

**Female Voice:** You are now listening to the IELTS podcast. Learn from tutors and ex-examiners who are masters of IELTS preparation. Your host, Ben Worthington.

**Ellen:** Hi everybody. This is Ellen with another tutorial for IELTS and what to expect in your IELTS speaking exam. Everybody gets really nervous about their exam especially if it's the first time they are taking IELTS and they don't know what to expect. So, that's what we're going to cover today. What to expect at the exam.

If you've never taken IELTS before, it's a long day. Typically, there is writing in the morning and at many centers speaking is on the same day. So, regardless of whether your speaking is the same day or if it's on a different day, certain things are the same. I want to go into what some of those things you should expect are.

The first thing you have to expect is that when the examiner opens the door and asks you to come in, he/she is probably already recording you because if you didn't know, the IELTS speaking test is recorded. There are a couple of reasons for that. It's partially to make sure that the examiners are doing their job the way they are supposed to be doing it, but the other reason it's recorded is to have evidence in case you want a remark or in case your speaking test needs to be double marked.

So, all the reasons are very well-intentioned, so it's nothing for you to worry about. In fact, I have heard some examiners after the end of the speaking test, after you leave the room, sometimes they will replay parts of it just to-- if they're on the fence about a grade to give you, they might replay part of it to kind of solidify their grade for you. So, that's the first thing you need to know.

The second thing you need to know is that there is really nothing allowed in the room. You're not allowed to wear a watch, there are no phones allowed, no food, maybe there's water allowed although I have heard from some students in the past that in certain centers their examiner most certainly had a phone with her in the room and it was in clear sight. Typically,

this is not allowed and so you should not expect to see something like that. That's definitely I would say not standard practice.

So, what happens? The examiner welcomes you into the room and will certainly tell you to have a seat. Then what they will do is they will record a formal intro. By that I mean they will read off of a script that they have and just say a few things that are pretty much meaningless to you, but they have to do it before each speaking test. So, that's the time when you just sit there and you're listening. It doesn't take too long, maybe 20 seconds or so.

Then what happens is the examiner will say to you, "Good morning," or "Good afternoon," or "Good evening." That is when the time starts. That is when the examiner is supposed to start recording you on those words. Of course, you respond in kind. You say good evening, good morning, good afternoon, whatever it is.

Then the examiner will ask you for your full name. That trips a lot of people up. Some people say, "My phone?" "My phone name?" No, but they ask you for your full names. You just have to give your first and last name. Some examiners will ask you what people call you or what shall I call you? The examiner may ask where you're from and the examiner will certainly ask to see your ID.

What follows after that, of course, is part 1. Part 1 will always consist of three sets of questions. The first set is always one of two topics. The topics are either where you live or the topic is work or study. Now, the questions vary quite a bit, but those are the two themes. So, you'll always get one of those two topics for your first topic.

Then the other two vary depending on the book that the examiner has. I think at this point, we all know what a lot of these topics are. It could be an endless number of topics from friends, family, school, your first school, your high school, trips, food, meals, plants, flowers, parks. There's a huge range of topics and I'm sure if you do a little research on the internet, you'll find what many of the topics that have come up are. Like I said, there will be two of those topics

that occur and the examiner will probably ask you three, four, maximum five questions from each of those topics.

Another thing that you need to know is that the examiner will not write grades in front of you. That never happens, but you will see the examiner writing things. A lot of examiners will take down notes on the timing of the test because the test is actually really, really strictly timed and examiners have to be very careful about the time especially with part 2 because there's the introduction to part 2 and then they have to make sure you have your one minute to plan and then, of course, there is the two minutes for your answer and then they also have to make sure that they have time for that follow-up question. So, if you see the examiner writing things down, that's why.

The next thing you need to know is that, as I said before, the examiner has a script and in parts 1 and 2, the examiner is not allowed to stray from the script at all. The test is so standardized and they are checked regularly, the examiners are checked regularly. As I said, the test is recorded and that's to help you, but it's also to make sure the examiners are doing their job properly.

So, the examiner is not allowed to rephrase, is not allowed to repeat more than once, is not allowed to use different words or help you with any unknown vocabulary or if you misunderstand the question, the examiner is still not allowed to help you.

