The Complete A to Z Guide to IELTS Reading
How can this book help you with your reading?

Listening and reading are considered the ‘easy’ parts of the IELTS test, but this does not mean that they do not require preparation.

This book provides you with the means of preparing fully for the reading test. It is designed as a complete A-to-Z guide and should be read in its entirety.

If you are reading this book, you already have the required level of English to do well in both tests. What you are probably lacking is a sound knowledge of the strategies needed to get very high marks.

This book will take you step-by-step through the different sub-skills that are required and the different strategies I suggest for dealing with all of the different question types.

The book will show you:

• The format of the test
• General tips and common mistakes
• Strategies for all question types
• The reading sub-skills that are tested
• How to improve your reading skills
• How to improve your vocabulary
The Reading Test

Three reading texts.
A total of between 2000-2700 words.

40 questions.
1 hour to answer them.

The texts and questions get more difficult as the test progresses.

Each reading text will have 3-4 different types of question.

You have no time to transfer your answers at the end.

Academic

The texts are taken from journals, magazines, books, text books and newspapers.

The texts are of an academic nature, but you do not require a specialist knowledge of the subjects to do well in the test.

General Training

The texts are taken from general sources, such as adverts, notices, government documents, manuals, leaflets, books and magazines.

The texts are intended to test a person’s ability to cope with everyday life in an English speaking country.
Reading Tips

How to use these…

These tips are simply to give you an introduction to IELTS reading.

They are not intended to be the only document you look at.

Many IELTS students think that ‘tips’ are the only things they need to get a good score. They are not.

Make sure you use these as an introduction and use the rest of the document to really progress.

Time is your enemy. Use it wisely.

Be aware of what sub-skills they are testing in each question.

Each different question type requires a different strategy.

You don’t have to understand every word. Accept that you won’t know everything.

Read, read and then read some more. Practice makes perfect.

Read the instructions VERY carefully.

Improve your vocabulary and you’ll improve your reading score.

Don’t waste too much time on one question. If you don’t know the answer, move on.
Question Type # 1

Short Answer Questions

These questions are often called ‘comprehension’ questions and they are very common in English classrooms all over the world.

Most students have answered these kinds of questions before and, for this reason, most students tend to do quite well with them.

Here are the skills tested for these types of question:

- Ability to skim the passage quickly and understand overall meaning.
- Ability to scan for specific information.
- Understanding the question being asked.
- Thinking of possible synonyms and paraphrases of keywords.
Common problems:

- Lack of awareness of synonyms and paraphrasing.
- Going over the word limit.
- Reading every single word instead of skimming and scanning.
- Panicking when you see a word or phrase you don’t understand.
Tips for short answer questions

The answers appear in the same order as the text.

Look at and understand the questions first, before you start reading the text. What is the question actually asking?

You will probably be given a word limit, for example ‘NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER.’ Make sure you don’t go over this limit.

The answers do not need to be grammatically correct, just short answers.

Don’t give your opinion, just give the answer that is in the text.

Keywords in the question will normally be nouns or noun phrases.

When you find your keywords, always think about synonyms and paraphrases.
Strategy for Short Answer Questions

1. Read the instructions carefully and note the word limit.
2. Read and understand the questions. Think about the information you will need to find.
3. Underline any keywords in the questions.
4. Think about synonyms or paraphrases for these keywords.
5. Find the part of the text the question relates to.
6. Read the question again.
7. Read the section containing the answer carefully and identify the answer.
8. Continue with the next question and repeat until finished.
Question Type # 2

Multiple Choice Questions

On both the academic and general IELTS reading papers you are likely to be asked multiple choice questions (MCQs).

Your job is to simply choose the correct answer from a list of possible choices.

Here are the skills tested for these types of question:

Understanding the main ideas contained in a text.

Ability to scan for specific information.

Reading in detail for understanding.

