

IELTS GENERAL TRAINING

Reading

Question types, timing strategy and the traps that cost marks

Ronacker Solutions · LaunchPad Career Toolkit

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1. What the GT Reading test looks like

Sixty minutes, forty questions, three sections — and, critically, **no extra time to transfer your answers**. Whatever is on the answer sheet when the hour ends is what gets marked. This single fact should shape how you work.

Section	Texts	Content	Suggested time
Section 1: Social survival	Two or three short texts	Notices, advertisements, timetables, instructions	15 minutes
Section 2: Workplace survival	Two texts	Job descriptions, contracts, staff handbooks, training material	20 minutes
Section 3: General reading	One long text	A discursive article from a newspaper, magazine or book	25 minutes

The marks are not evenly spread across difficulty

Every question is worth exactly one mark. A hard Section 3 inference question is worth the same as an easy Section 1 opening-hours question. So never leave Section 1 questions unfinished because you rushed to reach Section 3 — you are trading easy marks for hard ones.

The band conversion

GT Reading is marked more strictly than Academic Reading because the texts are easier. Approximate raw scores out of 40:

Band	Approximate raw score
Band 6	23
Band 6.5	27
Band 7	30
Band 7.5	32
Band 8	34

Most skilled migration applicants need Band 6 across all four skills; some occupations and points targets require 7. Note how close the bands sit — four extra correct answers can move you a full band, which is usually a matter of technique rather than vocabulary.

2. The method

Do not read the passage properly before looking at the questions. It feels responsible and it wastes minutes you do not have. Work in this order every time.

1. **Skim the text for 60–90 seconds.** Title, headings, first line of each paragraph. You are building a map, not learning content.
2. **Read the question.** Underline the keywords — names, numbers, dates, technical nouns. These are what you will hunt for.
3. **Scan for those keywords** in the text. Your eyes move down the page looking for a shape, not reading sentences.
4. **Read that area closely** — the sentence before, the sentence itself, the sentence after. The answer is almost always inside those three.
5. **Write the answer directly on the answer sheet.** Not the question paper.

Questions usually follow the order of the text

For most question types, if question 5's answer sits in paragraph C, question 6's answer is very unlikely to be in paragraph A. Use that: once you find an answer, start the next search from that point. The exceptions are Matching Headings and Matching Information, which deliberately jump around.

Skimming and scanning are different skills

	Skimming	Scanning
Purpose	Get the gist and structure	Find one specific piece of information
Where your eyes go	Headings, first and last sentences	Down the page hunting a keyword shape
When	Once, at the start	For every single question
Speed	Fast — 60–90 seconds for a passage	Very fast — you are not reading, you are pattern-matching

Scanning is easiest for capitalised words, numbers, dates and unusual terms because they have a distinctive visual shape. When a question contains a proper noun or a figure, that is your entry point — find it first, then read around it.

3. The question types

True / False / Not Given

The most-failed question type in the entire test, and almost entirely because candidates confuse *False* with *Not Given*.

Answer	Means
TRUE	The text states this, or states it in different words
FALSE	The text states the opposite of this
NOT GIVEN	The text neither confirms nor contradicts it

The rule that fixes most of these

Ask yourself: **would I need to know anything outside this text to decide?** If yes, the answer is NOT GIVEN. Your own knowledge, your assumptions about what is obviously true, and what the text merely implies are all irrelevant. Only what is on the page counts.

For Yes / No / Not Given, the same logic applies, but you are matching the *writer's opinion* rather than facts.

Matching Headings

- Read the paragraph first, then look at the heading list — not the reverse.
- The heading must cover the **whole** paragraph, not one striking detail in it.
- Cross off each heading as you use it. There are always more headings than paragraphs.
- Do the paragraphs you find easy first; the remaining ones get easier as the heading list shrinks.

Sentence, summary, note and table completion

- Obey the word limit exactly. *No more than two words* means two words is acceptable, three scores zero — even if the meaning is right.
- A hyphenated word counts as one. A number counts as one.
- Copy the word **exactly as spelled in the text**. Do not change its form.
- Predict the part of speech from the gap before you search — noun, verb, adjective. It narrows the hunt enormously.

Multiple choice

- Read all options before deciding. The first plausible one is often the trap.
- Eliminate wrong answers rather than hunting for the right one.
- Watch for options that are true in the world but not stated in the text.

- Watch for options that are *partly* right — correct information attached to the wrong cause, person or date.

Matching features and matching information

- Options may be used more than once, or not at all — read the instruction.
- These do not follow text order, so expect to move around.
- Scan for the names or categories first, then read what is said about each.

4. The traps

Synonym substitution

The test almost never repeats the question's wording in the text. If the question says *employees must be given prior notice*, the text will say something like *staff are to be informed in advance*. Candidates who scan only for the exact words conclude the information is absent.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE

Question: Cyclists are required to wear protective headgear.

Text: All riders must have an approved helmet fastened at all times.

Answer: TRUE. Not a single content word matches.

Qualifying words

Small words change the answer completely. Circle them in both the question and the text.

Watch for	Examples
Absolutes	all, every, never, always, only, none
Hedges	some, may, often, tends to, generally, in most cases
Comparatives	more, less, the majority, fewer than
Time markers	currently, formerly, since, until, by 2020

If the text says *many employees* and the question says *all employees*, the answer is FALSE — not TRUE, and not NOT GIVEN.

The answer sheet

No transfer time in Reading

Unlike Listening, you get no extra minutes to copy answers across. Write directly onto the answer sheet as you go. Every year candidates finish all forty questions on the question paper and score a fraction of what they earned.

Do's and don'ts

DO	DON'T
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- Read the questions before reading the passage properly
- Write answers straight onto the answer sheet
- Guess every unanswered question — there is no penalty
- Obey word limits to the letter
- Copy spelling exactly from the text
- Move on after 90 seconds and come back
- Keep to the 15 / 20 / 25 minute split

- Do not read the whole passage word by word first
- Do not leave a single blank — a guess is free
- Do not use your own knowledge for True/False/Not Given
- Do not assume the words in the question appear in the text
- Do not spend five minutes on one stubborn question
- Do not change your first instinct without a clear reason
- Do not write both possible answers — it is marked wrong

How to practise

Two things, both timed. First, full papers under exam conditions once a week — 60 minutes, answer sheet, no pausing. Second, and more useful: take papers you have already done and redo only the True/False/Not Given and Matching Headings sections. Those two types account for most lost marks, and they respond faster to practice than vocabulary does.

Ready to practise properly?

Reading a guide tells you what to do. Marked practice tells you whether you are doing it. The Ronacker LaunchPad gives you full timed IELTS practice with band feedback on every answer — Writing marked against all four criteria, Speaking with a live examiner-style roleplay, and Reading and Listening scored instantly.

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