



IELTS Reading Tips

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These **16 IELTS Reading Tips** provide you with essential strategies to help you get the score you need in the exam.

1. Skim the reading and questions first – it is a good idea to skim the reading first to get an understanding of what it is about and who it is written for. Look at the title of the reading, any subheadings, and pictures. Then look at the questions as the type of question will influence the strategies you use to complete them. You can learn the specific strategies for the different question types by looking at our [IELTS Reading Lessons](#).

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1. However, do what works for you! – You'll always find a mix of advice on ways to approach the reading test. A common complaint from students studying for the test is that "*One teacher told me to do it this way, but another told me to do it this way*". But this is fine – people read in different ways and what works for one person may not work for another. Listen to the advice, try both ways, and do whatever works best for you.
1. Read the instructions carefully – an important IELTS reading tip is to always read the questions carefully. The instructions differ for each question, for example telling you how many words you can use or whether you can take the words you will use directly from the text or not. So always read them to make sure you don't lose marks just because you were doing things the wrong way.
1. Take care with spelling and grammar – you will lose the mark if your spelling or grammar are wrong, so make sure you check these carefully. There is no excuse for making a spelling error if you are just taking the

word from the reading!

1. Move on if you don't know the answer – don't spend too long on one question. If you just can't work out the answer, then take a guess and move onto the next question. You may not get the chance to do later questions that you DO know the answer to if you waste time on other questions. You can always return to that question later if you have time at the end.
1. Highlight key words in the text – you will need to go back to the reading and scan it to find information to answer a question. So when you read the text, highlight such things as proper nouns (e.g. names of people, places, things). This is why it can be a good idea to look at the questions before you do the full reading – you will then have an idea of what kinds of things you may need to look for and therefore what it is a good idea to highlight.
1. Beware of synonyms – you will often be told to highlight key words in the question to help you find the answer in the text. That is a good idea, but remember it is not usually as easy as that and the word in the text will likely be a synonym of the word you have underlined. So be careful of just scanning to find the exact word you have highlighted in the question – you may then go to the wrong place for the answer. So look out for synonyms when you are finding the right place in the text for the answer.
1. Guess the meaning from context – unless you are a very proficient user of English, there will most likely be some or several words that you do not understand. When this happens, you should try and guess the meaning from the context. This means looking at the words and sentences around the word you don't know so you can make an educated guess as to what it means. However, you don't have much time, so do this as quickly as you can. Move on quickly though if you don't know – the word may not be important anyway.
1. Understand main ideas – each paragraph always has a main idea or topic. You should practice identifying the main idea of a paragraph as this will help you find the answers to questions, and in [matching headings to](#)

paragraphs type questions, you will have to identify the main idea in order to pick the right heading. The main idea is often in the topic sentence; however, sometimes you may have to read the whole paragraph to be sure of the central point.

1. Move down the text as you answer questions – the questions in each question set will nearly always follow the order of the text. So you know that when you have answered one question, the next answer will be below that. However, remember that this doesn't apply to certain types of question, such as paragraph to heading matching in which the order is mixed up.
1. Learn the skills of skimming and scanning – these are methods of speed reading and you should practice both. Skimming is when you run your eyes over the whole text from beginning to end to get an idea of what it is about, whereas scanning is when you find one specific piece of information in a text.
1. Read some parts of the text in detail – you won't have time to read the whole text in detail, but at times you will need to do this. When you are answering questions and you identify where the answer is in the text, you may need to read in detail to make sure you can work out the correct answer.
1. Start practice tests slowly – often IELTS reading tips will tell you to do practice tests, and it is correct that you should do these as much as you can as candidates often have problems with their timings. However, it is important to start out slowly until you get to know the questions, develop your skills and strategies and have decided the best way for you to approach the test. So don't worry about timing yourself when you start out – relax, take your time and get to know all the different types of question.
1. Gradually increase your speed when you practice – as your knowledge of the IELTS reading test improves, you can then start to speed up. But don't suddenly start trying to do the full reading practice test in 60 minutes – gradually increase the time you spend on each test until you are ready to tackle them in 60 minutes. The lower your level, the longer this will take.

1. Spend 20 minutes on each reading – in the actual test, you have 60 minutes to do three readings and, unlike the listening test, you don't have 10 minutes to transfer your answers at the end. So spend only 20 minutes on each one and transfer your answers to the answer sheet in the 20 minutes too. Make sure when you do practice tests you transfer your answers to a sheet of paper too so that this extra time is always taken into account.

1. Practice with interesting texts – in IELTS reading tips you will often be told to practice reading as much as possible, but what do you read? You should of course practice with real reading tests and some difficult readings, but this can get quite boring, as can reading lots of academic articles. Any kind of reading will help, so find some types of English language fiction (story) books you like and read them and short articles in magazines or on the internet. If you enjoy it, you are much more likely to read more. This is better than doing very little reading because you just do not want to read. Of course it should not be so easy that you learn nothing. Find something that will still mean you have to check and learn new words sometimes, but if it is a story you will enjoy you are much more likely to pick it up and read more. This will improve your vocabulary, reading speed, and other reading skills.

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