Differentiating between two or more possible answers.
Common problems:

- Reading the text before looking at the questions.
- Not answering the questions at all.
- Being tricked by ‘distractors’, such as qualifying words.
- Not reading the questions or text carefully.
Tips for multiple choice questions

Read the questions before you read the text.

Always write an answer. It is better to guess than not answer at all.

Try to narrow the choices down to 2 or 3 out of the 4 possible answers. This will increase your odds of getting the question correct.

If you are unsure of the meaning, try rephrasing the answers in your own words.

Be aware of ‘distractors’.

Don’t panic if you don’t know anything about the topic.

Try to predict the correct answer before you read the text.

Carefully read all of the options before making your final decision.

The answers will be in the same order as the text.
Strategy for Multiple Choice Questions

1. Read the questions carefully.
2. Skim the text to get the general meaning.
3. Underline any keywords in the question, and think about any synonyms that might appear in the text.
4. Read the choices and underline any keywords. Think about the differences in meaning between the different choices.
5. Predict the correct answer.
6. Read the text and, using keywords and synonyms, locate the part containing the answers.
7. Read that part of the text very carefully, thinking about the difference in meanings.
8. Don’t only think about which options are correct, but think about how the other options are wrong.
9. Go back and read the question again, then mark your final choice.
Question Type # 3

Summary Completion

You will be given a summary of information from the text and there will be some gaps in that summary.

You will either be given a list of words to fill the gaps with, or asked to find the answers in the reading text.

Your job is to insert some of the words from the list into the gaps, or, if asked, to fill the gaps with words from the text.

There will be more words in the list than required to fill the gaps.

Skills tested:

- Scanning for the correct information in the text.
- Being able to identify synonyms and paraphrases.
- Understanding the general meaning of the summary.
Common problems:

- Trying to fully understand every part of the text.
- Not being aware of synonyms and paraphrasing.
- Ignoring correct use of grammar.
- Copying words from the text instead of using synonyms or paraphrase.
Tips for summary completion

Try to predict the answers before you look at the options or the text. This will help you spot the correct answer.

Should the gap be filled with a verb, a noun, an adjective or an adverb? If your answer makes the sentence grammatically wrong, then you have the wrong answer.

Look for synonyms and paraphrases in the text rather than words that match directly.

Don’t spend too much time looking for the answer to one question. If you can’t find it, mark what you think it might be and move on. Focusing on the easier answers is a better use of your time.

If you get a list of words, think about the ones that can’t be the correct answer because of meaning or grammar. You can then eliminate these words.
Strategy for Summary Completion

1. Read the question carefully. Note how many words you can write (normally one, two or three), and if you should get the words from the reading text or a list.
2. Skim the summary and try to understand the overall meaning.
3. Try to predict the answers before you look at the reading text. Also, think about the word type (noun, verb, adjective) that should be included.
4. If you have a list of words, try to guess which 2 or 3 the answer might be. Pay attention to words that collocate well with the words in the sentence.
5. Identify which part of the reading text the summary relates to. Scanning for synonyms from the summary will help you do this.
6. Look at that part of the section more carefully and choose the correct answer. Remember to be careful with synonyms.
7. Check to see if your word makes the sentence grammatically correct.
Question Type # 4

Matching Sentences

You will be given a list of incomplete sentences with no endings and another list with possible endings.

Your job is to match the incomplete sentences with the correct ending based on the reading text.

This is not one of the more common questions, but should be studied all the same.

Skills tested:

- Prediction.
- Being able to identify synonyms and paraphrases.
- Understanding how the ideas in the sentences are connected to the main ideas in the reading text.
Common problems:

- Not reading or fully understanding the correct parts of the reading text.
- Not being aware of synonyms and paraphrasing.
- Looking for the exact words in the reading text, rather than synonyms.
- Trying to complete the sentences using logic or grammar, rather than using the reading text.
Tips for matching sentences

The answers are in the same order in the text as they are in the questions.

Locate question one first, and then you know where to begin.

Try to predict how each sentence will end before you look at the endings.

Start with the incomplete sentences first before you look at the endings or the text. There are more endings than required, so looking at all of these in detail is a waste of time.

