



FUTURE SCIENCE

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ENGLISH **PROFICIENCY** **TEST PREPARATION** **Essential Skills for EFL Learners**

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**ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST
PREPARATION:
Essential Skills for EFL Learners**

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PREFACE

Mastering English proficiency has become one of the most essential skills in recent globalized world. The ability to communicate effectively in English is needed for education, career advancement, and international collaboration. Recognizing the increasing importance of standardized English tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC, this book—***English Proficiency Test Prep: Essential Skills for EFL Learners***—is designed to guide English learners in understanding, practicing, and mastering the fundamental skills needed to achieve success in these tests.

This book presents a comprehensive discussion of the key components assessed in English proficiency tests, including listening, reading, speaking, and writing, along with grammar and vocabulary mastery. Each chapter explores not only the test structure and strategies but also practical exercises, skill development approaches, and authentic examples that reflect real test situations. Through a balance of theory and application, readers are encouraged to build both competence and confidence in using English effectively across contexts.

The book is organized into several chapters, each written by contributors with expertise in English language teaching and assessment. Together, they provide diverse perspectives on how learners can prepare strategically and efficiently for English proficiency examinations. Beyond test preparation, the book also emphasizes the long-term value of language proficiency as

a life skill that supports academic success and professional growth.

It is hoped this book serves as a valuable reference for teachers, students, and researchers in the field of English language education. May it inspire learners to approach English proficiency not merely as an examination requirement but as an opportunity to enhance communication, critical thinking, and global engagement.

Malang, October 2025

Editor

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS

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INTRODUCTION

English proficiency plays a vital role in the academic, professional, and personal development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. As the global lingua franca, English is the primary medium of communication in international education, business, science, technology and other fields. For EFL learners, acquiring strong English skills opens access to higher education opportunities abroad, including scholarships, academic exchanges, and enrollment in prestigious universities (Permatasari et al., 2024). Many multinational companies also require job applicants to demonstrate their English competence as a prerequisite for employment or promotion. Beyond academic and career advancement, English proficiency enables learners to engage in the global communication, access a wider range of digital resources, and participate meaningfully in online communities and intercultural exchanges. The ability to use English confidently and accurately empowers EFL learners to broaden their horizons and compete more effectively in the global landscape.

An English proficiency test is a standardized assessment designed to measure a person's ability to understand, use, and communicate effectively in the English language (Ruegg et al., 2024). These tests evaluate the core language skills-listening, reading, speaking, and writing- and sometimes include grammar

and vocabulary components. English proficiency tests are commonly used by educational institutions, employers, and immigration authorities to determine whether an individual has the necessary language competence to succeed in an academic or professional setting where English is the medium of instruction or communication (Chen, 2019; Hsu, 2009). English proficiency tests have no connection to a school regular curriculum. It assesses overall ability based on international standards. TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC and the Cambridge English exams are among the most common English proficiency tests and most international university admission, job application or visa processing in English-speaking countries often require them.

Standardized English proficiency tests are impartial instruments for assessing individual's competencies in using English for everyday situations. Strict criteria were used in the development of these examinations to guarantee dependability, consistency, and fairness for all test takers, regardless of background (Opperman, 2020). Standardized tests like TOEFL or IELTS are used in academic settings by universities and colleges worldwide to assess applicants' language proficiency, especially that of international students, in order to determine whether they have what it takes to succeed in coursework, engage in class discussions, and understand academic materials. Companies frequently use professional examinations like the TOEIC or IELTS General Training module to evaluate potential hires' English communication abilities, particularly in international businesses where English is the primary language of operation. Furthermore, many immigration authorities, such as those in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand, require standardized English test scores as part of their visa application processes to ensure that applicants can integrate into the community, access public services, and participate in

the workforce. Thus, standardized English tests play a critical role in facilitating education mobility, career advancement, and international migration for EFL learners.

KEY SKILLS ASSESSED IN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST

English proficiency tests are designed to assess a range of language skills that reflect a learner's ability to use English in academic, professional, or everyday contexts (Phillips, 2015). The four primary language skills commonly evaluated are:

1. **Listening:** the ability to understand spoken English in a variety of accents and contexts (e.g., lectures, conversations, instructions)
2. **Reading:** the ability to comprehend and analyze written texts, ranging from general passages to academic articles.
3. **Speaking:** the ability to produce spoken English clearly and coherently, often through structured interviews or recorded tasks.
4. **Writing:** the ability to express ideas in written English using appropriate grammar, vocabulary, coherence, and organization.

Some tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS, also integrate grammar, vocabulary, and functional language use as part of these core skills, either directly or indirectly through performance-based tasks. These skills align with the communicative competence outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) which emphasizes both receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing).

Proficiency tests aim to stimulate real-life communication needs. For example, academic tests like TOEFL iBT and IELTS Academic assess learners' ability to understand lecturers, write

essays and participate in discussions. Those skills are essential for success in English-medium education. Professional tests such as TOEIC evaluate the language needed in business or workplace settings, including email writing, phone conversations and meetings.

TYPES OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS

English proficiency tests can be categorized based on their purposes, contexts, and scopes. Taylor (2013) discusses how modern proficiency tests reflect the needs of different stakeholders – academia, the workplace, and government – through context-specific tasks. Broadly, they fall into the following three types. They are Academic English Proficiency Tests, General English Proficiency Tests, and Professional or Workplace English Tests.

1. Academic English Proficiency Tests

These tests assess a learner's ability to use English in academic contexts, such as university or college settings. They typically include tasks related to understanding lectures, writing essays, and interpreting academic texts. The examples of this type are TOEFL iBT, IELTS Academic, PTE Academic, Cambridge English: Advanced (CAE). Those tests are usually used as the requirement for admission into higher education institutions in English-speaking countries. (Weir, 2005) classifies English language tests based on their domain of use and notes that academic tests aim to predict success in university-level study.

2. General English Proficiency Tests

These assess everyday English communication skills in both spoken and written contexts. They are often used for immigration, general employment, or personal development. The examples of this test are IELTS General Training, Cambridge English: First (FCE), Duolingo

English Test. The function of this test is for immigration applications, work readiness, and general communication skills.

3. Professional or Workplace English Tests

These tests are designed to evaluate English used in professional or business settings, such as meetings, emails, negotiations, and customer service. It can be found in TOIEC, BULATS (now Linguaskill), Cambridge BEC (Business English Certificate). Those tests are for employment screening, promotions, or training programs in international companies. (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007) explain how specific-purposes language tests, such as workplace English exams, assess English proficiency within particular professional registers.

Other subcategories of English Proficiency Test are those that focus on specific skills and purposes beyond the general tests. These include assessments that measure listening, speaking, reading, and writing separately, as well as tests that emphasize academic or professional communication. Some subcategories are designed for placement or diagnostic purposes, while others are intended to certify proficiency for study, work, or immigration. Each of these types provides valuable insights into different dimensions of English language ability, which will be explained in the following section.

1. Integrated skills vs single-skill tests
e.g., TOEFL integrates all four skills; some tests assess only reading or speaking
2. Computer-based vs paper-based tests
e.g. TOEFL IBT is computer-based; IELTS can be paper-based or computer-based
3. High-stakes vs low-stakes tests

High-stakes tests impact decisions like admission or immigration; low-stakes tests may be for placement or classroom assessment

MAJOR ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS FOR EFL LEARNERS

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is one of the most widely recognized English proficiency tests, designed to assess a learner's ability to use and understand academic English. The most common format, the TOEFL IBT (internet-based test), evaluates four integrated language skills, namely reading, listening, speaking and writing. Each section is scored on a scale of 0 to 30, with a total score ranging from 0 to 120. More than 11.000 universities around the world, mostly in the US and Canada, recognize the TOEFL, which is mostly used for university applications. Authentic academic tasks, such synthesizing material from reading and hearing sources before speaking or writing about them, are what set the TOEFL apart from some other tests.

IELTS (International English Language Testing System)

An internationally renowned exam of English proficiency, the International English Language Testing **System** (IELTS) evaluates a candidate's competency in four essential areas: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. It comes in two forms: IELTS General Training, which is used for immigration and job purposes, and IELTS Academic, which is meant for people starting college or registering as professionals. Half-band scores (e.g., 6,5 to 7.0) are permitted on the test, which employs a band scale from 1 to 9 to denote skill levels. IELTS' face-to-face speaking exam, which is administered by a qualified examiner

and evaluates coherence, fluency, and pronunciation in real-time interaction, is one of its distinguishing characteristics. The test is jointly managed by Cambridge Assessment English, the British Council, and IDP: IELTS Australia. It is widely accepted in the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and many other countries. As Taylor (2013) explains, IELTS is structured to reflect real-life language use in academic, social, and workplace contexts, making it a flexible and practical choice for many EFL learners.

TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication)

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is designed to assess the everyday English skills needed in a workplace or business environment. In contrast to academically oriented assessments like the TOEFL or IELTS, the TOEIC places a strong emphasis on real-world communication problems that are frequently seen in global businesses and professional environments. Speaking and writing are optional components of the core test, which assesses listening and reading comprehension. The speaking and writing portions of the test are scored independently on scale of 0 to 200, while Listening and Reading portion provides a cumulative score between 10 and 990. In East and Southeast Asia, TOEIC is particularly well-liked and frequently utilized for language training programs, promotions and employment screening. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) created the TOEIC, which is based on the CEFR framework and workplace communication demands. (Lougheed, 2012) claim that in order to better assist employers and students in evaluating performance with international norms, TOEIC results can be mapped to CEFR levels.

Cambridge English Qualification (KET, PET, FCE, CAE, CPE)

The Cambridge Assessment English created the Cambridge English Qualifications, a set of proficiency exams that evaluate English language skills for a variety of levels and objectives. Exams like A2 Key (KET), B1 Preliminary (PET), B2 First (FCE), C1 Advanced (CAE), and C2 Proficiency (CPE) are among those that are in line with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Each test assesses the four fundamental language skills of speaking, writing, listening, and reading and is tailored to a particular CEFR level. Both computer-based and paper-based versions of the tests are offered, and the results are presented as a CEFR level in addition to a scaled score. Cambridge exams are widely utilized in schools, colleges, and professional contexts and are accepted by thousands of institutions, mostly in Europe. The CEFR framework serves as the foundation for test design, ensuring that language proficiency is assessed consistently and meaningfully in a variety of circumstances (Council of Europe, 2017). These credentials are particularly appropriate for students who want to monitor their development or gain a lifetime certification of their proficiency in English.

Duolingo English Test

Duolingo English Test (DET) has grown as recent online English competency test. It provides flexible accessibility, more affordable cost and easy to use. DET can be taken at any time via a computer with a camera and an internet connection, unlike traditional tests that require the candidates to visit the test location. The test uses an adaptive format that modifies the difficulty of the questions according to the test taker's performance to evaluate integrated language abilities, which include speaking, listening, writing, and reading. A

comprehensive score report includes subscores for literacy, comprehension, discourse, and production. Scores are presented on a scale ranging from 10 to 160. More and more universities, particularly in the US, are accepting the Duolingo exam as a substitute for the TOEFL or IELTS. According to Cheung (2025), the DET uses technology and artificial intelligence to provide a valid and dependable assessment experience, making it especially appropriate for learners who are located in remote areas or in areas with limited access. This challenges conventional testing methods. Scores are presented on a scale ranging from 10 to 160. More and more universities, particularly in the US, are accepting the Duolingo exam as a substitute for the TOEFL or IELTS. According to Cheung (2025), the DET uses technology and artificial intelligence to provide a valid and dependable assessment experience, making it especially appropriate for learners who are located in remote areas or in areas with limited access. This challenges conventional testing methods.

National/Local English Tests

The TOEFL ITP (Institutional Testing Program) is a paper-based English proficiency test developed by Educational Testing Service (ETS) and widely used in Indonesia, especially within universities, government institutions, and private organizations. Unlike the TOEFL IBT, which is intended for international academic admissions, the TOEFL ITP is primarily used for institutional purposes, such as university graduation requirements, scholarship applications, English placement tests, and recruitment processes. The test measures listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension, with a total score ranging from 310 to 677. In Indonesia, many institutions prefer ITP TOEFL due to its affordability, accessibility, and alignment with academic English

needs, even though it is not accepted for overseas university admissions. According to Widyaningsih (2020), ITP TOEFL is still perceived as a reliable indicator of English proficiency, especially in regions where internet-based testing is less accessible. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) also frequently requires TOEFL ITP scores for various domestic programs, making it a high-demand test for EFL learners in Indonesia.

Table 1.1. The Summary of Major English Proficiency Test

Test	Purpose	Skills Tested	Score Range	Recognition
TOEFL IBT	Academic	4 integrated skills	0 – 120	USA, Canada, Global Universities
IELTS	Academic & General	4 skills + face-to-face oral	1.0 – 9.0	UK, Australia, NZ, global
TOEIC	Workplace English	Listening, Reading (+optional Speaking & Writing)	10 – 990	Business/employment (Asia)
Cambridge English Qualifications	Academic/General	Depends on level (A2 – C2)	CEFR scale	Schools, universities, EU
Duolingo	Academic (Online)	Integrated adaptive skills	10 – 160	Increasing university acceptance
TOEFL ITP	Academic	Listening, structure, reading	310 – 670	Indonesia

TEST PREPARATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

One of the most essential aspects of English proficiency test preparation is a clear understanding of the test format and structure. Each standardized test, whether it be TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, or others, has its own unique design, section types, time limits, scoring criteria, and task instruction. Familiarity with the test's format enables learners to manage their time effectively, reduce anxiety during the test, and focus on demonstrating their true language abilities rather than being distracted by unexpected question types (Ihsan, 2023; Putri, 2014). For example, knowing that the TOEFL IBT integrates tasks across skills (e.g., reading followed by speaking) can help learners practice accordingly. Similarly, being aware that the IELTS Speaking Test involves a live examiner can help students prepare for real-time interaction. As Taylor (2013) notes, knowledge of the test's design is foundational to successful performance, as it helps test takers align their preparation with what is actually being assessed.

While understanding the test format is critical, learners must also balance language skill development with test-taking strategies. Effective preparation involves improving core competencies, such as vocabulary, grammar, reading speed, listening comprehension, and spoken fluency, alongside learning how to approach specific test tasks strategically (Hz et al., 2023). For instance, mastering the skill of skimming and scanning texts benefits both general reading proficiency and performance on reading comprehension sections. On the other hand, strategic approaches, like eliminating distractors in multiple-choice questions or structuring essays according to scoring rubrics, are test-specific techniques that enhance outcomes. As (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007) emphasizes, test success depends not just on knowing English, but on knowing how to apply that knowledge in the specific ways the test requires. Therefore, an integrated

approach that combines language practice with strategic test simulation is ideal for most EFL learners.

Early preparation has several benefits for EFL students, especially when it comes to building the confidence and fluency required for high-stakes exam situations. Early preparation, as opposed to cramming or short-term memory, enables students to develop the fundamental language skills necessary for success progressively (Wudthayagorn et al., 2022). Additionally, it offers enough time to pinpoint one's own shortcomings, establish reasonable objectives, and track advancement using self-evaluation or diagnostic testing. Additionally, early preparation promotes regular exposure to English through speaking practice, reading articles, and viewing English-language media, all of which aid in language acquisition. According to (Alderson, 2015), long-term preparation not only enhances test performance but also fosters meaningful, transferable language learning that benefits academic and professional communication. For EFL learners, whose access to immersive environments may be limited, structured, and sustained preparation is a key to both test success and broader language proficiency.

CHALLENGES FACED BY EFL LEARNERS

EFL learners often encounter several challenges when taking English proficiency tests, including time pressure, unfamiliar accents, and test anxiety. Several studies describe several major obstacles for students and professionals in acquiring English language competence, including (1) linguistic barriers, (2) speech processing difficulties, (3) academic and conversational English skills, (4) speaking confidence, and (5) access to speaking opportunities (Permatasari et al., 2024). Strict time limits can make it difficult for test takers to complete reading passages, process audio input, or plan their writing

responses effectively. Unfamiliar accents, such as British, American, or Australian, can hinder comprehension during listening sections, especially for learners who have limited exposure to global varieties of English. Additionally, high-stakes testing environment often trigger anxiety, which can affect concentration, memory recall, and language fluency. These factors, individually or combined, can create significant barriers for EFL learners in demonstrating their true language ability. These challenges can negatively affect test performance by reducing accuracy, fluency, and confidence during the exam. Time pressure may lead to incomplete sections or rushed answers, while accent unfamiliarity can cause misinterpretation of key information. Test anxiety often leads to lower cognitive function and poor decision-making. To overcome these issues, learners should engage in regular timed practice, expose themselves to various English accents through podcasts or videos, and develop stress-reduction techniques such as breathing exercises or positive self-talk. Test familiarity, mock exams and supportive learning environments can also help learners build the confidence and competence needed to perform at their best.

