introduction to each section. This will give you useful information about the situation and the speakers.
- ✓ Use the time at the beginning of each section (and in the middle of Sections 1 – 3) to read ahead the questions and think about the topic.
- ✓ Read the instructions for each task carefully. Remember to check the maximum number of words allowed.
- ✓ Write all your answers as you listen – remember you won't hear the recording a second time.
- ✓ Check that what you write makes sense in the context.
- ✓ Answer all the questions even if you don't feel sure about an answer – you may have understood more than you think.
- ✓ Wait until the end of the test to transfer your answers. You have ten minutes for this which is plenty of time.
- ✓ Write clearly when you transfer your answers. If an answer isn't clear on your answer sheet, you will lose the mark.
- ✓ Check your spelling (and grammar where necessary).

- ✗ Don't worry if you have to cross out or change an answer.
- ✗ Don't panic if you miss one question. Look ahead and concentrate on the next one.
- ✗ Don't try to rephrase what you hear. Write down the words you hear which fit the question.
- ✗ Don't write more than the maximum number of words or letters allowed for each answer.
- ✗ Don't copy any words that were printed on the Question Paper when you transfer your answers to the Answer Sheet.