Spend more time on the first question because this will be the most difficult.

Think of synonyms and paraphrases that the examiners could be using instead of the exact same words.

All of the sentence endings appear in the text, but you don’t need to read all of them, just the ones that you decide to match with the incomplete sentences.

When highlighting keywords, it is often a good idea to highlight any names, including place names, or dates. These are often easy to find in the reading text.

Don’t just match words. Make sure the meaning in the reading text matches.
Strategy for Matching Sentences

1. Read the question carefully.
2. Read the incomplete sentences first, and don’t look at the endings yet. Try to understand what they mean and highlight any keywords especially names, places or dates.
3. Predict what the endings might be before looking at them. Think about what word type (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs) makes the sentence grammatically correct.
4. Look at the endings but not in too much detail. Try to see if there are any obvious answers.
5. Eliminate endings that definitely cannot match. Think about grammar, collocations and meaning.
6. Match the endings you think might be correct. Write two or three options if necessary.
7. Find the correct part of the reading text for each incomplete sentence. Be careful with synonyms and paraphrases.
8. Understand the meaning of that part of the text and choose the correct answer.
Question Type # 5

Sentence Completion

You will be given a number of sentences with gaps in them, and asked to complete the sentences with words from the reading text.

These questions are as much vocabulary tests as they are reading tests. They require you to be aware of paraphrasing (using different words to repeat a sentence so that it has the same meaning) and synonyms (words with the same or very similar meanings).

Skills tested:

- Understanding what synonyms and paraphrasing are.
- Being able to identify synonyms and paraphrases.
- Scanning for the correct answer.
Not being aware of synonyms and paraphrasing.

Not being aware of synonyms and paraphrasing.

Not reading the instructions properly.

Reading the text before the question.
Tips for sentence completion

Check how many words it asks you to write. If it says ‘no more than two’, you can write one or two words. If it says ‘no more than three’, you can write one, two or three words.

Sometimes the question will state ‘using words from the text’ or ‘from the text’. In this case you should only use words from the text and not change them or use different forms of the words. If it does not say this, then you are allowed to change the words as long as the meaning is the same.

Remember that your answer should be grammatically correct.

When scanning for your answer, make sure you are thinking about paraphrasing and synonyms.

Find where the answer is located in the text before you try to answer the question. Remember, where before what.

Read the questions before reading the text.

The answers appear in the same order as the questions.
1. Read the instructions carefully, noting how many words you can write, and if they want you to include the exact words from the question or not.
2. Read the incomplete sentences first. Think about what word form can be used, and try to predict the answer. Also think about keywords and how they could be represented by synonyms or paraphrasing.
3. Locate where the information is located by scanning quickly. If you can’t locate the answer quickly, move on.
4. Read the incomplete sentence again.
5. Study the reading text more carefully to establish the answer.
6. Check your spelling.
7. Repeat with the other sentences.
Question Type # 6

True/False/Not Given

‘True, False, Not Given’ questions require you to identify if information in a text is true, not true or not given.

You will be given a number of factual statements and you have to check in the text if they are true or not.

This is probably the most difficult question type on the reading paper.

What do they mean?

If the text agrees with or confirms the information in the statement, the answer is TRUE.

If the text contradicts or is the opposite to the information in the statement, the answer is FALSE.

If there is no information or it is impossible to know, the answer is NOT GIVEN.
Common problems:

- Not understanding what ‘not given’ means.
- Spending too much time making sure that it is ‘not given’.
- A failure to understand exactly what each statement means, and therefore being unable to identify if it is true or false.
- Focusing on keywords instead of understanding what the statement as a whole means.
Ignore anything you already know about the topic and don’t make assumptions. Base your answers on the text only.

Identify any words that qualify the statement, for example - some, all, mainly, often, always and occasionally. These words are there to test if you have read the whole statement because they can change the meaning.

Be careful when you see verbs that qualify statements, such as suggest, claim, believe and know.