CONCLUSION

English proficiency test has become a vital skill for EFL learners in seeking academic, professional and personal advancement. Standardized English proficiency tests, such as TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, serve as important tools to measure the learners' abilities to apply English in academic, workplace and everyday contexts. Those tests assess the core language skills and provide objective benchmarks for university admissions, job qualifications, and immigration requirements. EFL learners are encourage to understand the types of proficiency test to choose the most suitable pathways for their goals.

In addition, having effective preparations such as understanding the test format, developing skills, and test strategies are very important. Test takers are encouraged to have early preparation since it would not only boost performance but also foster deeper language acquisition. Through consistent practice, exposure to varied English input and mental readiness, EFL learners can overcome some barriers such as time pressure, unfamiliar accents, and anxiety. With suitable guidance, perseverance, and resources, EFL learners can succeed in standardized tests and build lasting English proficiency that empowers them in the future.

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CHAPTER 2

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the bridge between thought and expression, with grammar providing the structure that keeps this connection strong. For many learners, grammar can feel abstract, inflexible, or even dull—especially when traditional teaching emphasizes rote memorization over practical application (Caingcoy, 2022). Yet grammar isn't about flawless precision; it's about clarity and coherence. The most effective approach is to study it systematically, practice regularly, and use it in meaningful, real-world contexts.

Grammar is more than a collection of arbitrary rules—it's the foundation of language itself. Without it, sentences lose clarity, meanings become ambiguous, and communication falters (Shakir & Mahmood, 2021). Strong grammar skills allow us to: articulate ideas with precision, write with authority and credibility, comprehend sophisticated texts, and speak fluently in any situation.

Rather than an obstacle, grammar is a powerful tool that enables precise and confident expression (Rosmiaty et al., 2023). By the end of this chapter, you'll not only grasp English grammar but also integrate it seamlessly into daily communication.

Grammar isn't about rigid memorization—it's about conveying thoughts clearly, professionally, and with confidence.

Whether in casual conversations, professional advancement, or academic achievement, mastering grammar unlocks better opportunities and more impactful communication.

A strong command of English grammar is vital for clear, confident, and effective expression. Its benefits extend far beyond basic communication, shaping cognitive skills, career growth, social interactions, and personal development (Daniel, 2017). Below are some of its key advantages:

1. Enhanced Critical Thinking
2. Studying grammar sharpens pattern recognition, structural analysis, and logical reasoning.
3. Memorizing rules strengthens memory and recall.
4. Grasping grammatical principles aids in learning additional languages.
5. Builds a framework for understanding how languages function systematically.
6. Improves the ability to compare and contrast linguistic structures.

This chapter will explore each Part of Speech in detail, demonstrating how they function individually and together. By mastering these fundamental elements, we will gain the confidence to build grammatically correct sentences, refine our writing, and communicate with greater accuracy. Let's begin with the foundation of grammar, where every word has a purpose, and every sentence follows a clear, logical structure.

PARTS OF SPEECH

The English language consists of eight primary parts of speech, each serving a different function in a sentence (Chiche & Yitagesu, 2022):

1. Nouns

Nouns is words that name people, places, things, animal, quality or ideas.

The function of Nouns:

- They can act as the **subject** of a sentence (who or what the sentence is about).
Example: *The lion* sleeps
- They can act as an **object** (what is being acted upon).
Example: She brings a *book*
- They can act as a *possession*.
Example: That is *Claudia's cake*
- They can act as a *complement*
Example: You are a *lecturer*

Types of Nouns

- Common nouns (general names of people, places or things).
Example: city, book, teacher, table, etc.
- Proper nouns (specific names of people, places, or things. It always capitalized).
Example: London, Harry Potter, Dr. Jhon, Istiqlal Mosque, etc.
- Concrete Nouns (Things that can physically be seen / touched).
Example: dog, cat, table, music, etc.
- Abstract Nouns (Ideas, emotions, or qualities. It cannot be touched).
Example: love, freedom, happiness, sadness, etc.
- Countable nouns (Things that can be counted. It can be singular/plural forms).
Example: Apple - apples, car – cars, child – children, etc.

- Uncountable nouns (Things that can't be counted. No plural form).
Example: water, sugar, information, rice, etc.
- Collective Nouns (Groups of people, animals, or things).
Example: Team, group, family, etc.
- Compound Nouns (Made of two or more words. It hyphenated or combined).
Example: toothpaste, mother-in-law, swimming pool, etc.

2. Pronouns

Pronouns are a fundamental part of speech that serve as substitutes for nouns or noun phrases, helping to avoid repetition and make sentences smoother and more concise. They play a crucial role in maintaining coherence and clarity in both spoken and written communication.

Pronouns are words that replace nouns to avoid repetition. The function of Pronouns is to make sentences clearer and also to maintain sentence flow. They refer to specific items or people. Examples: he, she, they, it, we, you, I

Types of Pronoun

- Personal pronouns (Replace specific people, animals, or things)
Example: *As Subject (perform the action):* I, you, he, she, we, they.
She is reading newspaper
As Object (receive the action): me, you, him, her, it, us, them
My father calls *me*
- Possessive pronouns (showing ownership)
Example: mine, yours, his, hers, ours.

This bag is *hers*

- Reflexive pronouns (refer back to the subject).

Example: myself, yourself, himself

You hurt *myself*

- Demonstrative pronouns (Point to specific things in space or time)

Example: this, that, these, those

This is my best friend

- Interrogative Pronouns (Used to ask questions)

Example: who, whom, which, what

Whose car is this?

- Relative Pronouns (Introduce relative clauses)

Example: who, whom, which, what

The boy *who* meets me is my brother

- Indefinite Pronouns (Refer to non-specific people or things)

Example: many, everyone, anyone, somebody

Everyone enjoy the show

3. Verbs

Verbs are words that express actions, states of being, or occurrences.

The function of verbs: to express actions, occurrences, or states. Every complete sentence requires at least one verb.

Examples: run, eat, think, is, have, etc.

Types of Verbs

- Action verbs (it describes physical or mental action).

Example: jump, write, kick, sleep, eat, etc.

Andy *kicks* the ball, She *writes* correctly

- Linking verbs (it connects the subject to a subject complement).

Example: seem, become, feel, sound, look, etc.

The girl *looks* sad

- Helping/auxiliary verbs (it works with main verb to express tense/mood).

Example: can, will, have, may, etc.

I will go to school, They have played football

Principal parts of Verbs

Base Form	Past Simple	Past Participle	Present Participle
Stand	Stood	Stood	Standing
Write	Wrote	Written	Writing
Play	Played	Played	Playing
Study	Studied	Studied	Studying
Go	Went	Gone	Going

4. Adjectives

Adjectives are words that describe or modify nouns. Adjectives add detail and richness to language. Examples: happy, tall, blue, three, big

Types of Adjectives

- Descriptive Adjectives (Describe qualities)
Example: color, size, shape, emotion, etc.
Diana has a kind heart
- Quantitative Adjectives (Specify quantity or amount)
Example: two slices of pizza, some milk, etc.
You buy two slices of pizza
- Demonstrative Adjectives (Point out specific nouns)
Example: this, that, these, those, etc.
That car is new, those students play volleyball
- Possessive adjectives (show ownership)
Example: your, her, my, etc.

My shoes is expensive, your dictionary is thick

- Interrogative Adjective (it used in questions)

Example: which, whose, what, etc.

Whose pen is it?, which book do you prefer?

- Proper Adjectives (derived from proper nouns and always capitalized)

Example: Korean food, Javanese Food

She eats Javanese Food

5. Adverbs

Adverbs are words that modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, explaining how, when, where, or to what extent something occurs. They add nuance and precision to language. Examples: quickly, very, well, yesterday

Types of Adverbs

- Adverbs of Manner (it describes HOW an action is perform).

Example: Jenny speaks *softly*, He explains the lesson *clearly*

- Adverbs of Time (it indicates WHEN something happens).

Example: I come to your house *yesterday*

- Adverbs of Place (it indicates WHERE an actions occurs).

Example: He looked *everywhere*

- Adverbs of Degree (it express intensity).

Example: The music was *very* energetic

- Adverbs of Frequency (it describes HOW OFTEN something happens).

Example: I *usually* sleep early

6. Prepositions

Prepositions are words that show relationships between nouns/pronouns and other words. It often relating to location, time, or direction. They are essential for constructing meaningful and grammatically correct sentences. Examples: in, on, at, under, between

A preposition links nouns, pronouns, or phrases to other parts of a sentence, answering questions like:

Where? (on, in, under, near),

When? (at, before, after, during),

How? (by, with, without),

Why? (because of, due to).

Examples in sentences: The food is on the table (Location),

She slept before noon. (Time)

He traveled by plane. (Means)

Types of Prepositions

- Simple Prepositions : Single-word prepositions (*in, at, on, under, over, with*)
Kimberly sits *on* the chair
- Compound Prepositions : Two-word prepositions (*inside of, because of*)
He goes *because of* the noise
- Phrasal Prepositions : Multi-word phrases (*in front of, in spite of, on behalf of*)
The students stand *in front of* the class
- Prepositions of Time : Indicate when something happens (*at, on, in, for, since*)
We arrive at school *at* 6 AM
- Prepositions of Place/Direction : Show location or movement (*in, on, at, to, from, into*)
The boys walk *on* the roof

- Prepositions of Agency/Instrument: Indicate means or tool (*by, with, using*)
The letter was written *by* pen
- Prepositions of Manner : Describe how something is done (*like, as, in, with*)
She speaks *like* princess

7. Conjunctions

Conjunction is a word or phrase that connects words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. It helps establish relationships between ideas, such as addition, contrast, cause-effect, or time sequence. Conjunctions are essential for creating smooth, coherent, and complex sentences. Examples: and, but, or, because, if

Types of Conjunction:

- Coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS)

Conjunction	Function	Example
For	Explains reason	She studied hard, for she wanted to pass
And	Adds information	I like tea and coffee
Nor	Adds negative alternative	He doesn't like apples, nor does he like oranges
But	Shows contrast	She is rich, but she is humble
Or	Presents a choice	Do you want tea or coffee?
Yet	Introduces contrast	He is young, yet very wise

Conjunction	Function	Example
So	Indicates result	It rained, so we stayed home

- Subordinating conjunctions

Category	Conjunctions	Example
Time	After, before, since, until, when, while	When she arrived, we ate dinner
Cause/Effect	Because, since, so that	He left because he was tired
Condition	If, unless, provided that	If it rains, we will cancel the trip
Contrast	Although, even though, whereas	Although he was late, he wasn't punished

8. Interjections

Interjection is a word or short phrase that expresses sudden emotion, reaction, or sentiment. It is not grammatically connected to the rest of the sentence and often stands alone, followed by an exclamation mark (!) or a comma (,).

Examples: Wow! Oh! Ouch! Hey!

Function of Interjections:

- To express emotions (anger, pain, surprise)
Example: Wow! That's fantastic!
- To react to situations.
Example: ouhhhh! I forget my bike.
- To greet or call attention.
Example: hi, how are you?

SENTENCE STRUCTURE

A sentence must have at least a subject (who/what the sentence is about) and a predicate (what the subject does/is). Sentences can be classified based on purpose (what they do) and structure (how they are built).

1. Subject & Predicate

Example: the boy sits on the chair

- Subject: The boy
- Predicate: sits on the chair.

Sentences Classification by PURPOSE

Classification	Function	Examples
1. Declarative Sentences	Make statements or express facts/opinions	I enjoy reading mystery novels
2. Interrogative Sentences	Ask questions	Where do you live?
3. Imperative Sentences	Give commands, requests, or advice	Close the door
4. Exclamatory Sentences	Express strong emotions (surprise, joy, anger)	What a beautiful sunset!

2. Sentences Classification by Structure

- Simple Sentence: consist of one independent clause.
Example: She sleeps.
- Compound Sentence: consist of two independent clauses joined by a conjunction.
Example: She reads books and he watches movies.

- Complex Sentence: consist of one independent clause + one dependent clause.

Example: Because she loves stories, she reads books.

TENSES (BASIC VERB FORMS)

Tenses indicate the time of an action (past, present, future).

- Present Simple: It indicates habits, daily activities and general truth

Example:

Every day they study at university

She cleans the bedroom

Sun rises at the morning

- Past Simple: it indicates completed actions in the past.

Example:

He visited Paris last month

I studied hard for the exam last week

The plane arrived at 4 AM in the morning

- Future Simple: It indicates predictions, promises.

Example:

They will travel next month.

They will come to my new house tomorrow

He will join the party tonight

SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT

Subject verb agreement is a grammatical rule that states that the verb in a sentence must agree with its subject in number and person. The verb must match the subject in number (singular/plural) and the person (first, second, third).

Example: Singular : *The cat runs* slowly.

Plural : *The cats run* slowly.

First person : *I am* beautiful

Third person : *She is* very smart

PUNCTUATION BASICS

Punctuation marks are symbols that help structure written language, making it clear and easy to understand. They indicate pauses, stops, emphasis and grammatical relationships. Proper punctuation ensures clarity in writing.

Kinds of Punctuation:

- Period (.) = Ends a statement.
Example: I like apples.
We study at college.
Every day they go to school by bus.
- Comma (,) = Separates items in a list or clauses.
Example: She bought eggs, milk, and bread.
My best friends are Tommy, Jenny, Christ and Lily.
- Question Mark (?) = Ends a question.
Example: Are you Ok?
Do you have dictionary?
- Exclamation Mark (!) = Shows excitement.
Example: What a surprise!
What a beautiful girl!
- Colon (:) = introduce a list or explanation
Example: Tomorrow every students must bring: book, dictionary, pen and eraser.
My mother said: open the door please!
- Semicolon (;) = closely related independent clauses but without conjunction.
Example: I like apple; she likes mango
Every morning my father reads newspaper; my mother listens to the music
- Apostrophe (') = to show possession
Example: This is Ferdi's car
Those are students' performances
- Quotation marks (" ") = to enclose direct speech or quotes
Example: You said: "How are you today?"

Quote of Luther King: “I have a dream”

- Hyphen (-) = to join compound words
Example: well-known, twenty-six, forty-five

Becoming proficient in English grammar isn't just about learning rules - it's about unlocking life-changing opportunities. This fundamental skill transforms how we connect with others, both in our careers and personal relationships. Rather than just fixing mistakes, grammar gives structure to our thoughts, helping us express complex ideas with clarity and impact.

When we build this strong grammatical foundation, we gain the ability to craft compelling messages, speak with assurance, and digest sophisticated material effortlessly. This knowledge becomes particularly valuable when learning other languages or specialized writing styles. Students find it boosts their academic performance through more coherent arguments, while professionals use it to establish trust and authority in their field. Even creative writers benefit - by understanding the rules, they can break them purposefully for greater artistic effect.

The real value of grammar study becomes even clearer in our digital age. In a world flooded with emails, posts, and online content, polished language skills make you stand out. They remove confusion from your messages and add depth to your personal voice. More than just proper sentences, grammar gives us the tools to tell our stories in ways that truly resonate. For anyone looking to make their mark in today's global community, developing this skill isn't optional - it's essential for meaningful, effective communication in every area of life.

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The author is a lecturer and active writer at KH. A. Wahab Hasbullah University (UNWAHA) Jombang, focusing on teaching and research in the fields of linguistics, grammar, and language education. In addition to developing practical grammar teaching materials, she also creates innovative learning media for beginner English learners. As an author, Iin Baroroh Maarif has published several reference books that serve as academic guides in higher education. Her works combine theoretical and practical approaches, emphasizing clarity and accessibility for both students and teachers. Some of her published books include *English for Specific Purpose (English for Islamic Education Students)* (2017), *English Grammar 1* (2020), *English Grammar 2* (2020), *Mastering English Grammar* (2021), *English for Worldwide* (2021), and *Enjoying English* (2024). In addition to writing, she is actively involved in linguistic research and community service projects related to language literacy. With her dedication to education, she is committed to developing English language competence in a systematic and contextual manner, particularly within the UNWAHA academic community and the broader society.

