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**ISSN 2454-8596**

[www.vidhyayanaejournal.org](http://www.vidhyayanaejournal.org)

**An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal**

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**IELTS as a Tool for Language Proficiency Test: A Study with reference to immigration**

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ISSN 2454-8596

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### ABSTRACT

It is generally recognized that proficiency in either English or French is essential if you wish to be economically successful in Canada. Indeed, numerous recent studies reveal that an immigrant's language proficiency is perhaps the most important indicator of economic success. Canada is very keen to welcome immigrants from all over the world. Canadian government also knows about the difficulties of future applicants which they are facing due to a high IELTS band requirement for additional points of Canadian Immigration. Due to these difficulties faced by the majority of the people over the world, Canadian government has very kindly reduced the IELTS score requirement for Canadian Immigration Points. The

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) has now decreased the IELTS band requirement criteria for Canada Skilled worker Immigration points. There are many cases where applicants were rejected only due to less score in IELTS. The Government of Canada has taken note of these studies, and has begun implanting language requirements for numerous immigration programs. The research paper will confer the barriers and suggestions for IELTS as a language proficiency test for Canadian Immigration.

### KEYWORDS:

**IELTS, Language Test, Canadian Study**



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**INTRODUCTION:** It is generally recognized that proficiency in either English or French is essential if you wish to be economically successful in Canada. Indeed, numerous recent studies reveal that an immigrant's language proficiency is perhaps the most important indicator of economic success. Moving to Canada as an immigrant is

an exciting and challenging opportunity. There are a number of jobs available in the skilled as well as the unskilled sector. The largest sector has been the skilled sector. For the unskilled sector some vocational training along with some vocational education and four to five years of work experience and basic speaking knowledge of English would be the criteria. As for the skilled sector university degrees, professional qualifications, fluency in English and five to seven years of work experience are must. International work experience is of great advantage. Criteria for obtaining a permanent visa to Canada are age, educational qualifications, English and French language ability, relatives in Canada arranged employment in Canada etc. All these contribute towards a permanent residency application. Canada is very keen to welcome immigrants from all over the world. Canadian government also knows about the difficulties of future



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applicants which they are facing due to a high IELTS band requirement for additional points of Canadian Immigration.[1]

### IELTS AS A LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST:

Any aspirant, interested in overseas study or immigration and in some cases while applying for international jobs, is required to undergo an IELTS test. The IELTS score is required to get admission into many renowned universities across the world and a majority of immigration destinations demand their applicants to take IELTS test in order to qualify for the eligibility criteria. The IELTS test serves as a perfect medium to evaluate one's language benchmark and in many cases; help the applicants find adept employment opportunities for themselves. Ace English language skills have always been one of the major selection criteria as far as the eligibility factor under the point based system is concerned. IELTS score of an immigrant applicant offers an opportunity for the immigration officers to judge the applicants for their English language skills. History says that earlier the immigration officers used to take a face-to-face interview with the applicants and come to a final judgment. But the system had many loopholes and the outcome usually resulted into prejudiced situations. This test, further allows the immigration officer to judge the candidate on the basis of all the required four skill such as understanding power, reading abilities, speaking skills and listening capabilities. This was not possible with the earlier concept of *one-on-one interview*. Keeping all these things in mind, the concept of IELTS Test was introduced. IELTS test holds an international acceptability, so its importance is automatically highlighted. An IELTS test is an integral part and one of the most critical aspects of almost all the immigration processes such as Study Visa, General Skilled Migration program amongst others. In addition, this test gives the applicants (applying for Study Visa) a polished opportunity to check on their language skill levels and apply for a particular course in accordance with their rankings. This also means that if the applicant manages to achieve the target score, it will provide ample confidence to the applicant and his college about his brilliant eligibility level.