There will be at least one of all three answers. If you don’t have at least one ‘true’, one ‘false’ or one ‘not given’, you have at least one answer wrong.

Don’t skim and scan the text to find the final answer. You will have to read the appropriate part of the text very carefully in order to understand what the author means.

Don’t look for words that match those in the statements exactly. You should also look for synonyms. Remember that you are matching meaning, not words.
More Tips for True/False/NG

If you can't find the information you are looking for, then it is probably 'not given'. Don't waste time looking for something that is not there.

If you have no idea what the answer is, put 'not given'. You probably have no idea because the answer is not there.

Answers are in the same order they appear in the text. Do not waste time going back. Keep on reading.

YES/NO/NOT GIVEN questions are slightly different because they deal with opinion. TRUE/FALSE/NOT GIVEN questions deal with facts.
1. Always read the instructions carefully, and make sure you know if it is a TRUE/FALSE/NOT GIVEN or YES/NO/NOT GIVEN question.
2. Read all the statements carefully, trying to understand what the whole sentence means rather than simply highlighting keywords. Watch out for qualifying words such as ‘some’ or ‘always'.
3. Try to think of the synonyms that might be in the text. This will help you identify the matching part of the text.
4. Match the statement with the correct part of the text.
5. Focus on the statement again, and then carefully read the matching part of the text to establish if it is true or false. Remember the meaning should match that of the statement exactly if it is true.
6. Underline the words that give you the answer, as this will help you focus and you can check back later. Again, be careful there are no qualifying words in the text.
7. If you can’t find the answer, mark it as ‘not given’ and move on to the next question.
8. If you are really unsure or can’t find the answer, mark it as ‘not given’.
Question Type # 7

Yes/No/Not Given

Yes/No/NG questions are very similar to T/F/NG questions.

The main difference is T/F/NG asks you to look at facts or information in the text, and Y/N/NG questions ask you to assess the writer’s opinion.

This opinion could be based on a certain section of the text or on the text as a whole.

What do they mean?

If the text agrees with or confirms the writer’s opinion, the answer is TRUE.

If the text contradicts or is the opposite to the writer’s opinion, the answer is FALSE.

If there is no information or if the statement may or may not be true due to lack of information, the answer is NOT GIVEN.
Common problems:

- Not understanding what ‘not given’ means.
- Spending too much time making sure that it is ‘not given’.
- A failure to understand exactly what each statement means, and therefore being unable to identify if it agrees with the writer’s opinion or not.
- Not understanding the writer’s opinion.
Tips for Yes/No/NG

Make sure you read the question statements carefully and fully understand them.

The questions are in the same order as the text.

If you do not know if the statement agrees with the writer’s opinion or not because there is not enough detail to give a definite answer, the answer is ‘Not Given’.

If the answer is ‘No’, the statement will clearly contradict the writer’s opinion.

Remember that you are only judging the writer’s opinion. If there are other people’s opinion’s mentioned in the text, this should have no influence on your decision.

Look out for when the writer gives their opinion, using phrases such as ‘In my opinion’, ‘I believe’ or using a comparative or superlative.
Strategy for Y/N/NG

1. Always read the instructions carefully and make sure you know if it is a TRUE/FALSE/NOT GIVEN or YES/NO/NOT GIVEN question.

2. Read all the statements carefully, trying to understand what the whole sentence means rather than simply highlighting keywords. Watch out for qualifying words such as ‘some’ or ‘always’.

3. Try to think of what synonyms might be in the text. This will help you identify the matching part of the text.

4. Match the statement with the correct part of the text.

5. Focus on the statement again, and then carefully read the matching part of the text to establish if it agrees or contradicts the writer’s opinion.

6. Underline the words that give you the answer, this will help you focus and you can check back later. Again, be careful there are no qualifying words in the text.

7. If you can’t find the answer or there is not enough information to decide, mark it as ‘not given’ and move on to the next question.

8. If you are really unsure or can’t find the answer, mark it as ‘not given’.
Question Type # 8

Matching Headings

This type of question tests your ability to understand the main idea of each paragraph.