CHAPTER 3

VOCABULARY MASTERY

FOR TEST SUCCESS

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INTRODUCTION

In the landscape of global English language education, proficiency tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC have become gatekeepers to academic advancement, professional mobility, and international communication. For millions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, these high-stakes assessments represent both an opportunity and a formidable challenge. Among the multifaceted skills required to excel in these tests, reading comprehension, listening accuracy, writing fluency, and oral competence, vocabulary knowledge consistently emerges as a pivotal factor (Boers, 2021; Żammit, 2024). Despite the attention given to grammar structures and test-taking strategies in language classrooms, vocabulary mastery remains the backbone of communicative competence and test performance. Yet, for many EFL learners, vocabulary acquisition is fraught with difficulties, ranging from limited exposure to authentic language contexts to inefficient memorization techniques that fail to sustain long-term retention.

Over the past decade, the significance of vocabulary knowledge has been increasingly underscored in applied linguistics research. Recent empirical studies affirm that lexical competence not only correlates strongly with reading and listening success but also influences writing and speaking proficiency in measurable ways (Aliakbari & Aslrasouli, 2024;

Tong et al., 2022). In the context of English proficiency tests, which often serve as gatekeeping mechanisms for university admissions, scholarships, and professional certifications, insufficient vocabulary breadth and depth can be a decisive barrier to achieving target scores. Studies by Ha (2022) highlight that learners who command at least 5,000 to 7,000 word families demonstrate markedly higher success rates in standardized tests, especially when such knowledge extends beyond superficial recognition to include collocational, morphological, and pragmatic dimensions.

The challenges confronting EFL learners in mastering test-relevant vocabulary are manifold. First, there is a disjunction between general vocabulary knowledge acquired in everyday study and the specialized lexical demands of proficiency tests. While general English instruction often prioritizes high-frequency words and basic communicative phrases, tests such as TOEFL and IELTS impose lexical thresholds that require familiarity with academic, technical, and less frequent vocabulary items (Żammit, 2024). Second, vocabulary learning is often treated as an ancillary activity rather than an integrated component of language skills development. This fragmented approach results in learners accumulating isolated word lists without adequate contextualization or practice in active production, a problem exacerbated by reliance on rote memorization techniques that neglect deeper semantic and pragmatic features (Boers, 2021).

Furthermore, recent global disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have reshaped the landscape of EFL education, shifting a significant portion of language instruction to online platforms. While digital tools offer new opportunities for personalized vocabulary learning through apps and spaced repetition systems, they also introduce new challenges regarding learner autonomy, digital literacy, and the efficacy of virtual

learning environments (Teng & Reynolds, 2024). Consequently, there is an urgent need for systematic, evidence-based strategies that empower learners to navigate the complex task of vocabulary acquisition in ways that are both efficient and test-oriented.

Theoretical models of lexical competence provide useful frameworks for addressing these challenges. Žammit (2024) model of vocabulary knowledge, which distinguishes between breadth (number of words known) and depth (quality of knowledge about each word), offers a foundation for curriculum design and learner training. Equally significant is Schmitt's (2023) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies, which emphasizes the importance of combining discovery techniques (e.g., guessing from context) with consolidation strategies (e.g., spaced repetition and usage practice). Such models highlight the necessity for multifaceted approaches that move beyond simplistic memorization to foster robust, flexible, and context-sensitive word knowledge.

At the core of successful test preparation lies an understanding of the lexical demands imposed by different proficiency tests. For example, the IELTS reading section typically requires familiarity with around 6,000 to 7,000 word families for optimal comprehension, while the TOEFL listening section similarly demands a high lexical threshold (Ha, 2022). Table 3.1 (provided in the discussion section) illustrates these lexical thresholds across major tests, underscoring the necessity for learners to systematically expand their vocabularies to meet test requirements. Importantly, the gap between a learner's current lexical profile and the target word family threshold serves as a diagnostic tool for individualized learning plans.

Equally critical is the distinction between passive and active vocabulary knowledge in the context of test preparation. While receptive knowledge (the ability to recognize and comprehend

words in reading and listening) is essential for test sections that assess comprehension, productive knowledge (the ability to accurately use words in writing and speaking) is crucial for sections that evaluate language production. Research by Aliakbari & Aslrasouli (2024) indicates that learners with balanced development in both receptive and productive vocabulary outperform peers with asymmetrical profiles, particularly in integrated test tasks that require reading-to-write or listening-to-speak responses.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is twofold: first, to provide an in-depth analysis of the vocabulary demands inherent in English proficiency tests, and second, to present a repertoire of evidence-based strategies for vocabulary mastery that align with the specific needs of EFL learners preparing for these assessments. Drawing upon recent scholarship, practical teaching experience, and emerging digital technologies, this chapter seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice in vocabulary learning. While the primary audience for this chapter includes EFL learners striving for test success, it also addresses language instructors, curriculum designers, and academic advisors seeking to optimize vocabulary instruction within test preparation programs.

In doing so, the chapter is organized into three major sections. Following this introduction, the discussion section will explore the lexical characteristics of English proficiency tests, highlighting empirical data on word frequency distributions and lexical thresholds. It will then delve into vocabulary acquisition strategies, ranging from the use of academic word lists and collocation training to the application of spaced repetition systems and digital learning tools. Special attention will be given to addressing common challenges such as vocabulary overload, plateau effects, and the difficulty of transferring passive knowledge into active use. Additionally, tables and

graphs will be provided to illustrate key concepts, such as the correlation between vocabulary size and test performance, and the retention benefits of different learning techniques.

In an era where linguistic competence is increasingly linked to global mobility and socioeconomic advancement, empowering EFL learners with effective vocabulary mastery strategies is more than an academic endeavor, it is an educational imperative. By equipping learners with the lexical tools necessary for test success, educators and institutions can contribute to more equitable access to international opportunities, while also advancing the broader goals of language education in the 21st century.

UNDERSTANDING VOCABULARY FOR TEST CONTEXTS

Vocabulary knowledge is universally acknowledged as the cornerstone of language proficiency and an indispensable asset for success in standardized English proficiency tests. However, the specific lexical demands of such tests often surpass the expectations of general language learners, creating a distinctive challenge that necessitates targeted preparation. Proficiency tests like TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC are not merely measures of basic language ability but rather rigorous assessments designed to evaluate a candidate's capability to function in academic or professional English environments. As such, the vocabulary tested tends to encompass not only high-frequency words but also mid-frequency and academic-specific vocabulary that falls outside the scope of casual language exposure (Ha, 2022; Żammit, 2024).

Empirical research has established clear lexical thresholds for these tests. According to recent studies by Żammit (2024) and Tong et al., (2022), candidates require knowledge of approximately 6,000 to 7,000 word families to perform

comfortably in the reading and listening sections of most major tests. Table 3.1 below summarizes the estimated lexical demands across popular English proficiency exams.

Table 3.1. Estimated Lexical Thresholds for Popular English Proficiency Tests

Test	Minimum Word Families Required	Corresponding CEFR Level
TOEFL	6,000–7,000	B2–C1
IELTS	5,000–7,000	B2–C1
TOEIC	3,000–5,000	B1–B2

Source: Ha (2022); Żammit (2024)

The distinction between receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge is critical in this context. Receptive vocabulary, which enables learners to comprehend written and spoken texts, forms the foundation for success in reading and listening sections. Productive vocabulary, by contrast, is essential for writing and speaking sections where learners are expected to demonstrate accurate and contextually appropriate word usage. Aliakbari & Aslrasouli (2024) emphasize that balanced development across both receptive and productive domains is correlated with higher test performance, particularly in integrated tasks that require cross-modal language processing.

Moreover, vocabulary depth—the quality of word knowledge—plays an equally significant role alongside breadth. Boers (2021) highlight that mastery of collocations, morphological variations, and semantic nuances is vital for learners aiming to progress from basic recognition to effective application in test settings. For example, understanding the word "analyze" extends beyond recognizing its meaning to knowing its derivatives ("analysis," "analytical") and appropriate collocates ("analyze data," "analyze results"). This depth of

knowledge becomes particularly salient in writing and speaking tasks where lexical sophistication is often a grading criterion (Guo & East, 2024).

Another layer of complexity is introduced by the genre and register demands of proficiency tests. Tests like IELTS and TOEFL draw heavily on academic English, requiring familiarity with vocabulary common in university lectures, journal articles, and formal discussions. (Ha, 2022) assert that learners aiming for high proficiency bands must acquire not only general service words but also academic word lists, such as Coxhead's (2000) Academic Word List (AWL), which comprises words frequently used across academic disciplines.

The implication for test preparation is clear: vocabulary mastery for test success requires a systematic approach that targets both high-frequency general words and mid-frequency to low-frequency academic words. This approach must address both the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge, with an emphasis on contextualized understanding and active usage skills.

STRATEGIES FOR VOCABULARY MASTERY

Given the distinctive vocabulary demands of English proficiency tests, effective strategies for vocabulary mastery must go beyond traditional rote memorization. Contemporary research advocates for an integrated approach combining list-based learning, contextual exposure, active production, and systematic review using spaced repetition (Milton & Hopwood, 2022; Schmitt, 2023)

Utilization of Word Lists

A foundational strategy is the use of curated word lists tailored to test requirements. The New General Service List (NGSL) and the Academic Word List (AWL) are among the

most widely recommended resources (Browne, 2024). These lists help learners prioritize high-value vocabulary that is statistically more likely to appear in proficiency tests. (Ha (2022) demonstrate that focused study of the NGSL (which covers approximately 92% of general English texts) combined with the AWL (covering an additional 8% of academic texts) equips learners with the lexical range needed for tests like IELTS and TOEFL.

Contextual Learning

Contextual learning, where words are acquired through meaningful use in authentic texts, is another critical strategy. Schmitt (2023) and Teng & Reynolds (2024) argue that repeated exposure to target words in varied contexts enhances both retention and depth of knowledge. For example, encountering the word "sustainable" across readings on environmental science, economics, and social policy reinforces its semantic range and collocational patterns.

Extensive reading programs, using graded readers and adapted academic texts, provide an effective medium for such exposure. Similarly, listening practice using academic lectures and news broadcasts helps learners attune to spoken forms and collocations of target vocabulary.

Word Families and Collocations

Building knowledge of word families and collocations amplifies the efficiency of vocabulary learning. Schmitt (2023) recommends teaching word families (e.g., "produce," "production," "productive," "productively") to maximize lexical coverage with minimal learning effort. Knowledge of collocations (e.g., "conduct research," "reach a conclusion") is particularly important in writing and speaking tasks where lexical appropriateness affects scoring (Askari, 2024).

Memory Techniques and Visualization

Mnemonic techniques, such as keyword mnemonics and the use of imagery, aid in the retention of challenging words. Tong et al., (2022) report that learners employing visualization strategies demonstrate higher recall rates after extended intervals compared to those relying solely on verbal repetition.

Spaced Repetition and Digital Tools

Perhaps the most powerful contemporary tool is spaced repetition systems (SRS), which algorithmically schedule vocabulary review at optimal intervals to combat forgetting. Applications such as Anki, Quizlet, and Memrise have revolutionized vocabulary learning by offering mobile, customizable, and data-driven platforms (Milton & Hopwood, 2022). The efficacy of SRS is illustrated in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2. Vocabulary Retention Rates with and Without Spaced Repetition (After 1 Month)

Method	Retention Rate (%)
Spaced Repetition (SRS)	85%
Massed Practice	45%
No Review	20%

Source: Tong et al., (2022)

This data underscores the importance of integrating technology-driven review systems into test preparation routines to ensure long-term retention and recall.

Active Production Practice

Finally, vocabulary learning must culminate in active production, where learners practice using target words in writing and speaking. Żammit (2024) emphasizes that productive tasks, such as essay writing, oral summaries, and debate activities,

consolidate word knowledge by engaging learners in context-rich application. For test preparation, it is particularly beneficial to simulate exam tasks using the newly acquired vocabulary, thereby reinforcing both form and meaning in an exam-like context.

Balanced Strategy Integration

Crucially, no single method suffices for comprehensive vocabulary mastery. Schmitt (2023) advocates for a balanced approach combining deliberate learning (e.g., word lists and SRS), incidental learning (e.g., extensive reading), and generative use (e.g., writing and speaking). Table 3.3 summarizes recommended strategies and their primary benefits.

Table 3.3. Vocabulary Learning Strategies for Test Success

Strategy	Primary Benefit
Word Lists (NGSL, AWL)	Prioritization of high-frequency words
Contextual Learning	Depth of understanding, collocations
Word Families & Collocations	Efficient coverage, productive use
Mnemonics & Visualization	Enhanced memory retention
Spaced Repetition (SRS)	Long-term retention, recall efficiency
Active Production	Application in writing and speaking tasks

Source: Schmitt (2023)

Together, these strategies create a comprehensive framework for EFL learners to systematically build the vocabulary knowledge required for test success. The integration of these methods into daily study routines not only accelerates

vocabulary acquisition but also ensures that word knowledge is robust, flexible, and test-relevant.

PRACTICE AND APPLICATION

Test-Oriented Practice

Test-oriented vocabulary practice plays a dual role: it both enhances lexical knowledge and builds test-taking familiarity. Using official practice tests and authentic sample questions is one of the most effective methods to expose learners to recurring vocabulary patterns that appear in reading, listening, writing, and speaking tasks. According to Żammit (2024), repeated encounters with test-specific vocabulary in context significantly reinforce both recognition and production abilities. For instance, frequent exposure to words like *"analyze," "significant,"* and *"impact"* in IELTS reading passages helps learners internalize not only their meanings but also their collocational patterns and grammatical behavior.

A recommended practice is noticing as a conscious strategy where learners underline or log recurrent vocabulary while working through practice materials. (Boers, 2021) suggest that noticing activities combined with retrieval practice (actively recalling meanings or synonyms) amplify retention. Learners should also categorize noticed words based on their frequency and relevance to specific sections. For example, academic adjectives (*"substantial," "considerable," "minimal"*) are often prevalent in reading passages, while process verbs (*"explain," "describe," "compare"*) dominate writing and speaking prompts.

Table 3.4. High-Frequency Vocabulary Across IELTS Test Sections

Test Section	Common Word Types	Examples
Reading	Academic nouns and adjectives	<i>research, theory, significant, various</i>
Listening	Everyday nouns and phrasal verbs	<i>appointment, schedule, put off, bring up</i>
Writing	Process verbs, hedging expressions	<i>analyze, demonstrate, might, could</i>
Speaking	Topic-related adjectives and phrases	<i>interesting, challenging, in my opinion</i>

Source: Browne (2024); Ha (2022)

Active Production

While receptive skills are often prioritized in vocabulary learning, active production is crucial for mastery, particularly in high-stakes proficiency tests where speaking and writing are graded based on lexical resource use (Browne, 2024). Integrating new vocabulary into writing tasks, such as essays or summaries, forces learners to retrieve and apply words contextually. Aliakbari & Aslrasouli (2024) argue that productive use of academic and semi-technical vocabulary correlates with higher band scores in writing tasks.

In speaking drills, learners should engage in targeted practice sessions that emphasize the deliberate use of newly learned vocabulary. Role-plays, structured interviews, and response-building exercises provide opportunities to rehearse word usage in simulated test conditions. (Schmitt, 2023) recommends creating "word banks" for common test topics (e.g., environment, education, health) and systematically incorporating them into both written and spoken responses.

Technology and Apps

The advent of digital learning platforms has greatly expanded opportunities for vocabulary building through interactive and personalized tools. Apps such as Anki, Quizlet, Memrise, and newer AI-based platforms like WordUp and Lingvist offer features that cater specifically to EFL learners preparing for proficiency tests. These apps typically include spaced repetition systems (SRS), gamification elements (points, levels, badges), and AI-driven review schedules that adapt to learner progress (Teng & Reynolds, 2024).

Table 3.5. Comparison of Popular Vocabulary Apps for Test Preparation

App	Features	Strengths
Anki	SRS, custom decks, multimedia cards	Flexibility, powerful SRS engine
Quizlet	Flashcards, games, collaborative sets	Gamification, easy sharing
Memrise	Video examples, AI review, gamified tests	Authentic context, engaging design
WordUp	AI-based word selection, real-life examples	Relevance-based learning, motivation
Lingvist	Adaptive learning, progress tracking	Efficiency, CEFR-level targeting

Source: Milton & Hopwood (2022);Teng & Reynolds (2024)

Gamification is particularly effective in sustaining motivation, especially among learners who struggle with the monotony of traditional word list study. AI-driven systems further personalize the experience by identifying weak areas and scheduling reviews precisely when learners are about to forget—a principle known as the "spacing effect" (Milton & Hopwood, 2022).

