



## How to Score IELTS Band 8

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How to score IELTS band 8 and how long it will take are common questions from candidates planning to sit the test.

Fortunately most people don't need to get a band 8 because most universities accept students with 7.5s and under. But some people do need it.

One of the first things you need to understand when thinking about how to score an IELTS band 8 is the way a band 8 is graded. This is the official description from IELTS:

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#### Very good user:

Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies. Misunderstandings occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation as well.

The key is '**fully operational command of the language**'. So this means that you are able to use it very well in *all situations*, be it to do with speaking, writing, listening or reading.

This means being almost **fluent** as mistakes or misunderstandings will only be made occasionally and in unfamiliar circumstances.

When thinking about how to score IELTS band 8, you must also consider what kind of errors you make. You must *not* make **systematic** errors for a band 8. This is to do with



speaking and is when you have a particular problem with grammar that is repeated.

Now we'll look at what is needed for each of the individual skills so you know more about how to score an IELTS band 8.

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## How to Score IELTS Band 8 Writing

To do this in IELTS writing you will have to write a near perfect essay or graph / letter!

To know how to score IELTS band 8 we'll look at what you are marked on for each criteria, which are:

- *Task Response / Achievement*
- *Coherence and Cohesion*
- *Lexical Resource*
- *Grammatical Range and Accuracy*

It varies slightly between Task 1 and 2 but most the criteria are the same so they'll be discussed together.

### Task Response

- **Sufficiently** addresses all parts of the ask
- **Presents** a well-developed response to the question with relevant, extended and supported ideas

To score IELTS band 8 for **Task Response / Achievement**, your response will have to fully answer **all** parts of the question.

Your ideas will have to be very well-developed and supported. If anything in your essay is unclear or not supported well, you can't get a band 8.

The minimum word length for an essay is 250 words (150 for Task 1) and most instructors will tell you to write around 265 words as you will be short on time. This is right because most people don't need a band 8.

A band 8, though, will be a very good writer and will easily be able to go beyond this and



may well do in order to end up with extended and supported ideas.

## Coherence and Cohesion

- **Sequences** information and ideas logically
- **Manages** all aspects of cohesion well
- **Uses** paragraphing sufficiently and appropriately

For **Coherence and Cohesion**, your writing will also need to be very easy to read and **all** aspects of this will be managed well. So one single mistake with this and you can't get a band 8.

A level of sophistication will also be expected. For instance, if you hold your essay together with lots of simple connectors such as *'firstly'*, *'secondly'*, *'thirdly'*, *'for example'*, *'for instance'* you are less likely to get an 8.

These may be ok for a 6 and under, but a very good writer knows how to link ideas in a way that does not look noticeable or mechanical.

## Lexical Resource

- **Uses** a wide range of vocabulary fluently and flexibly to convey precise meanings
- **Skilfully** uses uncommon lexical items but there may be occasional inaccuracies in word choice and collocation
- **Produces** rare errors in spelling and/or word formation

When planning how to score IELTS band 8, you also have to think about your vocabulary as the examiner will expect to see a wide range of words that stand out as high-level.

There will also be words that aren't used commonly in everyday language.

But there is no point in learning lots of high-level words unless you know how to use them without making errors because for an 8 candidate, mistakes will be vary rare

There may be just a few throughout the whole essay. And they will not be very noticeable errors either. Perhaps missing an article somewhere or misspelling an unusual word.

## Grammatical Range and Accuracy

- **Uses** a wide range of structures



- **The majority** of sentences are error-free
- **Makes** only very occasional errors or inappropriacies

Again, like with the vocabulary, a band 8 candidate makes just a few errors throughout the essay and these will be only minor errors, not ones that are very noticeable or confusing the reader in any way.

There will also need to be a mix of interesting and complex grammar structures.

We'll now move on to look at how to score IELTS band 8 in the speaking test.