Headings are short sentences that summarise the information in a paragraph. You have to pick the one that best summarises the information in a paragraph.

You will be given between 5 and 7 headings and asked to match each paragraph in the reading text to one heading. There are always more headings than paragraphs.

What skills are tested?

- Understanding the main idea of each paragraph.
- Quickly understanding the general meaning of a paragraph without reading every word.
- Differentiating between two or more similar headings.
Common problems:

- Lots of information to process and not enough time.
- Not understanding the statements as a whole.
- Some of the headings may appear to have the same meaning. Students do not spend enough time reading the statements.
- Not understanding the main idea of each paragraph in the text.
Tips for Matching Headings

Do this question first. By doing this, you will be able to get the general meaning of the text as a whole and this will help you with the rest of the question which requires you to take a more detailed look at the text.

You are not expected to read every word of the text.

Read the first one or two sentences and the last sentence of the paragraphs. You can also briefly look at the rest of the paragraph but you don’t have to read every word.

Don’t look at the heading first.

If there are words you don’t understand, don’t worry about this. Again, you should only worry about the general meaning of the paragraph as a whole, not individual words.

If there are two or three headings that are similar, write them beside the paragraph and try to find out the difference between the two headings.

If you still can’t decide which one suits best, move on and come back to it later.
Strategy for Matching Headings

1. If this type of question is on the test, do it first.
2. Don’t look at the headings.
3. Read the first one or two sentences and the last sentence of each paragraph to understand the general meaning of the paragraph. Don’t worry about highlighting keywords in the test. Try to sum up the general meaning of each paragraph in one or two words.
4. Look at the headings and identify keywords within each heading.
5. Match any headings that are very obvious and you are sure about.
6. For the others, write 2 or 3 headings beside the paragraph. Identify the difference between each of the headings. Establish if there are any synonyms in the paragraph to keywords in the headings.
7. If you still can’t pick one, move one. The answer will often reveal itself later.
8. Repeat until finished.
Labelling a Diagram

This type of question tests your ability to understand and label a diagram or plan.

There are three kinds of diagrams you might get: a technical drawing of a machine or invention, something from the natural world or a design or plan.

What skills are tested?

- Ability to cope with unfamiliar concepts or processes.
- Ability to appreciate the relationship between a text and diagram or plan.
- Locating the correct part of the text that contains the pertinent information.
Common problems:

- Focusing too much on the diagram and trying to understand everything about it.
- Failing to locate the paragraphs that contain the information quickly.
- Writing the wrong number of words or spelling the word incorrectly.
- Getting stuck on one question and wasting time.
Tips for Labelling a Diagram

Check how many words you are supposed to write, it will tell you in the question. In the example above, you can only write ‘one or two words’. If you write any more than this, you will lose marks. Remember that numbers count as one word and hyphenated words like ‘state-of-the-art’ count as one word.

Identify the type of word (noun, verb, adjective) you need. This will help you find the correct answer.

The answers do not always come in the same order that the paragraphs are in.

Do the easiest questions first. You are more likely to get these correct. If you cannot find the answer to a difficult question, move on and come back later.

Try to predict the answer before you read the text. This will help you find the correct answer.
Strategy for Labelling a Diagram

1. Check how many words you can write.
2. Study the diagram and try to understand what is happening generally. Don’t spend too much time doing this.
3. Highlight keywords or labels.
4. Identify the types of words required and try to predict the answer.
5. Scan the text and identify where the information is located.
6. Read in more detail to find the answer.
7. Check spelling.
Question Type # 10

Matching Names

In this type of question, you are asked to match someone’s name, normally an expert’s, researcher’s or scientist’s, to a statement.

You are given a list of names and a list of statements. Your job is to read the text and then match the names with the correct statement. The reading text will tell you what that person has said or done (normally research findings) and this will guide you to the correct answer.

What skills are tested?