ADDRESSING COMMON CHALLENGES

Vocabulary Overload

One of the most frequently reported challenges among EFL test-takers is vocabulary overload, the feeling of being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of words required to achieve high test scores. To manage this, Żammit (2024) advocates for a chunking strategy, where learners divide large word lists into smaller, manageable units, typically by theme (e.g., health, technology) or function (e.g., linking words, descriptive adjectives).

Goal-setting is another effective countermeasure. Learners should set SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound), such as "Learn and actively use 15 new academic words per week." Regular self-assessment using vocabulary size tests can help monitor progress and keep goals realistic. Tong et al., (2022) emphasize that incremental accumulation over time—rather than massed cramming—results in more sustainable vocabulary growth and better long-term test performance.

Plateau Effect

The plateau effect refers to the common phenomenon where intermediate learners experience stagnation in vocabulary development, often hovering around 3,000–5,000-word families without noticeable progress. This is particularly problematic for test candidates aiming for higher bands, as the lexical threshold for tests like IELTS 7.0 or TOEFL 90+ typically requires at least 6,000 word families (Ha, 2022).

To break through this plateau, learners must deepen their word knowledge rather than merely expanding breadth. Boers (2021) emphasize focusing on collocation (common word pairings), connotation (emotional and cultural meaning), and

register (formal vs. informal usage). For example, understanding that "*undertake research*" is a more formal collocation than "*do research*" contributes to lexical sophistication, a criterion in scoring rubrics.

Targeted exercises include collocation matching tasks, synonym-antonym drills, and register-shifting activities where learners rewrite sentences from formal to informal tone and vice versa. Schmitt (2023) suggests maintaining a deep vocabulary journal, where each new word entry includes not only the definition but also sample sentences, collocations, word forms, and notes on usage context.

CONCLUSION

The mastery of vocabulary stands as the cornerstone of English language proficiency, particularly in the context of high-stakes language tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, and TOEIC. As this chapter has demonstrated, vocabulary knowledge is not solely a matter of breadth, the sheer number of words a learner recognizes, but also of depth, encompassing the richness of semantic understanding, collocational patterns, register sensitivity, and productive capacity. Test success hinges on learners' ability to engage in intentional, systematic vocabulary learning that is closely aligned with the specific demands and lexical profiles of their target examinations.

An integrated approach emerges as the most effective pathway toward vocabulary mastery. Combining explicit vocabulary study, extensive exposure through reading and listening, and active application in speaking and writing enables learners to transform passive recognition into dynamic language use. Technological tools, especially those employing spaced repetition systems and adaptive algorithms, have proven invaluable in personalizing and optimizing vocabulary acquisition. Moreover, strategic test-oriented practice, coupled

with active noticing and self-regulation, equips learners to handle the lexical challenges embedded in test tasks with confidence and precision.

Based on the evidence presented, this chapter offers several practical recommendations. First, learners should commence their vocabulary development early, adopting a long-term, cumulative perspective rather than short-term memorization. Employing a diverse repertoire of methods, ranging from reading graded texts and engaging with authentic listening materials to using SRS apps and participating in productive language tasks, ensures robust word knowledge that is both retrievable and adaptable. Equally important is the deliberate balance between passive recognition (as assessed in reading and listening sections) and active usage (as required in writing and speaking), which together constitute comprehensive lexical competence.

Finally, both learners and instructors should embrace the understanding that vocabulary growth is inherently incremental. Small, consistent efforts yield significant dividends over time. The journey to test success is less about cramming large word lists and more about sustained engagement, reflection, and application. In this process, instructors play an indispensable role, not only as providers of knowledge but as facilitators who scaffold learning, diagnose gaps, and sustain learner motivation through encouragement and targeted feedback.

By adopting the strategies and mindsets outlined in this chapter, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners can transform vocabulary acquisition from a daunting obstacle into an empowering vehicle for test success and broader language proficiency.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



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CHAPTER 4

LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

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INTRODUCTION

Listening as one of language skills become a key of communication skills in English. Traditionally, listening was viewed as a passive activity where a listener simply received information from a speaker (Nation & Newton, 2009). However, more recent studies view listening as a complex process that involves understanding, interpreting, and making sense of spoken language. Listening is an active process of understanding, and not only passively hearing words. Listening comprehension involves paying attention to specific parts of what's being said, making sense of those words, and connecting them to what you already know (O'Malley et al.: 1989 cited in (Nazariah et al., 2022). Listening is a complex and active process in which requires the listeners to do several things such as: 1) recognize sounds, understand vocabulary, and interpret grammar; 2) grasp meaning from speaker's tone and emphasis; 3) remember information; and 4) interpret what's being said based on the specific situation and the broader cultural context (Vandergrift, 2004).

There are two types of listening, they are: one-way listening or transactional listening and two-way listening or interactional listening (Nation & Newton, 2009). One-way listening (transactional listening) is a situation where a listener receives and process information without the opportunity to interact or respond to the speaker. As Richards (1990); Vandergrift & Goh

(2012) said that one-way listening like news broadcast or lecture had an aim to get information, but not to engage with the speaker or ask questions. Then, two-way listening (interactional listening) is an interactive and collaborative process where speaker and listener actively participate in constructing meaning (exchange information and give feedback). Two-way listening or also known as interactive, interactional or collaborative listening is type of listening involves a complex set of skills from understanding speech and meaning and meaning to picking up on hidden intentions and using strategies to keep the conversation flowing smoothly (Gu, 2018).

In testing listening comprehension, there are some tests which are able to evaluate a person's listening ability. A good listening test must demonstrate one's comprehension through other skills, such as speaking, writing, or selecting a response. According to Nation and Newton (2009), there are some kinds of listening test, such as dictation and partial dictation (tested about listening for and producing every word, including grammar and pronunciation; processing speech at a normal rate of delivery; and discriminating among specific sounds and words), text with questions (a multiple choice question of test which is tested about listening for main ideas; listening for specific details; and understanding the speaker's purpose, opinion, or attitude), responding to statements, three choice true-false, recorded cloze (tested about listening for specific and factual information; following a sequence of ideas or instructions; and retaining key information in short-term memory), information transfer (tested about understanding and following directions; relating spoken information to a visual representation; and listening for spatial or positional language) and rating scales and lists.

Listening proficiency test for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners are designed to assess the ability of

learners to understand spoken English in various contexts. These kinds of test are used to specific purpose, such as university admission, immigration, or professional certificate. Some English proficiency tests for EFL learner that commonly used like IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), Cambridge English Qualifications, and ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Listening Proficiency Test (LPT). These some explanation about preparation for listening comprehension test.

PREPARATION OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION TEST

Facing a listening comprehension test requires preparing a number of skills and strategies, such as:

1. Active listening and note taking

Active listening means during the test; listeners must fully engage and trying understand the message. Listeners can practice active listening by taking notes or summarizing as you listen. While listening for main ideas, supporting details, and the context of the conversation in the same time, listener are able to take notes using abbreviations, symbols or single words in order to help listener to remember crucial information and check them when answering questions (Davies, 2025; Fluency Corp, 2024). In practicing this skill, listener can choose a short audio clip and then write down its contents word for word in order to help listener improve his/her ability to recognize spoken English.

Listener also should practice listening in different situation or environment. Noisy backgrounds make it hard for listeners to hear, so in other words, you can improve your

listening focus by trying practice to different settings and sounds.

2. Understanding vocabulary in context

In listening test, listener will hear unfamiliar words. Listener needs a skill to use surrounding words or phrases to infer the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary. The ability to guess unfamiliar words or phrases from context is a key strategy to success. In enhance the skill, listeners can expand their vocabulary related to test topic and situation by practicing listening in different context (English Radar, 2018).

3. Metacognitive strategies: Plan-Monitor-Evaluate

Metacognitive strategies are some steps that are applied before, during and after listening. Before listening (plan), listener skim questions and predict topic; while listening (monitor), listener understanding and decide when to move on; and after listening (evaluate), listener evaluate answer and strategy. There are many researches used metacognitive strategies in order to help EFL students improve their score in listening comprehension. As In'nami and Koizumi (2022) used metacognitive strategy in their research to improve test listening scores and learner awareness. Tarad (2023) used metacognitive strategies to improve EFL students listening comprehension while preparing for International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

4. Using multimedia as authentic materials

Practice with varied accents, speeds, speaking styles and topic area. In practicing listening, listener can use authentic material or real-world content like news broadcast, YouTube, podcast and documentaries to improve comprehension in listening. Using YouTube and podcast along with a metacognitive strategy are able to improve

students 'ability to comprehend listening test (Cheng, 2023; Lestari & Sianipar, 2024).

5. Understand test format

To get ready for the test, listener should take practice exams that are for your specific test (like the IELTS, TOEFL or TOEIC). If listener practice under timed conditions, it will help listener get faster and more accurate. While, every proficiency test is different. Listener should pay attention for the following information such as:

a. Timing the test

Listener should know about the length of the audio clips, how much time is given for answering questions, and whether you get to listen to the recording once or multiple times.

b. The content of listening sections

Listener should know the variety of audio format in the test, such as conversation between two people, monologues, radio broadcasts, or mix of them.

c. The type of listening questions

In doing the test, it is important to know if the test will have multiple-choice questions, fill-in-the-blanks, matching tasks, or diagram labeling.

d. The accent of the speaker.

Listener need to find out if the speakers will have American, British, Australian, or a variety of international accents.

There are some English proficiency tests for listening skill. Here are some formats for the test:

a. TOEFL

TOEFL or Test of English as Foreign Language is one of standardized tests that measure the ability of non-native speaker in comprehending English skills. TOEFL is designed for academic purpose or for

students who want to apply in universities from English speaking countries (IELTS Experts, 2022). While, according to Badger (2018) the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) has a significant impact on two main areas: how language is taught and learned, and the process of admitting international students to universities in English-speaking countries. Listening section format in TOEFL consists of some features, such as:

1) Content

Listening test in TOEFL is designed to simulate a university setting. The content of listening test consists of variety audio about academic lectures and conversation about daily student life on campus.

2) Audio

Listening section usually consists of a few conversations (typically 2 until 3 conversation passages) and slightly more lectures (3 up to 5 lectures). The conversations often feature a student talking with a professor or staff member, while the lectures are academic monologues given by a professor on various subjects like social sciences or biology.

3) Questions

Questions are presented in multiple-choice form and assess a set of listening abilities, such as (Bejar et al., 2000):

- a) Comprehension of detail and facts. That is about finding specific information about names, dates, number, etc.

- b) Comprehension of vocabulary. It means figuring out the meaning of new words by using context clues sometimes.
- c) Comprehension of main ideas and supporting ideas. It assesses the ability to identify the topic in the conversation or monologue and the key points that supports the topic.
- d) Inferences about content and relationship. This is the ability to connect and understand things that aren't stated directly like why something happened or what a speaker might think.
- e) Comprehension of communicative function of utterances. It is about understanding the speaker's intonation when the speaker is speaking (asking a question, making a suggestion, or giving a warning)

4) Key features

In listening test, test taker is allowed to take notes while listening and the audio is only played once.

b. IELTS

The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is an English proficiency test which is designed to evaluate people's English skills or ability for studying or working in an English-speaking country (IELTS Experts, 2022). There are two versions of IELTS test based on its purpose, like (Banerjee, 2025):

1) IELTS Academic

IELTS Academic is used for applying to universities or others higher education. IELTS Academic focuses on the language needed as one of requirements for educational environment.

2) IELTS General Training

It is used for people who want to apply for work or immigrate to an English-speaking country. This test measures people's English skills in practical everyday situation such as in workplace and social context.

The format of listening test for those kinds of IELTS test are similar. The type of questions in IELTS like multiple choice, short answer, sentence completion, note or form or table or flowchart completion, matching, map or diagram labelling. Here are the examples for each kind of questions (Banerjee, 2025):

1) Multiple Choice

Description: Choose the correct answer from three to four options. Pay attention to the instructions because you may need to select a single correct answer, or in some cases choose more than one correct answer.

➤ Question for single correct answer:

What is the main reason for coming late?

- a. Ranny
- b. Traffic
- c. Flat tire

➤ Question for multiple answer:

Choose **two** letters, **A to D**

What are two specific activities at the hotel that the speaker talks about?

- a. Breakfast is served at 6 to 10 a.m. every morning.
- b. Tour guide in the temples is available.
- c. The fitness center is on the fifth floor and open from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

- d. Shettle bus service to the zoo is available from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

2) Matching

Description: Match speaker or things from the audio with specific details (opinions, places or events).

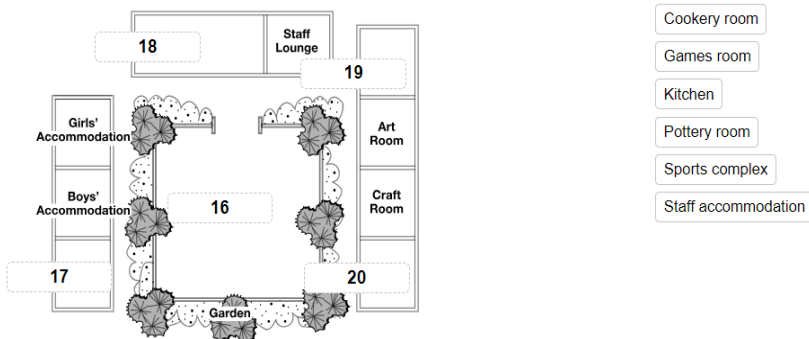
Question: Match for each description. Write the correct letter (A-C) for question number 1 and 2.

A. Breakfast	1. ... is opened from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
B. Maid service	2. ... is available between 6 a.m. to 9 a.m.
C. Fitness center	

3) Plan, Map, or Diagram Labelling

Description: Label a diagram or map by listening to the directions and descriptions in the audio. Tests the ability to accurately follow spoken instructions.

Question: Label the map below. Write the correct letter, A-I, next to questions 1-5



4) Form/Note/Table/Flowchart/Sentence Completion

Description: You will hear a conversation between a call center operator and a customer. Complete the summary below and write no more than one word or one number for each question. This conversation for question number 1 to 5.

Question 1-5.

Identification and Security Check: Intelligent Phone Service

Phone number: 1) 552-____-6696

Name: Natalie 2) ____

Address: 6B Brown Street, North Park, 3) ____

Date of Birth: 4) __ May 1986

Maiden Name: 5) ____

5) Short Answer Questions

Direction: According to the audio, list three reasons people need to move to a better place. Write no more than three words and/or a number for each answer.

Question 10-12.

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

In IELTS listening, there are four sections and for each section there are 10 questions, so totally there are 40 questions for the listening section. The contexts for the listening section in IELTS come from a variety of real-life situations, such as conversation in everyday

social setting, monologue on a general (non-academic topic), group conversation in an educational or training context, and monologue on an academic topic. IELTS listening test uses native English accents, such as British, American, Australian and Canadian.

c. TOEIC

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is a standardized English proficiency test designed to assess the skills of non-native speakers in global workplace and everyday professional contexts, excluding academic settings. There are 100 questions of listening test in TOEIC and the questions are divided into four parts, such as:

- 1) Part 1 is about photograph. In this part, listeners will be shown a picture and will need to listen carefully to four spoken statements. Then, listeners only hear the statements once and they will not be printed. Listeners must select the one statement that best describes the photograph.
- 2) Part 2 is about question and response. In this part of listening, listeners will hear a question or a statement followed by three different responses. Listeners must listen carefully and select the best answer, since the responses are spoken only once and not be printed.
- 3) Part 3 is conversation. This part of the test consists of conversation between two or three speakers and the audio only plays once without printed transcript. Listeners have to listen carefully and answer for the questions that follow.
- 4) Part 4 is talk. In this part, the listening form is short talks like announcements or narration that plays

only once. The talks are not printed in the test booklet, but you can read the questions and the options of the answer in the test booklet. Listener must choose the best answer or response for the questions.

6. Review the answer

After taking a practice test, the most important step is to analyze the mistakes—not just look at the final score. Go back and re-listen to the parts of the audio where the listener got a question wrong. The goal is to identify or analyze the wrong answer. For example, did you misunderstand a specific word or phrase? Was the speaker talking too fast? Listening again with the transcript or script is an excellent way to pinpoint exactly what you misunderstood. This process of identifying your specific weaknesses is what truly helps you improve and avoid similar errors in the future.