### RECENT CHANGES FOR IELTS AS A LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST MADE BY CANADIAN IMMIGRATION:

*“Extensive research has consistently shown that the ability to communicate effectively in either French or English is a key factor in the success of new citizens in Canada,” said Minister Kenney. “We believe it is important that new citizens to be able to participate fully in our economy and our society.”[2]*



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The *Citizenship Act* already requires that applicants be able to communicate in one of Canada's official languages. This regulatory change will not increase the language level required but will change the way that citizenship applicants aged 18–54 demonstrate their language ability. Under the old rules, there was no objective way to test language abilities of applicants. Under the new rule, applicants must provide objective evidence that they meet the language requirement, achieving the Canadian Language Benchmark in *speaking* and *listening*, when they file their application. Applicants will be required to submit acceptable evidence, such as:

- the results of a CIC-approved third-party test; or
- the evidence of completion of secondary or post-secondary education in English or French; or
- the evidence of achieving the appropriate language level in certain government funded language training programs.

CIC has decreased the minimum IELTS band score from 7 bands to 6.5 bands to obtain four points for Immigrate to Canada in Skilled Worker Category. Now, one can obtain 4 points for one module of IELTS if one scores 6.5 bands as compared to old system which required at least 7 bands in IELTS to obtain four points in a specific module of IELTS.

Only listening module gained the IELST score instead of reduction. i.e. 7.5 bands which was 7 bands previously. One can get 16 points for immigration if the aspirant for the Canadian immigration manages to achieve following minimum band in IELTS<sub>[3]</sub>

- Writing : 6.5 Band
- Reading : 6.5 Band
- Speaking : 6.5 Band
- Listening : 7.5 Band

Band score for speaking and writing tasks can be referred from <https://www.teachers.cambridgeesol.org>



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## PURPOSE OF IELTS TEST

**Listening Test:** The IELTS Listening test is designed to assess a wide range of listening skills, including how well a test taker:

- understands main ideas and specific factual information
- recognizes the opinions, attitudes and purpose of a speaker
- follows the development of an argument

**Reading Test:** The IELTS Reading test is designed to assess a wide range of reading skills, including how well a test taker:

- reads for the general sense of a passage
- reads for the main ideas
- reads for detail
- understands inferences and implied meaning
- recognises a writer's opinions, attitudes and purpose
- follows the development of an argument



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**Writing Test:** The IELTS writing test is designed to assess a wide range of writing skills, including how well a test taker:

- writes a response appropriately
- organises ideas



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- uses a range of vocabulary and grammar accurately

**Speaking Test:** The IELTS Speaking test is designed to assess a wide range of skills. The examiner will want to see how well a test taker can: [4], [5]

1. communicate opinions and information on everyday topics and common experiences; to do this you will need to answer a range of questions
2. speak at length on a given topic using appropriate language
3. organise your ideas coherently
4. express and justify your opinions
5. analyse, discuss and speculate about issues



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## COMPONENTS OF IELTS TEST

**1. Listening Test:** The IELTS Listening test takes approximately 30 minutes, and you are allowed an extra 10 minutes to transfer your answers from your question booklet to your answer sheet.

The IELTS Listening test is broken down into four sections:

The test taker will begin by listening to a recording of instructions and a sample question for section 1. Then he will read the questions for section 1, listen to section 1, and answer the questions. This procedure is repeated for sections 2, 3 and 4. In the final 10 minutes, you will transfer your answers onto the answer sheet. Each section is heard once only. There are 40 questions. A variety of question types is used, and you may be asked to:

- answer multiple choice questions



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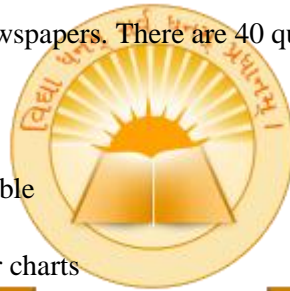
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- label a plan, map or diagram
- fill in a form
- complete a table
- complete a flow-chart
- give short answers

**2. Reading Test:** The IELTS Reading test takes 60 minutes. You are not allowed any extra time to transfer your answers, so write them directly on to your answer sheet. You will need to manage your time during the test because you will not be told when to start or finish each section. You will be given three different passages to read, each with accompanying questions. You can expect to read 2,150 - 2,750 words in total during your test. IELTS Academic Reading test. There are three sections to the IELTS Academic Reading test, and each contains one long text. These are taken from books, journals, magazines and newspapers. There are 40 questions. A variety of question types is used.