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## How to Score IELTS Band 8 Speaking

If you want to know how to score IELTS band 8 in the speaking test, again you need to be aware of what you are being graded on. These are:

- *Fluency and Coherence*
- *Lexical Resource*
- *Grammatical Range and Accuracy*
- *Pronunciation*

### Fluency and Coherence

- **Speaks** fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction
- **Hesitation** is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language
- **Develops** topics coherently and appropriately

How often do you hesitate or stutter during your test? A band 8 may just do this a few times throughout the whole of their speaking test.

And if they do, it's usually to do with thinking about what to say rather than struggling to know which word to use.

All questions will also be fully answered and related to the question. A band 8 won't go off-



topic or get confused about what a question meant.

## Lexical Resource

- **Uses** a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning
- **Uses** less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies
- **Uses** paraphrase effectively as required

When thinking about how to score IELTS band 8, consider if you know exactly how to get across what you mean.

A band 8 candidate can find exactly the right words to get their meaning across without any problem. They will use words that may be uncommon in your everyday speaking.

'**Idiomatic language**' is important but that does not mean learned phrases like '*I was over the moon*'.

These are fine if used properly and these are included but it's more about [collocations](#) and the ability to know which words fit together without having to think about it.

Again, only a few errors may be made throughout the test.

## Grammatical Range and Accuracy

- **Uses** a wide range of structures flexibly
- **Produces** a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inaccuracies or basic/non-systematic errors

A wide and interesting range of structures will be used, with few errors. An important factor is also the lack of **systematic errors**. These are errors where a candidate has a repeated type of grammar error they make.

For example, let's say a candidate misses the 's' off third-person singular e.g. '*He start work at 9am*'.

If a candidate did this once but got it correct every other time, this would be a one off error and **non-systematic**.

But if the candidate does this regularly this is a **systematic error** and something the candidate clearly has a problem with, so they can't get a band 8 for their grammar.



But either way, when planning on how to score IELTS band 8, grammar errors are rare.

## Pronunciation

- **Uses** a wide range of pronunciation features
- **Sustains** flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses
- **Is easy** to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility

A band 8 candidate will be understood throughout the test without any effort from the examiner.

The key thing here is '*sustains*'. That means the candidate will keep up their pronunciation features throughout the whole test.

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## How to Score IELTS Band 8 Listening and Reading

The listening and reading tests both have 40 questions. To score an IELTS band 8 you have to get at least 35 points in each.

Here you can view the [IELTS raw scores](#) and what score will get what band.

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## How long does it take to get IELTS band 8?

This is a bit like asking how long is a piece of string...When planning on how to score an IELTS band 8, it really depends on so many factors, but the main ones are how good your current **level of English** is and the **time you have**.

### I'm currently very good at English

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If you are already very good at English and you do not need to really improve your skills in the four areas of writing, speaking, listening, and reading, it would be quite possible to prepare for the test quickly.

But even if you are very good at English, don't assume you will do well with no practice! You still want to leave yourself at least a few weeks to prepare as even high level candidates can get caught out with some of the tests

There are lots of different types of essay questions and graphs / letters to learn and writing both of the tasks to a high level in one hour is difficult for many people. Also the reading test can be particularly difficult for anyone.

So to prepare, make sure you take as many practice tests as you can and practice writing under the timed conditions.

### **I'm currently quite weak at English**

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If you want to score IELTS band 8 and you are quite weak at English then you have to accept that getting there could take a very long time. It could take a number of years if you are at a low level.

As you will have seen from the band score descriptors above, a band 8 is nearly fluent and makes very few mistakes.

Learning a language takes time, and that is what you are doing. Simply learning IELTS test skills and strategies, though an important part of the process, will not get you from a band 6 to a band 8 in a few months.

You may also need to get a teacher in order to speed things up or join some kind of classes. A teacher will be needed to correct and advise on grammar. Though of course not possible for many, significant time spent in an English speaking country is ideal as that way you will pick the language up.

Band 8 and 9 candidates have often been educated abroad, in English speaking schools, or spent time living abroad, which is why they are very good at the language.



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