CONCLUSION

There are some English proficiency tests for listening in which able to help listeners improve their ability to listen to English as a foreign language. The most common listening proficiency tests are TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC. These kinds of tests are standardized tests and taken based on the purposes of the listening takers, such as for academic purposes (as a requirement to enter universities in English-speaking countries), or for work purposes. In improving listening skill, understand the structure and the purpose of the test can lead listener in advancing comprehension skills in listening. Then, consistent practice using a variety of resources and strategies is the key to becoming a successful listener.

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CHAPTER 5

READING COMPREHENSION TECHNIQUES

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INTRODUCTION

As English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, you may often face challenges when preparing for proficiency tests. These tests are designed to assess how well you can use and understand English in academic, professional, or everyday contexts. They are important for university admissions, job opportunities, immigration, and certification. Among the different skills tested, reading comprehension is one that many EFL learners find difficult. Limited vocabulary, lack of practice with authentic texts, and little training in exam strategies can make reading sections stressful and confusing.

Reading comprehension is not just about understanding words and sentences, it also requires higher-level skills such as making inferences, analyzing arguments, and evaluating information. To succeed, you need more than English knowledge—you also need practical techniques that help you read effectively under time limits. This chapter is written for EFL learners to introduce and explain useful reading comprehension techniques that can support you in exam preparation and beyond.

Reading comprehension is one of essential skills for understanding the world of texts around us. According to Antoniou (2021), its process involves several strategies such as making prediction, and summarizing the main idea. Reading strategies significantly improve students' reading

comprehension (Andi Rusgandi, 2023; Momdjian & El Chidiac, 2024; Pandey, 2022; Tails & Ipt, 2010; Ulker, 2017; Vannak, 2017). This chapter summarizes strategies to be integrated into a sequence encompassing pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading phases.

PRE-READING PHASE

Before reading a passage, it is important to prepare your mind. This helps you understand the text more easily and quickly. Start by looking at the title, headings, and any pictures or charts. These give you clues about the topic and help you get ready to read. Next, think about what you already know about the subject. For example, if the passage is about climate change, try to remember facts or ideas you've learned before. This is called activating background knowledge, and it helps you connect new information with what you already understand. Also, set a clear purpose for reading—ask yourself: Am I reading to find facts, understand the main idea, or answer questions? Knowing your goal helps you stay focused.

Teachers often use helpful activities before reading, such as teaching key vocabulary, asking questions, or having a short discussion about the topic. These steps make it easier to understand the passage, especially if the topic or words are new to you. Research by Silvia Febrianti et al., (2022) shows that students who use these strategies perform better in reading tasks. In tests like IELTS, you often see the questions before the passage. Take time to read the questions and underline keywords—this helps you know what to look for when reading. If you already know the topic, try to learn some important words in advance. These simple strategies can make a big difference in how well you understand and remember what you read during the test.

DURING READING PHASE

When you take an English proficiency test (EPT), you need to employ strategies that help you stay focused and find the answers quickly. There are questions on EPT that evaluate your ability to understand the main idea, specific details, word references, and inferences, etc. To succeed, you need to read actively and with purpose. Here I summarize the skills that help you to implement the strategies.

1. Overview questions.

In most reading tests, the first question after a passage usually asks about the main idea, main topic, or main purpose of the text (Phillips, 2001). This type of question determines whether you understand the passage's most crucial topic. The answer choices are entire sentences or noun phrases, and you must select the one that best summarizes the passage's main points.

1a. Main topic or main ideas questions are questions that ask you to identify the central point or theme of a text. Here are the sample questions:

- What is the **main idea** of the passage?
- What is the **topic** of the passage?
- What is the author's **main point** of the passage?
- Which of the following best summarizes the **author's main idea**?
- Which of the following would be the **best title**?
- What does the passage **mainly discuss**?

You can usually find the answer to these types of question by:

- 1) Reading the first sentences of each paragraph.

- 2) Looking at the first sentence of each paragraph to find a common topic or idea.
- 3) Scanning the rest of the passage to make sure those sentences really show the main idea.
- 4) Removing any answers that do not match the passage, then choose the best one from the remaining options.

Exercise 1a:

Approximately 90 percent of Earth's ice is located on the surface of Antarctica. Snowfall in Antarctica is minimal; however, any snow that does accumulate persists and increases in depth over time. In certain regions of Antarctica, ice may have existed for approximately one million years and currently exceeds two miles in depth.

Question: What is the topic of the passage?

- (A) The earth is a very cold planet
- (B) Most of the Earth's ice is found in Antarctica
- (C) It snows more in Antarctica than in any other place on Earth
- (D) Antarctica is only two miles wide but is 90 percent ice

(Phillips, 2001)

Look at the first underlined sentence of the passage (marked by the arrow)! You can use the strategies above to help answer the question.

1b. Main purpose questions enquire you to understand why the author write the passage ((Rogers, 2011). These questions focus on the writer's goal or reason for sharing the information. You might see questions like:

- The author's purpose in writing is to ...
- What is the author's main purpose in the passage?
- The main point of this passage is to ...

- Why did the author write the passage?

You can usually find the answer to these types of question by:

- 1) Learning common phrases like 'to define,' 'to discuss,' 'to show,' 'to connect,' 'to suggest,' 'to support an idea,' and 'to compare.' These words often appear in questions that ask why the author wrote something.
- 2) Being aware that the wrong answers usually have certain clues, they may be too specific, too general, not mentioned in the passage, or not related to the main idea.
- 3) Scanning rapidly the passage again if you are unsure of the answer.

Exercise 1b:

The last gold rush is a part of both Canadian and American history. The Klondike River, which flows from Canada's Yukon Territory into Alaska, was home to gold, which brought some 30,000 fortune seekers to the north. The Yukon became a territory, and Dawson, its capital at the time, wouldn't have existed without the gold rush. Jack London wrote a dozen novels based on the gold strike. It inspired Robert Service to write "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" and other poetry. It was also the setting for the great Charlie Chaplin movie The Gold Rush. It also marked the start of modern Alaska.

What is the author's main purpose in writing:

- (A) Discuss the significance of mining in Canada and the United States
- (B) Illustrate the influence of the Klondike gold strike on the creative arts
- (C) Point out the effect of the Klondike gold strike

(D) Explain how the Klondike gold strike changed life in the region

(Rogers, 2011)

Look at the underlined words as the key words of the passage, and you can use the strategies above to help answer the question.

1c. Tone questions ask how the author feels about the topic by the language that he or she uses in the passage. These questions at the end of a passage test are your overall understanding. To answer, look for words that show if the author's attitude is positive, negative, neutral, critical, outrageous, optimistic, humorous, etc. The following are sample questions:

- What tone does the author take in writing this passage?
- The tone of this passage could best be described as ...
- What is the author's attitude toward ...
- The author's opinion of... is best described as ...
- The author's attitude toward ...could best be described as one of ...
- How would the author probably feel about ...
- Which of the following recommendations would the author most likely support?

To answer these typical questions is, use quick strategy:

- 1) Read the question carefully. Understand what "tone" means. It's different from the **main idea** (what the text is about) and **purpose** (why the author wrote it). Tone is more about *emotion, attitude, or style*.
- 2) Look at the *adjectives, verbs, and overall mood*.

- 3) Eliminate extreme or illogical choices.
- 4) Choose the option that matches the *author's attitude*.
Look for clues in language. Ask yourself: *What kind of words does the author use?*
 - a. **Positive tone:** enthusiastic, optimistic, admiring.
Words: wonderful, inspiring, beneficial.
 - b. **Negative tone:** critical, skeptical, pessimistic.
Words: unfortunately, harmful, doubtful.
 - c. **Neutral tone:** objective, factual, informative.
Words: states, reports, explains.
- 5) Check the context and purpose. If the passage is about science, the tone is often objective or analytical. If it's a personal essay, the tone may be emotional, humorous, or persuasive.

Exercise 1c:

Passage: "Many people believe social media connects us, but it often isolates individuals and weakens real human relationships."

Question: The tone of this passage could best be described as...

- (A) Joyful
- (B) Critical
- (C) Neutral
- (D) Excited

Passage: "The experiment shows that plants grow faster when exposed to natural sunlight than artificial light."

Question: The tone is...

- (A) Persuasive
- (B) Humorous
- (C) Informative
- (D) Angry

1d. The organizations of idea questions ask about how the author structures or organizes the passage. Instead of focusing on meaning (like main idea or tone), it tests your ability to see the *framework* of the text. They usually ask things like:

- How is the passage organized?
- Which of the following best describes the organization of the passage?
- In the passage, the author does which of the following?
- The first paragraph mainly serves to...

To answer this kind of question, use quick strategies:

- 1) Read the first and last sentences carefully from each paragraph. The first sentence often introduces the main topic or problem, meanwhile the last sentence often summarizes, concludes, or suggests a solution. These two spots usually reveal the passage's overall structure. Then, skim each paragraph's purpose: Does it introduce, explain, compare, or conclude?
- 2) Look at the transition words (signal words), they reveal how ideas connect. Be familiar with organizational patterns like cause-effect, comparison/contrast, sequence, description, problem-solution, etc.
- 3) Eliminate wrong choices. Many distractors suggest patterns not present in the text.

Exercise 1d:

Plastic waste has become a global problem. It pollutes oceans and endangers marine life. To reduce this problem, some countries have banned single-use plastics, while others promote recycling programs. **Question:** The passage is mainly organized by...

(A) Comparing different kinds of plastics

- (B) Describing a problem and offering solutions
- (C) Telling a chronological story
- (D) Explaining similarities between countries

2. Directly answered questions are also called factual or detail questions in reading comprehension. They ask about information that is stated directly in the passage. You don't need to infer or guess – the answer is right there in the text. There are three types of these questions: stated and unstated detail questions, and pronoun reference questions.

2a. Stated detail question asks about specific information that is explicitly written in the passage. It focuses on the **who, what, when, where, how** mentioned in the text. Unlike inference questions, the answer is **directly stated** — you can point to the exact sentence. Here are the sample questions:

- According to the passage, ...
- Which of the following is stated in the passage?
- The author mentions which of the following ...
- The passage indicates that ...
- Which of the following is true?

And here are some strategies to answer these questions quickly:

- 1) Identify the keywords in the question
- 2) Scan the passage don't reread everything and see your eyes to move quickly down the text. Stop only when you find the keyword or its synonym.
- 3) Match ideas, not just words. The test may paraphrase the details.

- 4) Check carefully because three choices will match details in the passage, one will not.

Exercise 2a:

Without the Colorado River, many portions of the Southwestern United States would turn back into deserts. There are thousands of kilometers of canals, hundreds of miles of tunnels and aqueducts, and many dams and structures that deliver water from the Colorado River to the area. The Imperial Valley in Southern California is an example of this kind of region. It used to be a desert, but now it is a huge and fertile farming area. There are now 2,000 kilometers of canals that water fertile land and keep it productive.

Question: Which is the following mentioned in the passage as a way that Colorado River water gets to the Southwest?

- (A) By truck
- (B) In bottles
- (C) In wells
- (D) Through canals

(Phillips, 2001)

2b. Unstated detail question or sometimes is called negative detail question that asks you to find the detail in the passage. In other words, 3 choices are stated in the text, and 1 choice is **unstated** so that's the correct answer. The common question stems:

- According to the passage, all the following are true EXCEPT ...
- Which of the following is NOT mentioned in the passage?
- The author discusses all the following EXCEPT ...

- Which of the following is not stated/mentioned/discussed?

These are quick strategies to answer this question:

- 1) Notice the NOT/EXCEPT in the question.
- 2) Scan the passage for each option.
- 3) Eliminate the details that are clearly stated.
- 4) The one that is missing, or opposite must be the correct answer.

Exercise 2b:

In the 1960s, as space travel was becoming a subject of much discussion, Pan American Airlines began receiving some unusual request for flight information. People began making requests to be on the first flight that Pan Am made to the Moon.

On a whim, Pan Am started a waiting list for the first flight to the Moon. Similar requests have come to Pan Am over the years, and Pan Am has responded by adding the names of the requesters to the list.

Unfortunately for Pan Am, the original company is no longer in business, and it never got to the Moon. However, when it went out of business, it had a waiting list of more than 90,000 names for its first lunar flight.

The author discusses about Pan American Airlines, EXCEPT that

- (A) It began business in the 1960s
- (B) It received requests for its first flight to the Moon
- (C) It kept some people on a long waiting list
- (D) It went bankrupt

(Phillips, 2001)

2c. Pronoun referent question is a type of reading comprehension question that asks you to identify what a pronoun refers to in the passage. Here's set of strategies to

answer pronoun referent questions quickly in reading comprehension:

- 1) Locate the exact word (e.g., it, they, this, those).
- 2) Underline or highlight it so your eyes stay focused.
- 3) Look backward, not forward because most pronouns refer to something mentioned before in the passage, not after.
- 4) Pronouns and nouns must agree then check for logical meaning.
- 5) Be careful with demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these, those) because they sometimes refer not to a single noun, but to a whole idea.

Exercise 2c:

Passage:

Marie Curie discovered radium and polonium. This discovery changed the field of science forever.

Question: The word “*This*” refers to ...

- a) Radium and polonium
- b) Marie Curie
- c) The field of science
- d) Forever

3. Indirectly answered questions are also called inference questions or unstated questions. They do not ask about something directly written in the text. Instead, you need to read between the lines to find the answer based on clues and logic. The answer is not stated word-for-word but is implied by the text.

3a. Implied detailed questions

Here are the sample of implied detail questions:

- What can be inferred from the passage?

- The author implies that ...
- The passage suggests which of the following?
- It is most likely that...

The following are the strategies for how to answer this type of question quickly:

- 1) Read the question carefully. Look for words like implies, suggests, inferred. These signals you need to think beyond the exact words.
- 2) Use clues in the Passage and identify key facts given in the text, then connect them logically to find the hidden meaning.
- 3) Eliminate unsupported options.

Exercise 3a:

Until 1996, the Sears Tower was the world's tallest building, at over a hundred floors. It is in Chicago, also known as Windy City. The combination of a very tall building in a metropolis with such weather conditions causes a lot of swaying in the wind.

On a windy day, the top of the building might shift up to three feet every few seconds. The interior doors at the top of the structure open and close, and water in the sinks sloshes back and forth.

The Sears Tower is possibly...

- (A) as tall as the Empire State Building
- (B) no longer the tallest building in the world
- (C) taller than any other building
- (D) still the highest building in the world

(Phillips, 2001)

3b. Transition questions are about what probably came before the reading passage or what probably comes after it.

They test whether you understand how ideas are logically connected across paragraphs or sections. In other words, these questions focus on the flow of thought in the passage, checking if you can identify what kind of introduction or conclusion would fit naturally. Transition questions do not test the details of the passage itself but your ability to recognize the author's organization and how one-part leads into the next. Here are the sample of implied detail questions:

- The paragraph preceding the passage probably...
- What is most likely in the paragraph following the passage?

Here are the strategies for how to answer this type of question:

- 1) If the question asks *what came before*, focus on the **first sentence/paragraph** of the passage because it gives hints about what type of introduction would fit.
- 2) If it asks *what comes after*, check the **last sentence/paragraph** since it shows what type of conclusion or continuation is logical.
- 3) Ask: *Is the author introducing, contrasting, giving examples, explaining causes, or concluding?* The right transition must match that purpose.
- 4) Look for signal words and tone.

Exercise 3b:

Cosmos was another program significant in the popularization of science. This series, aired on public television, addressed topics and issues from diverse fields of science. Carl Sagan served as the principal writer and narrator of the program, recognized as a prominent astronomer and Pulitzer Prize-winning author.

The preceding of paragraph likely addresses....

- (A) a different scientific television scene
- (B) Carl Sagan's scientific achievements
- (C) The Pulitzer Prize won by Carl Sagan
- (D) Public television

(Phillips, 2001)

3. Vocabulary questions test your ability to understand the word or phrase context meaning. They usually highlight a specific word in the passage and ask what it most nearly means in that context. The goal is not just to check dictionary knowledge but to see if you can use context clues to figure out meaning. You might see questions like:
- The word “X” in line 5 is closest in meaning to ...
 - In paragraph 2, the word “Y” most nearly means ...
 - The phrase “...” in the passage can best be understood as ...
 - The author uses the word “Z” to mean ...

Here are the strategies for how to answer this question quickly:

- 1) Don't jump to the dictionary meaning because many words have multiple meanings and Exams test the meaning in context, not the most common one.
- 2) Read a few sentences before and after since the context often makes the meaning clear.
- 3) Look for clues in synonyms or opposites nearby. Authors often explain difficult words by using synonyms, examples, or contrasts.
- 4) Use word parts (Prefixes, Roots, Suffixes).

