

IELTS GENERAL TRAINING

Speaking

The three parts, the cue card method and what fluency actually means

Ronacker Solutions · LaunchPad Career Toolkit

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1. The test

Eleven to fourteen minutes, face to face with an examiner, recorded. Three parts, each testing something different. Identical for General Training and Academic candidates.

Part	Length	What happens
Part 1: Introduction	4–5 minutes	Identity check, then familiar questions on home, work, study, hobbies
Part 2: Long turn	3–4 minutes	A cue card, one minute to prepare, then speak for one to two minutes
Part 3: Discussion	4–5 minutes	Abstract questions connected to the Part 2 topic

How it is marked

Criterion	What the examiner is listening for
Fluency & Coherence	Speaking at length without long pauses; ideas connected logically; self-correction that does not derail you
Lexical Resource	Range and precision; idiomatic language used naturally; paraphrasing when you lack a word
Grammatical Range & Accuracy	A mix of simple and complex structures; tense control; accuracy under pressure
Pronunciation	Being understood without strain; word and sentence stress; intonation

Accent is not marked. Clarity is.

A Zimbabwean or South African accent will not cost you a single mark. What is marked is whether the examiner can follow you without effort — which comes down to word stress, sentence rhythm and clear word endings, not to sounding British.

2. Part 1 — Introduction

Familiar topics: your home town, your job, your studies, food, weather, transport, hobbies. The examiner is warming you up and taking an early reading of your level.

The two-sentence-minimum rule

One-word and one-sentence answers are the most common reason capable speakers score Band 5 in Part 1. Every answer needs at least two sentences: the answer, then a reason, an example or a contrast.

WEAK VERSUS STRONG

Q: Do you enjoy cooking?

Weak: Yes, I do. It's nice.

Strong: I do, though mostly at weekends when I actually have time. During the week I tend to fall back on whatever is quickest, but on a Sunday I quite enjoy making something slow — my mother's sadza and stew, usually, which reminds me of home.

The strong answer contains a contrast, a time reference, a personal detail and a reason. It took eighteen seconds. That is the target length.

Useful extenders

- **Reason:** mainly because... / the main reason is that...
- **Contrast:** though ... / whereas when I was younger...
- **Example:** for instance, just last week...
- **Qualification:** it depends really — if ... then...

3. Part 2 — The long turn

You are handed a cue card with a topic and three or four prompts, given one minute and paper to make notes, then asked to speak for one to two minutes. The examiner will not interrupt.

A typical cue card

CUE CARD

Describe a skill you learned that has been useful to you.

You should say:

- *what the skill is*
- *how and when you learned it*
- *how difficult it was to learn*

and explain why it has been useful to you.

How to use the minute

Do not write sentences — you will read them aloud and it shows immediately. Write four or five keywords, one per bullet, plus the final *explain* point.

1. Choose your subject in the first ten seconds. Do not deliberate — any subject works if you have something to say about it.
2. Write one keyword per bullet.
3. Spend the remaining time on the last bullet — the *explain why* one. It carries the most speaking time and candidates always under-prepare it.
4. If nothing true comes to mind, invent something. Nobody is checking.

Cover the bullets in order and finish the last one

The bullets are a ready-made structure — follow them and your answer is automatically coherent. Candidates who run out of time on the final bullet lose coherence marks, so pace the first three deliberately.

Filling two minutes

- **Add sensory detail.** Where were you, who was there, what did it feel like?
- **Add time depth.** What it was like before, during, and how you feel about it now.
- **Add a contrast.** How it compares with something else you have done.
- **Add a consequence.** What changed for you afterwards.

Do not stop early

If you finish in forty seconds the examiner has less evidence to grade and you have made Fluency harder to score. If you genuinely run dry, return to the last bullet and add one more consequence or one more comparison. Keep going until you are stopped.

4. Part 3 — Discussion

The questions turn abstract and societal. If Part 2 was about a skill you learned, Part 3 might ask which skills schools should prioritise, or whether practical training is valued as much as academic study. You are no longer talking about yourself — you are giving views on general issues.

The answer shape that works

1. **Position.** I'd say that... / On the whole I think...
2. **Reason.** mainly because...
3. **Example or evidence.** In Zimbabwe, for instance...
4. **Balance or concession.** That said, there is an argument that...

A BAND 8 PART 3 ANSWER

Q: Should schools teach practical skills as well as academic subjects?

I'd say they should, and probably earlier than they currently do. The main reason is that a great many students will never use algebra again but every one of them will have to manage money, fix something, or negotiate a contract. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the technical colleges produce people who are employable almost immediately, whereas some university graduates struggle for years. That said, I wouldn't want practical training to crowd out the academic side entirely — the ability to think abstractly is what lets someone retrain when their trade changes, and trades do change.

Buying thinking time

Silence is penalised; hesitation phrases are not. These sound natural and give you two or three seconds to organise a thought.

- That's an interesting question, actually...
- I hadn't really thought about it that way, but...
- It depends, I suppose, on...
- Let me think about that for a moment...

Use them sparingly

One or two across the whole test sounds natural. Beginning every answer with *That's an interesting question* sounds memorised, and examiners are trained to discount rehearsed phrases entirely.

5. Pronunciation and delivery

Pronunciation is a full quarter of your Speaking band, and it is the criterion candidates most neglect. It is not about accent — it is about four features.

Feature	What it means	Quick fix
Word stress	Which syllable carries the weight	Check new words in a dictionary and mark the stress
Sentence stress	Which words in a sentence get emphasis	Stress the content words; let the small words go light
Intonation	Pitch rising and falling	Rise slightly for questions and lists, fall for statements
Word endings	Final consonants, especially -s and -ed	Read aloud slowly and exaggerate the endings until it is habit

Dropped word endings are the most common single issue for Southern African speakers, and they cost marks twice — once under Pronunciation and again under Grammatical Accuracy, because a missing *-ed* sounds like a tense error.

Do's and don'ts

DO	DON'T
• Give at least two sentences to every Part 1 question • Use the full minute to make keyword notes in Part 2 • Keep talking until the examiner stops you • Self-correct briefly and move on • Invent details if the truth is dull or slow to explain • Ask for a question to be repeated if you did not hear it • Sound the ends of your words	• Do not memorise answers — examiners discount rehearsed language • Do not answer with one word or one sentence • Do not write full sentences on the Part 2 note paper • Do not stop early in Part 2 • Do not apologise for your English or your accent • Do not use slang or filler like <i>you know</i> repeatedly • Do not stay silent — hesitation phrases are free, silence is not

How to practise

Record yourself. Every day, take one cue card, prepare for one minute, speak for two, and play it back. You will hear the pauses, the repeated words and the dropped endings far more clearly than you feel them while speaking. Twenty recordings over three weeks will move you further than any amount of reading about technique.

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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