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- fill gaps in a passage of written text or in a table
- match headings to written text to diagrams or charts
- complete sentences
- give short answers to open questions
- answer multiple choice questions

Sometimes you will need to give one word as your answer, sometimes a short phrase, and sometimes simply a letter, number or symbol. Make sure you read the instructions carefully.

**3. Writing Test:** The IELTS Writing test takes 60 minutes. Spend 20 minutes on Task 1, and 40 minutes on Task 2. You will need to manage your own time, so make sure you move on to Task 2 after 20 minutes. There are two tasks in the IELTS Writing test. You will be asked to write at least 150 words for Task 1 and at least 250 words for Task 2. The content of the Writing test is different for IELTS Academic and IELTS General Training tests. Write in a formal



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style in the IELTS Academic Writing test. In Task 1 you will be presented with a graph, table, chart or diagram. You will be asked to describe, summarize or explain the information in your own words. This might involve describing and explaining data, describing the stages of a process or how something works, or describing an object or event. In Task 2 you will be asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. In Task 1 you will be presented with a situation and asked to write a letter requesting information or explaining the situation. You can write the letter in a personal, semi-formal or formal style. In Task 2 you will be asked to write an essay in response to a point of view, argument or problem. You can use a fairly personal style.[6], [7]

**4. Speaking Test:** The IELTS Speaking test takes 11-14 minutes. The Speaking test is made up of three sections:

**Part 1:** Introduction and interview (4-5 minutes) The examiner will introduce him or her and ask you to introduce yourself and confirm your identity. The examiner will ask you general questions on familiar topics.

**Part 2:** Individual long turn (3-4 minutes) The examiner will give you a task card which asks you to talk about a particular topic, including points to include in your talk. You will be given one minute to prepare and make notes. You will then be asked to talk for 1-2 minutes on the topic. You will not be interrupted during this time, so it is important to keep talking. The examiner will then ask you one or two questions on the same topic.

**Part 3:** Two-way discussion (4-5 minutes) The examiner will ask you further questions which are connected to the topic of Part 2. These questions are designed to give you an opportunity to discuss more abstract issues and ideas.

## COMMON PROBLEMS FOUND IN IELTS

### Listening Test:

Candidates fail to cope up with listening test in the following areas:





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- to hear the audio clearly
- to follow the instructions carefully
- to listen for the specific information when the speaker is changing the mind
- to manage time as the candidates stick with one question and lose the rapport with the tape which is being played during the exam
- to write correct spelling
- to read, write and listen at the same time

### **Reading Test:**

Candidates fail to cope up with reading test in the following areas:

- to cope up with time
- to locate the key words from the passage
- to find the differences among True, False and Not Given
- to find the correct matching headings of the paragraphs
- do not try and read every word; remember, you are reading for a purpose
- to answer with correct spellings



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### **Writing Test:**

Candidates fail to cope up with writing test in the following areas:

- to analyze each task properly
- to generate ideas
- to plan your answers
- to prepare outline



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- to express ideas with different and effective words
- to manage time to complete both the tasks
- to present with proper structure

### **Speaking Test:**

Candidates fail to cope up with speaking test in the following areas:

- to express freely and friendly
- to cope up exam anxiety
- to develop your answers

## **SOLUTIONS AND TIPS FOR THE BETTER SCORE IN IELTS.**



### **Listening Test:**

As the candidate's ears are not acquainted with the English sounds, candidate fails to decode the content. The candidate is, therefore, here, advised to go through the tape script of the listening test so that the ideas related to the pauses, intonations and paralanguage can be identified and acquired. The candidate should also:

- follow the instructions carefully; they may be different to practice or previous tests
- listen for the specific information
- try and anticipate what the speaker will say; this will require concentration
- be careful with spelling and grammar
- pay attention to the word limit; for example, if it is asked to complete a sentence using no more than two words, if the correct answer is 'wooden cart', the answer 'cart made of wood' would be incorrect