Exercise 4:

Babies are always born with blue eyes. This is because the pigment that colors the eyes, melanin, does not reside on the iris's surface. Instead, it is located within the iris folds. The eyes appear blue because the iris surface has minimal melanin.

After a few months, melanin rises to the surface of the iris. The amount of melanin on the surface defines a person's permanent eye color, thus a baby's eyes develop the color they will keep for the rest of their lives.

The word "pigment" in line 2 is similar to...

- (A) skin
- (B) muscle
- (C) tissue
- (D) color

(Phillips, 2001)

POST READING PHASE

The post-reading phase is the stage after you have finished reading a text. Its main purpose is to help you reflect on, consolidate, and extend your understanding of what they have

read. This phase also develops higher-order thinking skills by encouraging you to analyze, evaluate, and apply the information.

In the post-reading phase, one of the most common activities is summarizing. You may restate the main ideas of the text in your own words, either orally or in writing. This activity helps you consolidate understanding, practice paraphrasing, and strengthen your ability to distinguish between main ideas and supporting details. Another useful activity is discussion and reflection. After reading, you can engage in group or pair discussions to share your interpretations, opinions, and personal reactions. This promotes deeper comprehension, as you not only process the content individually but also compare perspectives with your peers.

Teachers may also conduct question-and-answer sessions, which can include factual, inferential, and evaluative questions. This ensures that comprehension is checked at different levels and encourages learners to think critically about the text. Similarly, revisiting important vocabulary items through vocabulary review allows you to reinforce your lexical knowledge and practice using new words in meaningful contexts.

The post-reading phase can also include creative responses to the text. For example, you might engage in role plays, debates, or even write alternative endings to the story. Such tasks build imagination and make the reading experience more interactive. Alongside this, writing activities such as reflective journals, essays, or letters inspired by the reading selection provide an opportunity for you to extend their ideas in written form.

CONCLUSION

Reading comprehension is a crucial skill for you as EFL learners, especially in the context of academic and proficiency

examinations where success often depends on the ability to process texts efficiently and accurately. Developing this skill goes beyond understanding vocabulary and grammar; it requires the use of effective strategies that help you interact actively with the text. Techniques such as skimming, scanning, guessing meaning from context, identifying main ideas and supporting details, making inferences, summarizing, note-taking, and managing time effectively provide you with practical tools to approach reading tasks with greater confidence.

When practiced consistently, these strategies can help learners become independent readers who approach texts with curiosity, efficiency, and confidence. Finally, mastering reading comprehension techniques equips you with skills that extend beyond exam preparation. It enables you to succeed in academic study, professional communication, and lifelong learning, thereby opening doors to broader opportunities and deeper engagement with the world of knowledge.

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CHAPTER 6

DEVELOPING SPEAKING FLUENCY AND ACCURACY

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INTRODUCTION

English is a foreign language in Indonesia and students learn English as EFL at schools or institutions which provide English language learning. EFL in Indonesia is learning a language not normally used by the community through classrooms at schools, or private course centres. Therefore, the exposure of the language is minor compared to when English is a Second Language (ESL) in a country. English is believed as a need to be learnt to interact with global community (Quimosing-Ocay, 2022). Indonesia has adopted English as EFL and English is taught at schools and many institutions which provide English study. According to Nuraeni and Aisyah (2020) and He, Zou, and Wu (2022) most students in Indonesia learn English is for academic purposes, including to pass the test, future education, and future career. For future education or future career, the evidence of English competency is needed such as the score in an English test such as TOEFL, IELTS, Duolingo English test or DET, or the Cambridge English Qualification. The most popular English tests, are TOEFL, IELTS and DET. There are many types of English test, however, some tests do not include speaking as the skill to be examined. The four types of tests mentioned above (TOEFL iBT, IELTS, and DET), include speaking as one of skills examined.

Speaking is the most challenging skill to be examined. It is a vocabulary and grammar mix with the ability in

communication that is spontaneous, fluent, and accurate within a defined topic and time frame. These skills and knowledge must be delivered verbally. Challenges in speaking come from anxiety when speaking another language. Most candidates feel anxious when they are required to undertake the speaking test as they are afraid of making mistakes, more so than when they demonstrate the other three skills (listening, reading, and writing skills). Not only that, they must understand the question and find the right answer immediately with fluent and accurate speaking. Speaking English fluently refers to the ability to speak in English with a continuous manner while accuracy in speaking English is the ability to speak in English with the right grammar, language use, and vocabulary (Fahranaha, Nonia, & Salija, 2024; Pratama, Sabarun, & Qamariah, 2023; Ork, Chin, Ban, & Em, 2024). Fluency and accuracy have become the main indicators in speaking English tests.

There are several important points that need to be considered in order to be fluent and accurate in conducting a speaking test and they are: balanced fluency and accuracy, understanding the test requirements, focus on pronunciation and intonation, using a range of vocabulary and grammar, develop coherent and organized responses, and stimulate test conditions and get feedback. These key points must be developed during the preparation for the English-speaking proficiency test. Therefore, English speaking proficiency test participants will be able to speak fluently and accurately to achieve a high score for the speaking test.

KEY POINTS IN TO SPEAK ENGLISH FLUENLY AND ACCURATELY DURING THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PROFICIENCY TEST

Balanced Fluency and Accuracy

Soraya (2023) and Robaina and Larenas (2020) stated that in speaking English, both fluency and accuracy must be developed together, as both are equally important, therefore, there must be balanced emphasize between fluency and accuracy. English learners tend to focus on one aspect only, either fluency or accuracy. For example, the fluency aspect. Shyness is one of the factors which hinders learners to speak English fluently (Chin, Ban, & Em, 2024). Learners tend to think that by overcoming their shyness and becoming confident when talking, they will speak English fluently. Yes, they might be able to speak with a continuous manner, though, it does not mean accuracy. The grammar, language used or vocabulary might not be correct. The speaking will only be a range of sentences which sound like English, but it is not English. It is just an arrangement of meaningless sentences.

If learners only focus on accuracy by improving their knowledge in vocabulary, language use, and grammar, they might not be able to speak fluently. They might be shy or lack confidence when talking. As the result, they are stunted when talking and pause many times during the talk. Chand (2021) conducted a study in Nepal related to challenges faced by bachelor level students when they speak English. The study reveals that even though the participants have learnt English for a long time, they are not fluent when speaking in English. This can be caused by lack of practice, so that the knowledge they have, is not utilised regularly. Students who are knowledable in vocabulary and grammar, are not necessarily confident in speaking English as they are worried about making mistakes and it makes them shy and nervous. It can be concluded that learners must utilise balanced emphasize when learning to speak English. They must equip themselves with advanced knowledge in grammar and master a large amount of vocabulary. This will

build learners' confidence. Learners then practice to speak and apply the right grammar and use vocabulary in sentences.

Understand the Test Requirements

Not all English proficiency tests include equivalent speaking tests. For example, the tests stated earlier such as TOEFL iBT, IELTS, and Duolingo English test require speaking test. However, there are differences in format and focus, which learners must recognize. For example, the TOEFL-iBT or Test of English as a Foreign Language-Internet Based Test for speaking test examines participants' reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. The format is recording-based where test participants speak using a microphone and are recorded with the speaking test lasting 16 minutes. Speaking in TOEFL-iBT consists of 4 tasks the first task is an independent speaking task where students answer questions based on their personal experience such as "Do you prefer going to Bali or to Singapore for a holiday?" Participants must prepare the answer in 15 minutes. The second task is integrated reading, listening, and speaking. Participants read a short text, listen to an explanation, and then provide summary and opinion. Participants only have 30 seconds for the preparation before recording their answer. The third task is integrated listening and speaking about academic topics. Participants will listen to a lecture and they have 20 seconds to prepare their summary about the lecture. The last task in the speaking test for TOEFL-iBT is like the third task (ETS, 2023).

IELTS test for speaking section has different format from TOEFL-iBT for speaking section. The speaking test is conducted directly, or face to face with an interviewer and lasts for between 11 and 14 minutes. It has three sections: introduction and interview, longer speech by the interviewee, and two-way discussion. In the introduction and interview

section, the interviewer introduces themselves and then participants introduce themselves. After that, participants will be asked several questions about their personal data or experience. The second section is where the interviewer will give questions and participants will answer the questions with a long talk without any interruption from the interviewer. The third section is where interviewer and participant have a discussion related to the topic in section two. However, participants are given more opportunity to speak.

The DET requires participants to read aloud and then speak about a photograph that is shown by the interviewer. In this second section, participants are shown a picture and then participants must explain the situation or what is happening in the picture. The third section is where participants are asked to read and then speak. Participants will be given a topic or a question, then participants will give their opinion related to the topic. The last section is where participants listen to questions and answer the questions. The speaking test is conducted online (DET**PRACTICE**.com., 2025).

From the explanation about popular English proficiency tests above, speaking test participants must realize there are several differences in format and criteria for assessment. Both TOEFL-iBT and DET are fully computer-based speaking tests with human (for verification) and AI as evaluators while IELTS is a face-to-face or a video call test with a human examiner only. In general, these three speaking tests evaluate the delivery for fluency, accuracy, clarity, language use (such as grammar, vocabulary use) in the form of complex sentences or lexical resource, pronunciation, and intonation. The aspect of assessment also includes topic development, where participants must be able to develop ideas, relevance, coherence, and understanding about the topic which is described during the delivery.

Focus on Pronunciation and Intonation

Pronunciation and intonation are very important in speaking English. Pronunciation is how the word sound and intonation are the variance of tone when speaking. They complete each other and they are indicators of how good the test participant is, as good pronunciation and intonation will support clarity, fluency, and communication between interviewer and interviewee. Pronunciation is important as mispronounced words may lead to misunderstanding when speaking. For example, the word food and foot, ship and sheep, or eggs and axe. They must be pronounced correctly otherwise, the message will not be delivered (Lubis, Nadilla, & Rayani, 2025; Wang & Zhang, 2024; Permatasari & Lubis, 2024). Therefore, when pronunciation of words are correct, it means that learners are learning. Gilakjani (2017) argues that many teachers do not have guidelines on how to teach pronunciation. As the result, pronunciation receives less attention than other aspects of language such as grammar and vocabulary. Moreover, Lubis et al. (2025) explain in their study that students find it challenging to learn pronunciation, as the exposure to English speaking by native speakers is limited and consequently during classroom activity, pronunciation does not receive as much attention as other language aspects. Intonation is important as it supports speakers to deliver emotion, important points, intention, and the structure of sentences. For example, intonation usually drops at the end of positive sentences, while in interrogative sentences, the intonation will go up at the end of sentences. Wang and Zhang (2024) in their study found that pronunciation and intonation are still challenging for students in speaking English.

Due to the limited exposure to native speakers, limited attention to the teaching of pronunciation and intonation occurs, learners who are planning to take an English-speaking test must conduct several strategies to improve their pronunciation and

intonation. Firstly, learners should listen and imitate the pronunciation and intonation. Many platforms such as YouTube provide English speaking situations, and students can listen to these and then imitate the words. This strategy will also improve students' listening ability. Secondly, students should record their talking and evaluate the result. There should be no hesitation to consult Google or AI applications to assure the right pronunciation and intonation. Thirdly, use phonetic feature in an e-dictionary such as the Cambridge or Oxford online dictionary. They are usually equipped with phonetic symbols. Fourthly, use pronunciation applications such as Speechling, ELSA Speak, or Forvo. The last recommended strategy is to practice regularly how to use pronoun words and intonation in a sentence.

Use A Range of Vocabulary and Grammar

The use a range of vocabulary and grammar is important when speaking English (Rao, 2018). English has several words to describe a similar thing. For example, the word “to improve” has synonyms such as “to expand” “to progress” “to recover”. The word “small” has synonyms such as “petite” “tiny” “minor”. Learners must understand that they are similar in meaning, however, they depend on the context. For example, the word “tiny” means extremely small, “minor” is usually used to signify that something does not receive large or significant attention. In a speaking test, learners must be able to use the right word to provide a correct meaning and to avoid repetition. Learning vocabulary is very important in speaking English as described in a study conducted by Khan, Radzuan, Shahbaz, Ibrahim, and Mustafa (2018). Yet, it is also challenging to master a range of vocabulary as it needs learners' determination and commitment toward memorizing words. Learners must read numerous texts to add many new words into their vocabulary list and use new words in speaking practice.

Grammar is one of important aspects in language use (Kumari, Kumbhakar, & Kumar, 2024). A range of vocabulary must be supported by the mastery of grammar. Learners must realize that grammar is not only To Be or Tenses. Gerunds, pronouns, or linking words are also important aspects to be mastered to assist learners in arranging words for the speaking test. When learners master a range of grammar, the speaking will be more accurate and clearer. English speaking participants will show high level of speaking during the test when speaking is supported by a range of grammar. Students who master a range of grammar will be more confident when speaking in English. There are several strategies to improve learners' mastery of a range of grammar. Learners must practice their speaking actively and use the structure in a sentence to create another sentence. They should use grammar in various types of topics in speaking. Listening is also helpful to understand which grammar that speakers use. Learners can also use interactive applications to assist them to correct their grammar when speaking and writing such as the use of ELSA Speak and Grammarly.

Develop Coherent and Organized Responses

Building coherence and organized responses in speaking English is very important especially when learners take an academic IELTS, TOEFL iBT, or DET test. Building coherence and organized responses is the ability to deliver organized explanation, logical ideas, and an easily understood delivery (Tsunemoto & Trofimovich, 2024; Rao, 2018). Coherence (lexical arrangement, connection, or verb repetition) and organized speaking, demonstrate fluency and the level of a learners' skill in speaking. Building coherence and organized responses is problematic. There are challenges in developing these aspects such as lack of planning before the test. When

taking a speaking test, test participants do not know in advance what topic to be questioned will be. Moreover, speaking anxiety often hinders test participants' ability to organize words. Moreover, the lack of a range vocabulary and grammar will be one of the challenges in speaking English during the test. Many participants are also not skilled to develop ideas quickly.

There are strategies which can be developed by developing a clear structure which consists of introduction-body-conclusion. Participants must state their main point, develop the ideas of the topic, provide examples, and summarize the explanation with their opinion. They should use linking words such as firstly, after that, however, and other linking words.

Simulate Test Conditions and Get Feedback

Learners should use a simulation of the speaking test. Test participants may use a recording device. Learners record answers to questions from the sample test book, for example, or sample test which is available online. After that, learners evaluate the result. A test like the IELTS test requires a peer to do the mock test. Learners should select a peer who has good proficiency in English, so that he or she will be able to give more accurate and functional feedback.

CONCLUSION

The speaking test is the most anxious test for students as many learners are afraid of making mistakes. Learners must prepare themselves with a range of vocabulary and grammar, have balanced fluency and accuracy, understand the test requirements, focus on pronunciation and intonation, develop coherent and organized responses, and stimulate test conditions receiving feedback to help learners during the actual speaking test. Being able to speak English properly and to succeed in a speaking test needs a long process and is achieved through

regular practice. The most important aspect is to overcome shyness and to be confident. Therefore, ideas will be flowing during a speaking test and participants will be able to produce a sentence with appropriate structure and vocabulary.

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CHAPTER 7

WRITING FOR CLARITY AND COHERENCE

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of writing proficiency in English language assessments is widely recognized, particularly given the central role of clarity and coherence in the production of effective academic texts. These two dimensions are not merely indicators of a test-taker's linguistic competence, but are foundational to articulating structured arguments and presenting critical insights logically and persuasively. In standardized assessments such as IELTS and TOEFL, clarity and coherence directly affect scoring and the overall communicative quality of written responses.

Clarity allows learners to convey ideas in a direct and comprehensible manner, facilitating reader understanding. As Saeed et al. (2021) note, a central concern in proficiency testing is whether second-language learners can construct well-organized and intelligible responses. However, many adult EFL learners struggle with this due to insufficient instructional emphasis on structural writing features. The lack of focus on these aspects limits learners' ability to demonstrate depth of understanding and critical thought within time-constrained test settings.

Equally vital is coherence, which involves the logical flow and connectivity of ideas both within and across paragraphs. Dobbs & Leider (2024) assert that a strong command of Standard Written English is essential for academic success, especially in writing. This reinforces the idea that writing

instruction must go beyond grammar and address organizational structures and rhetorical strategies. These elements are integral to test rubrics and carry substantial weight in high-stakes evaluation.