- Scanning for the names in the text.
- Reading the appropriate part of the text in detail for understanding.
- Appreciating the presence of synonyms or paraphrasing that might help find the correct answer.
Common problems:

- The names that occur several times will be harder to match than the names that appear only once.
- Reading the whole text and trying to find the names that way.
- Not reading the appropriate sections in detail, and instead finding the names and writing the answer immediately.
- Trying to find words in the text that match with words in the statement exactly.
Focus on the easy questions first. If you can’t find the answer to a question, move on and come back to it later.

Find the names in the text quickly by scanning for them and then underlining them.

The names might be shortened to just a first or last name. For example, ‘John Jones’ might appear as only ‘Jones’ in the text.

Some of the names might be used more than once. Check the question for instructions on this.

Think of synonyms that might appear in the reading text. For example, the phrase ‘intense burst of energy’ could look like ‘explosive release of energy’ in the text.

The questions do not follow the order of the text. You might have to go backwards and forwards to find the correct answer. This is a very unnatural way to read and requires you to use your scanning skills.

If you like to categorise things by colour, use different coloured pens to underline the different names.
Strategy for Matching Names

1. Read the question carefully.
2. Focus on the names first. Read them and then scan for the names in the reading text and underline them. Remember that some names will appear more than once and you should underline them all.
3. Focus on the names that appear only once first, because these are the easiest.
4. Read around the name to see if their findings or research come before or after their name.
5. Read their research or findings, and then go back to the statements in the question and match them. Be aware of synonyms.
6. When you find a statement that matches a name, delete the statement. Each statement can only be used once.
7. Repeat for the rest of the names.
Matching Information to Paragraphs

In this kind of question, you are asked to match statements to paragraphs in the reading text.

The statements could be reasons, descriptions, summaries, definitions, facts or explanations.

You do not need to understand what the whole paragraph is about, just find specific information in the paragraph and match it to one of the statements. The answer will normally be contained in a whole phrase or sentence, rather than a single word.
Common problems:

- The biggest problem is the fact that you need to look at the whole text.
- The answers might not be the main idea of each paragraph.
- There is also lots of irrelevant information that you do not need to consider.
- Not all paragraphs contain an answer, and some paragraphs contain more than one answer.
Tips for Matching Information to Paragraphs

Do this question last. If you do other questions first, you will become familiar with the passage and this will help you identify the correct information more quickly and easily.

Try to find names, place names and numbers in the questions. These are often easier to find in the text.

Be aware that there may be synonyms. For example, you might see ‘34%’ in the question, but it might say ‘just over a third’ or ‘about a third’ in the text.
Strategy for Matching Information to Paragraphs

1. Read the instructions carefully.
2. Read the questions first. Think about synonyms and how you could paraphrase the statements. This will help you identify the answer. Saying each statement in your own words can help do this.
3. Quickly skim the reading text to try to understand the general meaning of the text.
4. Read the question statements again and predict which paragraph contains the answer.
5. Scan the text paragraphs you think might contain the answer for synonyms. If you find a possible answer, underline it.
6. Check back with the question statement and mark the answer if correct. If not, move on to other paragraphs.
Question Type # 12

Table Completion

For these questions, you will be asked to complete gaps in a table.

You may also be asked to complete gaps in a flow chart.

You have to complete the gaps using words or phrases from the text.

What skills are tested?

- Reading the instructions correctly.
- Scanning the text to locate the relevant paragraphs.
- Transferring information to the gaps correctly.
Common problems:

- Not reading the instructions carefully, especially the word limit.
- Going over the world limit.
- Changing the form of the words from the text.
- Spelling errors.
Tips for Table Completion

Read the table and understand what the table is about. This will help you predict the correct answer.

Note the heading of the table so that you know the type of information you need.

Note the other information in the table for clues to help you.

Predict the types of words you have to include based on the information already there.

Read the instructions very carefully.

Do not go over the world limit.

