

Tenses for graphs, processes, and maps

Candidates practicing for IELTS often ask which **tenses for IELTS** are important and which tenses they need to know.

We'll have a look at this in this lesson.

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Which tenses for IELTS do I need?

Speaking

The fact is that there are not specific ones that are important for speaking – the more you know, the better you will be able to convey your message in the speaking test.

You will be asked about the past, present, and future in the test, so all will be needed.

The important thing about tenses for IELTS in the speaking test is that you know how to listen carefully to the question, and then choose the correct one to answer.

For instance, if the examiner asks;

- ***Did you like to read when you were a child?***

Your answer should of course also be in the past:

- ***Yes I did. I used to read books like Harry Potter. I found them really exciting and I learned a lot as well.***

Or if the examiner asks:

- ***How do the diets of people in the past compare with the diets of people today?***

Then you will need to use a mix of past and present tenses.

So make sure at the very least you have a good knowledge of the present, past and future

simple tenses to get you through the test, but if you are more skilled and want a higher score, then of course you want to start ensuring you can use some of the more advanced level tenses such as the [present perfect continuous](#) and [future perfect continuous](#) tenses.

Writing

For the writing, it is possible to be a bit more specific about which tenses for IELTS are needed.

For the **Task 1 Academic**, you are most likely to have to write about a graph in the past. So you should make sure you know how to use the basic [past simple](#). Graphs are sometimes about predictions, so you need to make sure you know the future simple as well, although common words to use for this are 'expected' to, 'predicted' to' etc than the more definite words of 'will' or 'going to'.

As in this example, you can see it goes up to 2022.

IELTS line graph in the past and future

You could have sentences like this:

- **From 2012 to 2013, grants and subsidies remained stable.**
- **During 2021 and 2022, borrowings are expected to remain at the same level.**

This does not mean that you won't have the opportunity to fit in other tenses, which of course if you have higher skill levels you should do to ensure you show the examiner the flexibility that you have to try and get the highest possible grammar score.

For instance:

- **By 2016, grants and subsidies had risen to around \$750 million (past perfect)**

Occasionally you have to write about an IELTS process diagram, in which case you need to make sure you can use the [passive voice](#) in the present simple (if it's a *man-made* process).

Below is an example:

- **The limestone and clay are crushed up together**
- **The cylinder is heated while it rotates**

The passive is needed for process diagrams

Maps or plans also sometimes arise, where you have to compare how they differ at two points in time. The times can vary, so it could for example compare present with future, or past with present. So again you need to know the basic tenses for IELTS to answer these.

Example of map in the past and present

For the **Task 2 Essay (Academic and General Training)** it's actually very common to use the [present simple](#) tense for IELTS. This is because you will be writing about general facts and truths and giving your opinions, which are commonly done using the present tense.

Of course though again you may need to make use of other tenses, as you may want to refer to past and future situations, events, or views as well.

You can take a look at these [sample essays](#) to examine how different tenses for IELTS are made use of.

For the **IELTS Letter (Task 1 General Training)** you could have to use a variety of tenses. It's quite common to discuss a situation/problem you had in the past, but to then discuss possible solutions:

You recently stayed in a hotel in a large city. The weather was very unusual for the time of year and the heating / cooling system in the hotel was quite inadequate.

Write a letter to the manager of the hotel. In your letter:

- give details of what went wrong
- explain what you had to do to overcome the problem at the time
- say what action you would like the manager to take

So in this example you would certainly be making use of the **past simple** to discuss *what went wrong* and *what you did to overcome the problems*:

- ***The heating system did not give off enough warmth***
- ***I was forced to wear my coat in the room***

But then the **future unreal conditional tense** to talk about the actions you 'would like' the manager to take (we use 'would' for *imaginary situations*):

- ***I would like to have a refund because of these issues***

Here is a different example:

You are going away to travel for the summer. A friend will be looking after your house



while you are away. Write a letter to your friend.

In your letter:

- Say where you are going
- Describe your house
- Explain some of the things your friend must do to look after your house

This is slightly different as you would be using future tenses, such as the **future simple/continuous**, to say *where you are going* and the **present simple** to *describe your house*:

- ***I'm going to the south coast of France***
- ***My house is a cottage, with a thatched roof***

But then the present and future using **modal verbs** (e.g. *you must*; *you will have to*) to say *what your friend has to do at your house*.

- ***You'll have to water the plants in the lounge once a week***

Again though, it's unusual to just stick to one specific tense for IELTS letters for each point, so to be flexible and write a good letter you will likely be moving around different tenses in order to convey a coherent message in your letter.

Reading and Listening

The reading and listening modules are different to the writing and speaking as you are taking information directly from the audio or reading texts to place into your answer key. So in that respect, understanding tenses for IELTS as above is not the same.

However, the more you understand tenses, the better you will be able to make sense of what you are listening to or reading, as our comprehension of a language is of course directly related to this. So it's still important to know about tenses and what they mean as much as possible.

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