Pedagogical strategies that emphasize clarity and coherence can significantly enhance students' writing development. Wischgoll (2016) introduces the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) model as a framework integrating cognitive and metacognitive strategies to improve student writing. This approach supports learners in setting goals, organizing their writing, and engaging in reflective revision. It also encourages autonomy and motivation—essential attributes in high-pressure testing environments.

Beyond linguistic precision, writing proficiency entails the capacity to engage critically with content and discourse norms. (Bhowmik, 2023) emphasizes that writing development in ESL contexts is a dual process: acquiring the language and internalizing the conventions of academic discourse. This requires instruction that balances grammar with rhetorical clarity and argumentative structure, equipping learners to manage complex writing tasks effectively.

Nevertheless, numerous challenges hinder EFL learners' writing progress. A prominent issue is writing-related anxiety, which negatively impacts coherence and clarity. Sun et al. (2024) highlight that limited writing practice, fear of criticism, and weak strategy instruction contribute to this anxiety. Prasetyaningrum et al. (2021) add that strict time limits during writing tasks further intensify stress, restricting learners' ability to organize ideas effectively.

Linguistic limitations remain a major obstacle. EFL learners frequently face difficulties with limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and syntactic problems—all of which impede clarity. Fareed et al. (2016) attribute these issues to insufficient

proficiency and a lack of instruction in academic writing conventions. Alzahrani et al. (2021) further argue that traditional teaching methods—reliant on rote memorization—fail to prepare students for the integrated and expressive demands of academic writing.

Cultural unfamiliarity introduces another layer of complexity. Assignments that involve culturally unfamiliar content can overwhelm learners and increase cognitive load. (Yu & Zhou, 2022) explain that such tasks may lead to confusion and reduce the quality of argumentation. Al-Seghayer (2019) also emphasizes that limited exposure to authentic language contexts restricts learners' confidence and ability to produce culturally appropriate writing aligned with target-language expectations.

Instructional quality also plays a crucial role. Many educators lack specialized training in writing pedagogy, and some curricula neglect the integration of critical thinking and communicative writing strategies. As Fareed et al. (2016) and Haji (2024) assert, without explicit instruction and opportunities for meaningful practice, learners remain unprepared to meet the rhetorical and cognitive demands of academic writing.

UNDERSTANDING CLARITY IN WRITING

Clarity in academic and test writing is essential for effective communication, as it ensures that the intended message is conveyed and understood without obstacles. Academic clarity entails presenting ideas in a straightforward manner that facilitates comprehension and engages readers. Key features contributing to clear writing include concise sentence structure, precise vocabulary, and the elimination of redundancy and ambiguity.

Concise sentence structure enhances clarity by minimizing unnecessary complexity in language. Tikhonova et al.

emphasize that structuring writing effectively is crucial for maintaining reader engagement, which is typically threatened by excessive verbosity and redundancy (Tikhonova et al., 2024). This finding aligns with the assertion that clear writing correlates with improved comprehension among readers. Moreover, the use of straightforward, affirmative sentences is preferred over convoluted phrasing to optimize readers' understanding (Tikhonova et al., 2024). Similarly, Lubis and Miranti highlight that excessive use of passive voice can obscure meaning, advocating for a predominantly active voice to maximize clarity in written communication (Lubis & Miranti, 2024). However, they also note that strict adherence to active voice might not always be suitable and can depend on rhetorical context and audience.

Another pivotal feature of clarity in academic writing is the use of precise vocabulary. Alsubaie reports that clarity is one of the writing skills least affected by mobile typing apps among students, suggesting that the conscious selection of words significantly impacts the clarity of written communication (Alsubaie, 2022). Wei indicates that the lack of clarity in language use can hinder students' capacity to communicate effectively, particularly in discipline-specific contexts (Wei, 2020). This need for precision necessitates a strong vocabulary foundation, which strengthens communication and improves clarity in academic texts.

The elimination of redundancy and ambiguity is equally vital for achieving clarity. Pandey notes that students often face challenges in their thesis writing processes, especially in producing clear and coherent content, which calls for explicit guidance in writing clarity (Pandey, 2024). The importance of logical flow, as highlighted by Habtu and Deressa, is directly linked to the elimination of ambiguous phrases and repetition, as cohesive writing is achieved by logically connecting sentences

and paragraphs (Habtu & Deressa, 2024). Ensuring that each sentence adds value without reiterating previously stated ideas aids in sustaining reader attention and facilitating understanding.

In essence, clarity in academic writing is a multifaceted objective achieved through concise sentence constructions, precise vocabulary usage, and the avoidance of redundancy and ambiguity. By adhering to these features, students and professionals alike can enhance the effectiveness of their written communication, contributing to clearer expression of complex ideas and research outcomes.

EXAMPLES

Example 1: Vague Language

Unclear

Many people think that the thing is important and can help in many ways.

Clear

Many students believe that effective time management is important because it helps them balance academic and personal responsibilities.

Why It's Clear

The subject ("students"), the topic ("time management"), and the benefits ("balance academic and personal responsibilities") are specified.

Example 2: Wordiness

Unclear

Due to the fact that students are not able to submit their assignments on time, it becomes difficult for the teachers to provide timely feedback.

Clear

Because students submit assignments late, teachers struggle to provide timely feedback.

Why It's Clear

The revised sentence eliminates unnecessary words, improving readability without losing meaning.

Example 3: Ambiguity**Unclear**

She discussed the research findings with her advisor in the library, which was surprising.

Clear

She was surprised that her advisor agreed to discuss the research findings with her in the library.

Why It's Clear

The source of the surprise is made explicit, eliminating ambiguity.

Example 4: Pronoun Reference**Unclear**

When Ana met Maria, she was excited because she got the job.

Clear

Ana was excited when she met Maria because Ana had gotten the job.

Why It's Clear

Clarifying who "she" refers to avoids confusion between the two subjects.

Example 5: Jargon and Complex Structure

Unclear

The proliferation of syntactic incongruities detrimentally affects the cognitive processing of textual content.

Clear

Too many grammar mistakes make it hard for readers to understand the text.

Why It's Clear

Using simpler, more familiar vocabulary makes the meaning more accessible to readers.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE CLARITY

Achieving clarity in writing is essential for facilitating effective communication, especially within academic and professional domains. Employing concrete strategies—such as adopting the active voice, minimizing the use of ambiguous expressions, and providing precise examples and evidence—can substantially improve textual clarity and communicative intent.

Active Voice Versus Passive Voice

The active voice is generally preferred in formal writing due to its ability to convey ideas in a more direct and engaging manner. In contrast, the passive voice may obscure the agent of the action, thereby reducing immediacy and weakening sentence impact. Empirical evidence suggests that active constructions enhance both clarity and rhetorical effectiveness, particularly in oral communication settings, where direct language improves message delivery (Arella, 2023). The active voice explicitly connects the subject with the action, thereby fostering reader engagement and improving interpretability. For example, a sentence such as "The ball was thrown by John" in passive form

lacks the immediacy conveyed by the active alternative, "John threw the ball" (Newton & Salvi, 2020). Such preferences are consistent with established academic writing conventions that emphasize succinctness and clarity to maintain reader interest and comprehension (Sarker et al., 2020).

Minimizing Ambiguity Through Precise Language

The use of vague language poses a significant barrier to effective communication, often leading to confusion or misinterpretation. Scholarly studies have shown that ambiguity in verbal interactions such as those occurring in medical consultations can produce uncertainty, which may adversely affect client satisfaction and understanding (He & Smit, 2021). Similarly, in academic writing, imprecise terminology can obscure core arguments and diminish the interpretive accuracy of research findings (Álvarez-Gil & Toledo, 2022). Researchers have emphasized that vague phrasing complicates the reading process by inviting divergent interpretations, thereby diluting the overall impact of the message (Ismail et al., 2022). Consequently, eliminating ambiguity through the use of precise and well-defined language is imperative for ensuring communicative effectiveness.

Enhancing Clarity Through Specificity and Evidence

Clarity is further reinforced through the inclusion of specific examples and substantiated evidence. Methodologically robust studies and clearly articulated outcomes enhance the transferability and credibility of research findings, particularly within systematic reviews (Bekker et al., 2015; Maggio et al., 2022). In educational research, for instance, the integration of concrete case studies and empirical data strengthens the connection between theoretical concepts and real-world practice, thereby increasing the relevance and accessibility of scholarly

discourse (Steele et al., 2017). Moreover, specifying contextual variables and research methodologies supports the practical application of findings, effectively narrowing the gap between abstract theory and empirical implementation (Engell et al., 2023; Levinson et al., 2024).

UNDERSTANDING CLARITY IN WRITING

Coherence refers to the logical organization and smooth progression of ideas in a written text, allowing readers to effortlessly follow the writer's argument or narrative. This quality plays a fundamental role in both academic and professional communication, as it directly affects the clarity and interpretability of information. The presence of coherence enables readers to make sense of the content without confusion, which in turn improves comprehension, retention, and engagement (Fang, 2024; Habtu & Deressa, 2024). In the context of academic writing, coherence is not merely an aesthetic feature but a functional element that enhances the overall effectiveness of a text.

Achieving coherence involves several interrelated components, including the logical sequencing of ideas, internal paragraph unity, and the strategic use of transitions. The logical flow of ideas ensures that each point naturally extends from the one preceding it, forming a cohesive narrative or argument (Habtu & Deressa, 2024). Writers must construct clear sentences and well-organized paragraphs that contribute incrementally to the central thesis. This structure allows readers to understand the interconnections between concepts, thereby deepening their comprehension and reinforcing the overarching message of the text.

Paragraph unity, sustained through strong topic sentences, is another essential element of coherence. A well-crafted topic sentence succinctly introduces the main idea of a paragraph and

serves as a roadmap for the supporting details that follow (Zhang et al., 2023). Each sentence within the paragraph should contribute directly to the development of the topic sentence, thus maintaining focus and cohesion. Research emphasizes the importance of aligning topic and supporting sentences to achieve internal consistency and logical progression within the text (Tarin & Yawiloeng, 2023).

In addition, effective transitions are integral to guiding the reader through various segments of the text. Transitional words and phrases function as signposts, indicating relationships such as contrast, causation, sequence, or addition. These linguistic markers not only connect individual ideas but also reinforce the structure of the overall argument. Studies have highlighted that insufficient or inappropriate use of transitions often results in fragmented and disjointed writing (Hama, 2021; Jimola & Dada, 2023). Conversely, the deliberate and contextually appropriate use of transitional devices enhances the coherence and readability of academic texts (Hassan, 2024). Consequently, the mastery of transitional strategies is vital for writers seeking to produce logically connected and reader-friendly prose.

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE FOR COHERENCE

In constructing paragraphs that adhere to the principles of coherence, it is essential to maintain unity, ensuring that each paragraph conveys a singular, focused idea. This allows for clearer communication, thereby enhancing the reader's understanding of the text. Furthermore, the ordering of ideas—whether chronological, cause-effect, or comparison-contrast—plays a critical role in the overall logical flow of the written work. The following sections will outline these key elements of paragraph structure in detail, supplemented by illustrative examples.

Unity: One Idea Per Paragraph

The principle of unity dictates that each paragraph should revolve around a single concept or argument. This singular focus helps prevent the dilution of the argument and keeps the reader engaged. For instance, consider a paragraph discussing the causes of climate change. The topic sentence might read, "The primary contributors to climate change include greenhouse gas emissions from transportation and industrial activities." This sentence clearly establishes what the paragraph will focus on. The ensuing sentences should elaborate on specific sources of greenhouse gas emissions, backed by empirical data and scholarly research. This method not only boosts clarity but also enhances the argumentative strength of the text.

Ordering: Chronological

When organizing information chronologically, the writer arranges events or ideas according to the sequence in which they occur. This approach is particularly effective in historical or narrative writing. For example, a paragraph detailing the evolution of renewable energy technologies could follow this structure:

1. Topic Sentence: "The development of renewable energy technologies has evolved significantly since the late 20th century."
2. Early Developments: "In the 1970s, interest in solar power surged due to the oil crisis, leading to initial technological advancements."
3. Follow-up Innovations: "By the 1980s, wind energy began to gain traction, driven by technological improvements that enhanced turbine efficiency."
4. Recent Trends: "Entering the 21st century, breakthroughs in battery storage and smart grid technology have further propelled the adoption of renewables."

This chronological structure facilitates a natural, easy-to-follow narrative, guiding the reader through the historical development of the topic.

Ordering: Cause-Effect

In a cause-effect ordering, paragraphs explore the relationship between events or phenomena, indicating how one results from another. For instance, a paragraph examining the impact of deforestation might include the following elements:

1. Topic Sentence: "Deforestation has far-reaching effects on both the environment and human societies."
2. Cause: "The primary cause of deforestation is the increasing demand for agricultural land to support the global population."
3. Immediate Effects: "As forests are cleared, biodiversity loss accelerates, leading to the extinction of numerous species."
4. Broader Implications: "Moreover, the removal of trees contributes to climate change by releasing stored carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, exacerbating global warming."

This structure permits the author to effectively demonstrate the consequences of deforestation, supporting the argument with a logical progression from causes to effects.

Ordering: Comparison-Contrast

The comparison-contrast structure allows the writer to examine the similarities and differences between two or more subjects. This method is particularly effective for critical analysis and can clarify distinctions that inform the reader's understanding. For example, a paragraph contrasting renewable energy sources might be organized as follows:

1. Topic Sentence: "Wind energy and solar energy represent two of the most prominent renewable energy sources, each with distinct advantages and challenges."
2. Similarity: "Both wind and solar energy reduce reliance on fossil fuels, thus contributing to lower carbon emissions."
3. Difference: "However, wind energy is more reliable in certain geographic locations, while solar energy is contingent on sunlight availability."
4. Additional Contrast: "Furthermore, the installation costs for solar panels can be higher initially, though advancements in technology are gradually lowering these barriers."

This comparative structure elucidates the various characteristics of the discussed energy sources while guiding the reader through a structured analysis.

(Gomwalk et al., 2023)

ORGANIZING IDEAS LOGICALLY

Proficient writing necessitates a thorough grasp of several integral elements, including the logical organization of ideas, the construction of outlines prior to drafting, the application of coherent paragraph structures, and the use of pre-writing techniques such as brainstorming and mind mapping. These components are indispensable for learners and novice writers aiming to enhance their academic writing competence.

The logical structuring of ideas forms the basis of effective written communication. Gomwalk et al. (2023) emphasize that grouping related concepts purposefully fosters coherence and facilitates clearer message delivery. This observation is corroborated by Long & Teopilus (2023), who found that students frequently encounter challenges in maintaining logical sequencing in their essays, a factor that negatively influences their academic writing performance. Employing established

writing frameworks—such as the PEEL (Point, Evidence, Explanation, Link) and PIE (Point, Illustration, Explanation) models—has proven beneficial in promoting clarity and ensuring a seamless progression of arguments.

Developing an outline prior to writing has also been shown to significantly enhance the overall quality of written work. As noted by Mustofa & Wahyuni (2024), pre-writing activities assist learners in systematically organizing their thoughts, thereby improving coherence and unity within their texts. Similarly, Lihawa (2024) underscores the importance of idea analysis and structured planning as a means to strengthen communicative effectiveness in writing. Habtu & Deressa (2024) further argue that the presence of a logical flow in composition aids in the clear presentation of content and contributes to greater reader engagement.

In addition, brainstorming techniques—particularly mind mapping—constitute effective tools in the initial stages of writing. Astiantih & Akfan (2023) highlight that concept mapping provides a visual scaffold for idea generation and organization, enhancing students' ability to manage complex information and produce well-structured descriptive texts. This cognitive approach supports both creativity and structure in academic writing. Lestari et al. (2020) similarly affirm that such strategies support the internal processes of idea articulation and paragraph development, contributing to improved coherence and clarity.

Finally, the logical organization of arguments within academic texts bears a strong correlation with overall academic performance. Fang (2024) asserts that coherence and logical flow are critical determinants of writing proficiency, which in turn influence academic success. This perspective is supported by Bataller et al. (2024), who note that clarity and progression are key evaluative criteria in academic assessment. Therefore, a

deliberate focus on these foundational writing strategies not only cultivates effective writing habits but also contributes significantly to students' broader academic achievement.