Check spelling.
Strategy for Table Completion

1. Read the instructions carefully.
2. Check the word limit.
3. Scan the text to locate the relevant paragraph(s).
4. Read the appropriate section carefully to find the answer.
5. Transfer the word(s) exactly as they are to the gap.
6. Check your spelling.
The reading test is a test of your general reading skill, but this is made up of more specific sub-skills.

This section will look at all of the most important reading sub-skills. This will give you a greater insight into what is actually being tested in each question.

A greater awareness of these skills allows you to decide what the best approach to each question is. It will also give you the confidence that you are approaching each question in the correct manner.

Like any skill, an awareness of them is only the first step. In order to master each of these skills, you must practice them. When you have mastered all of these skills and you know when to use them, the reading test will become much easier for you.

Let’s look at each of the main sub-skills.....
Skimming

Think about how you do this when reading in your own language.

This is when you quickly read the whole text or a large part of the text, so that you understand the general meaning. In other words, you read quickly to generally understand what it is about.

When I look at a newspaper, I tend to do this, so that I can quickly understand what the stories are about and if I want to read some of them in more detail. In this way, I can read a whole newspaper in 5-10 minutes because I have not been reading every word of each story, but, instead, just quickly finding out what the general meaning is.

Why do we do this?

Understanding the general meaning of a text will help you scan for the correct information and decide what the correct answer is. It is very difficult to look at one sentence and decide what the correct answer is without knowing the overall context of the entire text.
Read the questions first. This will allow you to know what you are looking for, before starting to skim.

Titles and sub-headings will give you a good idea of the general meaning before you read the actual text.

The first paragraph and last paragraph of a text will normally give you a good idea of what the whole text is about.

Practice
Read an online newspaper each day. Try to read 2-3 of the stories very quickly (3-4 times faster than normal) and think about the general meaning. You can then read more carefully to find out if you were correct or not.
Scanning

This skill does not normally give you the correct answer, but allows you to find where the answer is.

Scanning is when you look for a particular word or phrase. We normally use this skill when we are trying to locate where the correct answer is. This skill alone does not give us the correct answer, rather it tells us the correct location of the correct answer.

This skill is useful because it means we do not have to read the entire text to find the answer. In that way, it is a time saving skill more than anything else.

I use this skill when I am going to the cinema. Instead of reading every single movie and every single time, I will scan the text for the name of the movie I want. It will tell me the location of the available times, and then I can make my decision.
Read the questions first. This will allow you to know what you are looking for before starting to skim.

Focus on finding the relevant paragraphs or parts of the text, rather than looking at the text as a whole.

Avoid reading every word, or reading line by line.

Practice
Read a few news articles each day. Read the title and sub-titles only to give you an idea of what the articles are about. Guess 2-3 things, such as names, places, key facts, that might appear in the articles. Scan the articles quickly for these things.
In this guide, I often refer to this skill as ‘reading in detail’. It is the skill that most often allows you to establish the correct answer.

There is no point in just skimming and scanning without using this skill, because skimming gives us general meaning and scanning gives us location, neither of which give us the correct answer.

Close reading is when we understand a whole sentence or paragraph, so that we know exactly what it all means. In other words, you understand every word and the meaning of the whole sentence. It takes time and concentration and requires you to think carefully about meaning.

You will use this skill when deciding the correct answer.

I use this skill when reading an important email from someone. It is essential that I read and understand every word. If I don’t, I could misinterpret something and send the wrong reply.

Lots of students mention ‘skimming’ and ‘scanning’ when asked about reading skills but ignore this, the most important skill.
Dealing with New Words

The key here is not to panic and accept that there will always be ‘new’ words.

A ‘new’ word is a word that you have never seen before. This causes lots of stress because students believe that the new word is key to finding the answer, and not knowing what it means will lose them marks.

The first thing to do is decide if the new word is actually needed to get the correct answer. If it is not, ignore it. You will never understand all of the words in the text, so accept this and move on.

If the word is key to establishing the correct answer, you should guess what it means by looking at the context. The context is the words, phrases and sentences around the new word. You can normally guess the meaning based on what is around the new word.