Sometimes, examiners seem rather stiff and formal and maybe unfriendly. It's not because they want to be, but just because the test, as I said, is really, really strictly controlled and they are not allowed essentially to let their personality come through and to make it a little more personal.

I know that for some students that feels very awkward and they feel kind of uncomfortable. The examiners that I spoke to all try to kind of silently encourage students and test takers but, like I said, they're not allowed to do anything to actually change the language of the test at all.

Another thing that you need to be aware of is that the examiner has a lot of things going on at the same time. As I said, the examiner 1) has to be really strict with the timing of the test. 2) The examiner has to be strict with actually conducting the test appropriately making sure that he/she is asking you the right questions, the questions that he/she is supposed to ask you and at the same time, the examiner has to assess your speaking. So, it's a lot of things going on at the same time.

The reason why I mentioned that is that it might appear sometimes that the examiner is actually not listening to you. I've heard a couple of students of mine tell me, "My examiner was so strange. He had his eyes closed during the exam." Of course, I wasn't there but my guess was that the examiner was just probably really trying very hard to focus on the student to make sure that he was listening to the test and being focused on the actual speaking.

So, sometimes some people will do things like that in order to concentrate. I wasn't there so I can't say 100% for sure, but I'm very certain that the examiner wasn't sleeping, which is like I said what my student thought.

Another thing you need to know about the exam is that the examiner will say 'thank you' a lot. Thank you is the examiner's way of saying that's enough, no more, let's move on. The examiner, as I said before, cannot say those words, so if you hear the examiner say 'thank you', it means stop. That's pretty much one of the only words examiners are allowed to use.

And that's another thing that you'll find quite a bit. The examiner will cut you off. Sometimes students think that they have to give these really long-winded answers for part 1. That's not the case. Usually, two, three, maximum four sentences are enough to give a solid developed part 1 answer. As I said, the examiner has to get through three sets of questions, so if you keep going on and on, the examiner might have to stop you, might have to cut you off. So, you'll probably hear one of these 'thank you'.

Another thing you might hear the examiner say a few times in part one is 'why'. The examiner asks you a question and then you respond and then the examiner comes back and says, "Why?" That's just the examiner's way of saying that they want more language from you. They want you to speak more. They want you to expand more, so it just means keep talking more. You don't want the examiner to do that repeatedly. If you find the examiner has asked you why once or twice, that's your cue to supply more information in your answers.

I want to talk a little bit about what to expect in part 2. The examiner will give you some instructions. He will say that you will have one minute to think about what you're going to say and that you can take some notes. He will hand you a piece of paper and a pencil for taking those notes and he'll also tell you not to write on the book. The actual speaking card is, from what my students tell me, in the form of a little spiral bound notebook and then the questions are there.

You will have one minute to think about what you're going to say. Some people don't take the whole minute. I always encourage people to take the full minute. This way they can write some things down. What each person writes is different; it's up to them. Some people depending on how they've been trained with their teacher might write down keywords. Some people will write down sentences.

I am always a big supporter of writing down keywords to remind you of how to develop each of the bullets. I always say stick to the order of the bullets because they're actually a really logical order to tell your story and they allow you to embellish it. It's a nice flow. It's a good structure for your story. So, I always suggest you stay with it.

Do take the full minute. You have it. It's yours. Always think that you need to say more than you probably do because the most awkward thing is if you run out of time, some examiners I have been told say things like, "Can you tell me something more about that?" That can make

students nervous, so really try to plan out far more than you think you have to because when you're speaking you'll find that what you thought was a lot really isn't.

In fact, some of the examiners I know have told me that you will be asked to talk for the full two minutes. I know that they say 1-2 minutes, but they've told me that they actually have to give you the full two minutes unless you say something along the lines of, "Okay, I'm done now. I really have nothing else to say about that."

If you do say something like that, the examiner will still give you a little time to think about it and if you're certain you've nothing else to say, the examiner will give you one of these 'thank you'. All this while, the examiner is looking at his/her clock, is looking at the little piece of paper he/she has to write down the times. Again, it might look like he/she is not listening, but that's their job. They have to listen.