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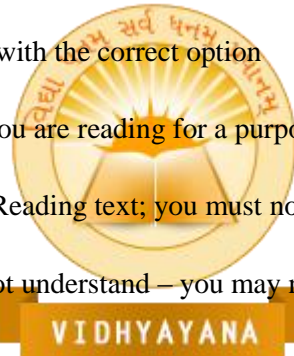
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- attempt all questions; there are no penalties for incorrect answers
- check your answers

### Reading Test:

The common tendency of a candidate is to divide total passages from the total time allotted i.e. if there are 3 passages and 60 minutes, the candidate will divide 20 minutes per passage (60/3). Instead of this, if the candidate plans like: 4,17,17,17,5 i.e. 4 min. to plan which passage to begin with either subject matter wise or question type wise. 17 min. for each passage and last 5 min. to review the answer and answer the remaining answers if there are any. The candidate should not stick to this strategy only because it varies from situation to situation. The candidate should also

- for True, False, Not Given applies strategies like; check True and False and if it is false then check for Not Given
- use POE (process of elimination) if not sure with the correct option
- do not try and read every word; remember, you are reading for a purpose
- the word(s) you use must be taken from the Reading text; you must not change the form of the word(s) in the text
- do not worry if there is a word that you do not understand – you may not need to use it
- check the spellings
- be careful to use singular and plural correctly
- check your answers



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### Writing Test:

The writing task is assessed in the following four parameters:

1. **Task Response/ Task Achievement:** The candidate should first refer and understand the prompt to know that what is expected to write as an answer
2. **Coherence and Cohesion:** Coherence stands for logical sequence which means there must be logical flow in the writing whereas cohesive devices, being transitional words, help to transfer from one thought to another



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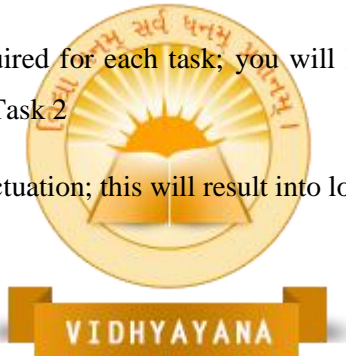
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3. **Lexical Resource:** Knowledge of vocabulary and optimum use of the same help to score more bands

4. **Grammatical Range and Accuracy:** This parameter checks how differently the candidate can use variety of sentence formations with the utmost possible accuracy.

The candidate should also:

- use the template for better score
- read good quality essays to feed the ideas
- prepare Outlining effectively
- manage time; remember, Task 2 is worth twice as much as Task 1
- spend approximately 20 minutes on Task 1 and approximately 40 minutes on Task 2
- pay attention to the number of words required for each task; you will lose marks if you do not write at least 150 words for Task 1 and at least 250 words for Task 2
- pay attention to spelling, grammar and punctuation; this will result into losing marks for mistakes
- avoid informal language [8]



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### Speaking Test:

The speaking task is assessed in the following four parameters:

1. **Fluency and Coherence:** It is checked that how fluently and logically the candidate expresses the views before the oral examiner
2. **Lexical Resource:** It focuses the capability of the candidate in using varieties of words used while the speaking test
3. **Grammatical Range and Accuracy:** This parameter checks how differently the candidate can use variety of sentence formations with the utmost possible accuracy
4. **Pronunciation:** The delivery of the candidate in a comprehensive manner is checked.



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The candidate should also:

- try to talk as much as possible in a natural way
- talk as fluently as possible and be spontaneous
- relax, be confident
- develop the answers
- speak more than the examiner

As IELTS is having specific formation, the candidate requires personal counselling and/or coaching. The knowledge of English is possessed by the candidate and application of that knowledge within the format of IELTS test patterns differs. The golden rules for the brightest success in IELTS are: [9]

- read the instructions carefully
- refer the examples given
- tests, Assessments, Analysis and corrective steps
- practice, practice, practice and lots of practice under supervision



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