
Book reviews

TOP TIPS FOR IELTS: GENERAL TRAINING

*Produced by Cambridge ESOL in collaboration
with the British Council*

Cambridge, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2009,
ISBN 978-1-906438-73-9 (92pp and CD-Rom)

TOP TIPS FOR IELTS: ACADEMIC

*Produced by Cambridge ESOL in collaboration
with the British Council*

Cambridge, University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations, 2009,
ISBN 978-1-906438-72-2 (96pp and CD-Rom)

Reviewed by Sophie Hayat
IELTS examiner

The *Top Tips for IELTS* books are produced by the organisations that own IELTS, the internationally recognised test of English language skills. Compact, and each with an accompanying CD-Rom, these support materials are aimed at candidates or potential candidates of IELTS. The only noticeable difference between these two books is the content of the reading and writing sections, reflecting the differences in the reading and writing tests between the general and academic modules. As the titles indicate, these materials provide helpful tips along with relevant examples from the tests. They are not designed to directly help a candidate with the necessary language skills such as grammar or vocabulary. Anyone wondering what happens at an IELTS test, including what kind of questions will be asked or how the answer sheet should be completed, should be able to answer most of his or her questions through these books.

The books have identical formats, starting with an explanation of the various question types a candidate may come across: multiple choice, matching information, sentence completion and diagram labelling. The section "How to revise for IELTS" provides a useful study plan, including a list of ideas that are relevant not only for IELTS candidates, but for anyone wanting to improve their English language skills. The next four sections, and the bulk of the books, are divided into listening, reading, writing and speaking. In these

sections each page has a specific tip, a related example of a test question, the answer and an explanation. Both books finish with instructions of what to do on the test day, answer sheets and a very brief explanation of how IELTS band scores are reported.

Anyone unfamiliar with IELTS should find plenty of useful information in these materials. Test rules and regulations, explanations of question types and the structure of the tests are all covered. Potential candidates can also use the books and CD-Roms to assess whether they are ready to take the test. The books include numerous examples of questions, and the CD-Roms contain a full practice test and a video recording of a candidate undertaking the speaking test. However, these materials are not just for the uninitiated. They also contain advice for those candidates looking to improve on previous test scores. With examples of what you should do and even what you should not do to get the marks, there are practical hints as to what examiners and markers will be looking for. Candidates should be able to find detailed tips about what to concentrate on, and pitfalls to look out for. Likewise, an IELTS preparation teacher may also find the tips useful for helping candidates identify specific skills to focus on. The CD-Roms with the practice tests and speaking test video will most likely be very useful for candidates. Obviously candidates cannot obtain a score for their writing or speaking tests using these materials, but they can at least compare their answer with a sample answer.

Occasionally, the given tips and explanations can initially seem confusing. Although the example often helps with understanding, readers with a lower level of English language may find it a challenge to follow some tips and explanations. If the reader can get past some of these more complex explanations, the tips may be very helpful in achieving successful results.

Both *Top Tips for IELTS* books offer practical information for prospective or experienced IELTS candidates. They can guide candidates with their test preparation and help them avoid unwanted surprises when taking the test. Even teachers may be able to make use of the tips, examples, study plans or practice materials. Unfortunately, with only one full practice test provided, opportunities to do a mock test are limited. However, to balance this, many examples of test questions are included. Lightweight, and at roughly the size of a short paperback novel, the books could easily be carried around for quick access at any time or place. Their design lends itself to different study approaches such as reading a tip a day at lunch, or using more material as part of a full study session. With a comprehensive range of specific and general tips, these *Top Tips* are likely to be worth the effort.