You can also guess the meaning based on the form or function of the new word or phrase.
Dealing With New Words

Guess what the new word means based on the context. Look at the title, headings and words around it, as well as its function and form.

Make a mental note of what you think the new word means and continue reading. Don’t look it up.

Underline any new words you think might be useful, and you can then look up the meanings at the end. It will surprise you how many you get right without knowing the meaning.

Practice

You can combine this with your vocabulary building strategy. When you see a new word it is tempting to immediately look it up in a dictionary.

You should try to read something in English every day. When you see a new word you should do the following....
Context is essential for guessing the meaning of new and unknown words.

The general meaning of the paragraph will help you when guessing meaning from context. The topic sentence will help you quickly identify the overall meaning.

What form does the new word take? Is it a verb, a noun or an adjective? This will help you guess the meaning.

Could you replace the word with a word you already know? This will normally be a synonym of the unknown word.

Is it absolutely essential that you know the meaning? Can you answer the question without it? Remember that time is against you and you should move on if a word is causing too many problems, or if it’s taking too long to identify.
The first line of any paragraph will tell you about the rest of the paragraph.

Topic sentences tell the reader what the main idea of the paragraph is. It acts as a sign post, telling the reader what to expect in the rest of the paragraph.

A topic sentence is normally made up of two elements: the topic and the idea.

The topic will normally be a noun or noun phrase. The idea is the sub-context that they will be tackling within the topic.

For example, the topic might be ‘Ireland in the 20th Century’. This is quite a wide topic, so the writer will narrow it down by including an idea, for instance, child poverty. Our topic sentence will therefore be- ‘Child poverty was amongst the highest in Europe in 20th Century Ireland.’

We now know that the writer is going to discuss 20th Century Ireland and the main idea they are going to read about is child poverty.
It’s a vocabulary test
The reading and listening tests are as much vocabulary tests as they are skills tests. It is much easier to get a good score when you have a wide-ranging vocabulary.

Read and Listen
Studies have shown that the number one way for learners to improve their vocabulary is through reading and listening to genuine sources of English.

Record
You must record any new words you hear or read, so that you will remember them effectively. There are lots of ways to do this.

Review
It is essential that you regularly review these new words and phrases in order to retain them in your memory.
Online Resources

It’s all free

You do not need to spend any money to improve your vocabulary. All of the resources you need are freely available on the internet.

Here is a list of my favourite sites, but there are millions more that will help you. Simply use Google to find something that interests you.

- **BBC News**: All of the common IELTS topics are covered on a daily basis. Listen or read.
- **The Guardian**: They have a great selection of news articles and podcasts.
- **The Economist**: Economic, as well as political, commentary on current world issues.
- **Memrise**: Nice app for recording and reviewing vocabulary. Makes reviewing vocab. fun.
- **New Scientist**: A scientific, journal-style magazine that is not only educational, but also very interesting.
- **Wired**: Online technology magazine.
- **Quizlet**: Simple tools for learning anything.
- **eBooks**: Hundreds of thousands of books are now available to read online for free.
Practice makes perfect

Remember that reading is a skill. You should not just practice past exam papers. Reading anything in English will help you improve your chances of getting the score you need. Here are some sources:

- Cambridge Past Papers
- British Council, Cambridge and IDP Websites
- Online newspapers and magazines
- Google it! Search for whatever you’re interested in and read it.
This is not a skill, but is crucially important.

Stop! I know you think this is ‘easy’ and you know how to do this, but you would not believe the number of good students that throw away marks because they don’t fill out the answer sheet properly.

Read the instructions very carefully for ALL questions. Use any examples to help you. If you don’t understand the example or instructions, don’t move on until you do.

You can delete your answer with a single line, and then write your new answer beside it.

Grammar and spelling are crucially important. One small mistake and the answer will be marked wrong.

Try copying your answers section by section rather than all in one go.

Leave no blanks. If you have no idea, guess.
THANK YOU
For Your Precious Time