After you've finished with your part 2, you'll find that the examiner will ask you something about everything you've just said. It's a little short question. It just requires a little short answer. Not too long, not some extended response, maybe just like, I don't know, 5-10 seconds or so. You just respond. It's usually something like, "Do your friends know about this?" or "Did you tell anybody about this incident?" or "Have you done this?" or "Do you think you'll do this?" It's usually questions like that and you can just respond with a "Yes. In fact, I told my best friend and my mother." Something brief really just to close up part 2.

The examiner will then ask you for the book and the paper and the pencil and then will go into part 3. Part 3, something really interesting happens according to my examiner friends. People suddenly relax. I think they think that the worst is over because they've gotten over part 2 and that part 3 is really more of a casual chit chat.

That's not entirely true because part 3 has a lot of challenging questions and they tend to be rather abstract. That's something you should prepare for and as the test goes on, you'll find that the questions get more abstract and sometimes more difficult to answer and certainly less

related to what you talked about in part 2. So, those are some things that you should know and expect.

Here the examiner has a little leeway to ask you some of his/her own questions. So, they'll ask you one of the questions in the book and then maybe they'll ask you something related to that or maybe to describe it more or maybe something just off the top of the examiner's head.

Here there are usually two topics. Not usually, here there are two sets of questions and these two sets of questions will take about four, five minutes. There's usually like three sets of questions in each and as I said, the examiner does have to ask you some follow-up questions based on your response that are not in the book, but they just come up from your discussion with the examiner.

Another thing you should expect during the exam is that the examiner will probably have those band descriptors out somewhere in his sight. Those are obviously not for you to look at, but they are for the examiner to refer to while listening to you speak or even after the test; the examiner will refer to them in order to give you your grade.

Another thing you should expect from your IELTS speaking exam is that the examiner isn't really allowed to say even normal things that we do in conversations like aha, mmh, oh how interesting, oh I see. The examiner is not allowed to say any of those things, so sometimes the conversation can feel a little unnatural.

The examiners that I have spoken to though tell me that they do try to give some sort of non-verbal cues to the students like nodding their head or making a sign with the hand like okay, go on. Tell me more. But as I said, they're really not allowed to say anything. So, just be prepared for that. Not even like mmm, oh, mmh. Some examiners will do it, but they're actually not supposed to.

One place where you'll see this is if you ask the examiner a question. Imagine that you didn't understand the question and so you want some sort of clarification. So, let's say the examiner

asks you, I don't know, just imagine any topic. You say to the examiner, "By this do you mean this?" The examiner isn't really allowed to say anything. What he /she might do is just nod or just make some sort of shrugging motion with their shoulders. Things like that are about the most they can do, but they are certainly not allowed to help you with any verbal information.

Along those lines, it goes without saying that the examiner is not allowed to tell you anything about your grade whatsoever. Sometimes I know students are always tempted to ask, did I do okay? I'm sorry I was so nervous or I hope that was all right. I hope I did well. Could you tell me something about my grades? Anything anybody says like that, the examiner theoretically isn't supposed to say anything, just perhaps smile and say okay, bye-bye. Just avoid asking things like that because they're not supposed to say anything.

Even if you do admit that you're nervous, it might make you feel better, it might make you feel like you're being a little more personal, I wouldn't say it will help your score at all. You could say it if you want to if it makes you feel better, but just be aware that the examiner will probably not respond. Also, remember that pretty much everybody taking that test that day is nervous just like you are so the examiner knows that.

Another thing that you need to remember is that examiners are by and large teachers themselves, so they have heard everything. They don't want to destroy your life. They don't want to make your life difficult and they would love to be able to give you high scores and good scores to get you where you want to go.

Sometimes I've heard that people will actually tell the examiner what score they need. So say, for example, if someone is a doctor, they might say to the examiner, "Yes, I need a 7 in this exam in order to go to the UK and practice." The examiner understands all those things and certainly doesn't want to ruin your life. They do have some leeway in terms of how they score, but don't imagine that that's very much. I will explain scoring as it has been explained to me in another podcast that will follow soon.



For today, that's pretty much what I wanted to talk about. Just remember that the IELTS examiner doesn't want to ruin your life. They would like to help you as much as possible, as much as they can while still retaining the integrity of the test. Keep that in mind for your exam.

I want to wish everybody good luck both on their preparation or if they are ready-- if you're ready to take your exam, good luck on your test. For everybody else, stay tuned for more tutorials from all of us here and good luck with your IELTS preparation.

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