TRANSITION SIGNALS AND COHESIVE DEVICES

Cohesive devices are generally classified into four principal categories: additive, contrastive, causal, and sequential. Additive connectors, such as *moreover* and *in addition*, are employed to introduce supplementary information or to reinforce previous statements, thus contributing to a more layered and comprehensive exposition of ideas (Shinta, 2021). Contrastive markers, including *however* and *on the other hand*, are used to signal opposing viewpoints or to introduce alternative interpretations, which are essential for constructing sophisticated and balanced arguments (Latifah & Musfiroh, 2022). Causal connectors, such as *therefore* and *because*, serve to explicitly indicate cause-and-effect relationships, enabling writers to present logical reasoning or justification for claims (Shinta, 2021). Lastly, sequential devices, including *first*, *next*, and *finally*, function to structure discourse in a linear or hierarchical order, thus guiding readers through the progression of ideas in an organized manner (Nurpitriyani et al., 2023).

Despite the critical role these devices play in enhancing coherence, writers frequently encounter challenges in their usage. Excessive reliance on cohesive markers or unvaried repetition may produce a formulaic tone, thereby diminishing the overall rhetorical effectiveness of the text (Kaula et al., 2022). A tendency to overuse familiar transitions may also restrict stylistic flexibility and obscure subtle distinctions in meaning (Shinta, 2021). Furthermore, the inconsistent or inappropriate application of cohesive devices can disrupt logical flow and hinder comprehension, ultimately compromising textual coherence (Lee & Oxenham, 2024). To mitigate these

issues, writers are advised to employ a diverse and contextually appropriate range of cohesive devices, thereby enhancing reader engagement and ensuring a more fluent and intelligible composition (Bui et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

The ability to produce written texts characterized by clarity and coherence constitutes a fundamental component of academic literacy and is critically important in the context of English proficiency assessments. Clarity enables writers to articulate their ideas with precision and transparency, reducing ambiguity and facilitating reader comprehension. Coherence, in turn, ensures that ideas are logically organized and meaningfully connected, allowing the reader to follow the progression of arguments seamlessly. These two dimensions are not only indicative of linguistic competence but also reflective of the writer's capacity for critical thinking and structured reasoning, both of which are essential for academic success.

Furthermore, the chapter has outlined a range of pedagogical strategies that can be employed to enhance these competencies, including the use of structured planning techniques (e.g., outlining and mind mapping), effective paragraph development models (such as PEEL and PIE), and the judicious application of cohesive devices. While common challenges—such as repetition, disjointed structure, and overuse of transition signals—may impede writing quality, they can be mitigated through explicit instruction and sustained practice. Ultimately, prioritizing the development of clarity and coherence in EFL writing instruction not only improves learners' performance in standardized assessments but also cultivates transferable academic skills necessary for success in higher education and professional domains.

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CHAPTER 8

TEST-TAKING STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

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INTRODUCTION

While traditional assessment methods provide objective and quantifiable measures of student performance, they often represent a static evaluation of existing abilities rather than a dynamic measure of learning progress or an in-depth understanding of cognitive processes (Xue et al., 2023). Evaluation is an essential component in the educational process because it functions as a measuring tool for student learning outcomes (Chen & Yang, 2023). Among the various forms of evaluation, tests, whether in the form of multiple choice, essays, or other standard formats, are still the most common method used by educational institutions around the world (Oteng et al., 2023). Tests are used not only to determine the extent to which students understand the material, but also to assess the effectiveness of teaching, design learning interventions, and as a basis for making academic decisions such as class promotion, graduation, or selection to the next level of education (Irene, 2023). This ubiquitous application underscores their perceived utility in benchmarking educational standards and facilitating comparative analyses among learners and institutions alike (Torres-Madroño et al., 2020). This pervasive reliance on standardized testing highlights its critical role in validating acquired knowledge and ensuring that expected skills have been attained before final certification or progression in academic pathways (Benkirane et al., 2019). However, the design and

implementation of these assessments must be meticulously aligned with the curriculum and pedagogical strategies to ensure they accurately reflect learning objectives and promote genuine comprehension rather than rote memorization (Mate & Weidenhofer, 2021).

Evaluation is an essential component in the educational process because it functions as a measuring tool for student learning outcomes. Among the various forms of evaluation, tests, whether in the form of multiple choice, essays, or other standard formats, are still the most common method used by educational institutions around the world. Tests are used not only to determine the extent to which students understand the material, but also to assess the effectiveness of teaching, design learning interventions, and as a basis for making academic decisions such as class promotion, graduation, or selection to the next level of education (DiVall & Schlesselman, 2018).

Furthermore, tests act as an objective and efficient selection mechanism, especially in the context of mass education (Messick, 1987). National exams, college entrance exams, and professional certifications are real examples of how tests are used to filter and classify participants based on certain achievements (Salvia, 1981). However, it is important to realize that success in exams is not solely determined by mastery of the material. Several studies have shown that students' ability to understand test instructions, manage time, and apply effective answering strategies greatly affects their performance in exams. In this context, test-based evaluations require not only cognitive skills, but also non-cognitive skills such as self-control, thoroughness, and adaptive test-taking strategies.

In addition to being a tool for measuring achievement, tests also play an important role in the academic selection process (Messick, 1987). Various education systems in the world, including at the national and international levels, use test results

as the basis for selection to enter higher education, awarding scholarships, or professional certification. University entrance exams, academic aptitude tests, and foreign language proficiency tests such as TOEFL or IELTS are real examples of the strategic role of test-based evaluation in determining a person's academic access and mobility (Astuti & Revianti, 2023). Therefore, validity and fairness in the preparation and implementation of tests are very important so that evaluation is not only administrative in nature, but also reflects the quality of education that is inclusive and oriented towards the development of students' potential as a whole (East & Slomp, 2023).

Tests have become an integral component in various levels of education, from elementary school to higher education (Levy-Feldman, 2025). At the elementary and secondary levels, tests are used to assess curriculum achievement, determine graduation, and identify student learning needs. At the college level, tests are not only used as a measure of academic achievement in the form of midterm or final exams, but also as part of the assessment of critical, analytical, and applicative thinking skills (Irene, 2023; Levy-Feldman, 2025). Educational evaluation plays a vital role in gauging student learning achievements, understanding their progress, identifying challenges, and offering suggestions for improvement (Ghaljeh et al., 2021). It acts as a tool to measure how well students have grasped the material (Muzaza & Tembo, 2020).

Furthermore, tests are also used in various selection and certification contexts that have a major impact on an individual's academic and professional future. College entrance exams such as SBMPTN in Indonesia, SAT in the United States, or A-Level in the United Kingdom, for example, are the main gateway to continuing education to a higher level. Likewise, professional certifications such as TOEFL, IELTS, GRE, GMAT, and certain skills certification exams are requirements for gaining access to

international education or global job opportunities. These tests not only measure competence, but also become selection tools that determine a person's social and academic mobility (Astuti & Revianti, 2023). Therefore, a deep understanding of test-taking strategies becomes increasingly important to ensure that participants are not only prepared materially, but also technically and psychologically in facing various forms of evaluation (Levy-Feldman, 2025).

DEFINITION AND DIMENSIONS OF TEST-FACING STRATEGIES

In the context of modern education, test-taking strategies are understood as a set of skills, knowledge, and behaviors used by learners to prepare for, face, and complete exams effectively (Irene, 2023). These strategies include cognitive, metacognitive, and affective aspects that work simultaneously in the decision-making process during the exam. Unlike simply studying the material, test-taking strategies emphasize how learners manage their time, understand the instructions for the questions, organize the order of work, and calm themselves under pressure (Niroula & Niroula, 2020). In general, these strategies can be classified into several main dimensions, such as pre-exam strategies (e.g., study techniques and mental preparation), test-taking strategies (e.g., question selection, time management, and answering techniques), and post-exam strategies (reflection and self-evaluation). A deep understanding of these dimensions is essential not only for learners, but also for educators and assessment designers who want to create a fairer evaluation system that supports overall academic success (Perez, 2025; Yin et al., 2022).

Test-taking strategies do not just refer to the technique of answering questions, but include broader and deeper skills, especially in terms of self-management and reflective thinking

processes known as metacognition (Muzaza & Tembo, 2020). Metacognitive knowledge allows test takers to understand what they know and how best to use it in the context of the exam. This includes awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses in taking questions, selecting effective study strategies, and evaluating their readiness before the exam. In other words, test takers who have good metacognitive skills not only learn the material, but also actively plan, monitor, and adjust their approach to the exam process (Smith & Doe, 2024).

During the exam implementation phase, test-taking strategies help participants to manage time, understand instructions carefully, and prioritize questions that are easier or more confident to be worked on first (Levy-Feldman, 2025; Muzaza & Tembo, 2020). Skills such as eliminating incorrect answer choices on multiple-choice questions, sketching ideas on essay questions, or staying calm when faced with difficult questions are concrete examples of the application of this strategy (Perez, 2025). Decision-making during exams is not only technical, but also strategic, because participants are required to balance between accuracy and efficiency. In this context, the ability to recognize when to move on to the next question or when to review answers becomes an important part of metacognitive skills in exams (Tullis & Benjamin, 2010).

After the exam is over, the process of reflecting on the exam experience is also an integral part of test-taking strategies. Students who are able to identify strategic errors, such as taking too long to work on one type of question or rushing through the instructions, will have a greater chance of improving their performance on the next exam (Niroula & Niroula, 2020; Perez, 2025). This reflection also helps in developing more appropriate learning strategies in the future. Therefore, test-taking strategies are a cycle of skills that start from preparation, implementation, to post-exam evaluation (Niroula & Niroula, 2020). The three

are interconnected in forming strategic mindsets and study habits, making students not only memorizers of material, but also active and reflective managers of the exam experience (Lim et al., 2021).

Preparation strategies focus on how students prepare themselves academically, mentally, and physically for the exam. These strategies include active learning techniques such as making summaries, answering practice questions, studying in groups, and doing exam simulations (Poorman & Mastorovich, 2008; Syafitri & Nirwana, 2020). In addition, time management in scheduling study sessions, maintaining sleep patterns, and avoiding last-minute cramming are also important parts of this stage. On the other hand, mental preparation through relaxation techniques, positive affirmations, and visualization of success can help reduce exam anxiety. The main goal of these strategies is to ensure that students not only master the material to be tested, but also enter the exam room in optimal condition emotionally and physically (Ovadia-Blechman et al., 2022).

Execution strategies are skills that participants use when facing the exam directly. These strategies include the ability to understand the instructions of the questions carefully, recognize the types of questions that can be solved first, and manage the time to complete them proportionally (Sung et al., 2020; Syafitri & Nirwana, 2020). Technical techniques such as eliminating incorrect answer choices, marking difficult questions to be re-worked, and adjusting the rhythm of the work so as not to rush are also included in this category (Kissi et al., 2023). In addition, it is important for participants to remain calm when faced with challenging questions, and to be able to manage time pressure with a cool head. These strategies aim to maximize performance during the exam in an efficient and measurable way, rather than simply relying on memorization or intuition.

Meanwhile, post-exam strategies (reflection strategies) relate to participants' ability to evaluate the exam experience critically and objectively. This reflection can include analysis of the types of questions that are most often wrong, the causes of difficulty in answering certain questions, and the effectiveness of the learning methods used (Gorres-Martens, 2020; Sung et al., 2020). This strategy is important for forming an adaptive and sustainable learning cycle, where participants are able to improve their learning approaches and exam strategies in the future. In addition, reflection also helps participants develop self-awareness and responsibility for their own learning process (Tseng et al., 2025). Thus, post-exam strategies become an important foundation in building long-term learning skills and sustainable academic success.

RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN EDUCATION

In the context of modern education that is increasingly competitive and based on measurable achievement standards, the ability of students to deal with various forms of evaluation effectively is becoming increasingly important (Ghaljeh et al., 2021; Levy-Feldman, 2025; Oteng et al., 2023). The current education system not only demands mastery of academic content, but also emphasizes critical thinking skills, problem solving, and the ability to adapt to various test formats, both paper-based and digital. As the forms and functions of assessments develop, including diagnostic tests, computer-based tests, and portfolio-based tests, students are required to have a set of strategies that allow them to respond to tests flexibly and efficiently (Fraidan, 2019; Perez, 2025). In this situation, test-taking strategies play a crucial role in bridging the gap between mastery of material and actual performance in assessments. These strategies encompass a wide array of cognitive and

metacognitive skills that include time management, understanding test instructions, efficiently processing questions, and error checking, all of which directly affect students' test scores and the validity of the assessment (Fraidan, 2019).

Technological developments have driven significant transformations in the education evaluation system, including the shift from paper-based testing (PBT) to computer-based testing (CBT) (Levy-Feldman, 2025). This format change not only touches on technical aspects such as test media, but also affects how participants interact with questions, manage time, and navigate digital systems. Computer-based tests, such as the TOEFL iBT, Duolingo English Test, or CAT (Computer Assisted Test)-based selection, require participants to be familiar with digital interfaces, understand screen instructions, and use features such as scrolling, highlighting, or drag and drop that are not found in paper-based tests (Wang et al., 2021). Therefore, test-taking strategies in the CBT format require special adaptations, not only in cognitive aspects, but also technically and mentally.

For educators, these changes require adjustments in the learning approach and exam training. Teachers and instructors need to equip learners with adequate digital skills, train them through computer-based test simulations, and introduce answering strategies that are relevant to the digital format. Meanwhile, learners also need to build confidence in using digital devices, improve their reading accuracy on the screen, and understand that CBT assesses not only the content of the answer, but also the efficiency in operating the system. Without strategies that are appropriate to the CBT format, learners risk losing time, making technical errors, or even failing to complete the exam optimally. Therefore, a deep understanding and proper training on test-facing strategies in a digital context are absolute necessities in the current era of assessment transformation.

GAP IN LITERATURE AND THE NEED FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

Although the importance of test-taking strategies has been recognized in various educational discussions, in-depth and comprehensive scientific studies on this aspect are still relatively limited, especially in the context of education in developing countries (Le et al., 2022; Majeed, 2021). Many studies focus more on aspects of material mastery, test anxiety, or student learning styles, but only a few explicitly explore how test-taking strategies act as mediating variables between knowledge and test performance. In fact, these strategies can be a major determinant of success in tests, especially in the context of high-stakes assessments such as college entrance exams, international certifications, or scholarship selection. The lack of studies that focus on the dimensions of test strategies has led to a gap in understanding between assessment designers, educators, and students themselves (Brown, 2022).

Furthermore, most of the available literature is still fragmentary, with a limited focus on one type of strategy or only on a particular test context, such as a language test or a national standardized test. There are not many studies that present a holistic approach that combines cognitive, affective, metacognitive, and technological perspectives simultaneously in studying test-taking strategies (Fraidan, 2019; Ketworrachai & Sappapan, 2022). This indicates an urgent need for in-depth studies that are not only descriptive, but also analytical and applicable, so that the results can be used as a basis for designing training, interventions, or educational policies that are more responsive to the challenges of modern tests. Therefore, this book chapter is here to answer this gap and encourage a more serious academic discourse on the importance of test-taking strategies in the success of learning and evaluation (Peng et al., 2014).

In fact, in the context of modern evaluation, test-taking strategies act as an important bridge between mastery of the material and the final exam results (Salvia, 1981). Someone who has understood the subject matter will not necessarily be able to show optimal performance in the exam if they are unable to utilize effective answering strategies—such as managing time, understanding the structure of the questions, or assessing priorities in working on the questions. In this situation, test-taking strategies are the key to transforming academic potential into real performance. However, unfortunately, only a few studies have made test-taking strategies the main variable, or analyzed them separately from more general learning strategies. This results in a less comprehensive understanding of the crucial role of test-taking strategies in the educational literature (Fraidan, 2019; Peng et al., 2014). The planning, selection, and application of test-taking strategies underscore the test-taker's metacognitive abilities, highlighting the cyclical process where individuals assess the effectiveness of their chosen strategies and adjust their approach accordingly (Fraidan, 2019).

Moreover, existing research approaches tend to be descriptive or correlational, with a scope limited to one type of test, educational level, or cultural background (Benjamin & Pashler, 2015; Messick, 1987; Salvia, 1981). There are not many studies that use longitudinal, experimental, or multi-contextual approaches to assess the effectiveness of test-taking strategies in various forms of assessment, such as written, oral, computer-based, or competency-based tests. In fact, in the world of education that continues to develop—both technologically and pedagogically, a cross-contextual understanding is needed that can be used as a basis for developing real interventions, from training in test-taking strategies to integrating the material into the education curriculum (Neumann et al., 2019). Therefore, test-taking strategies need to be positioned as an essential

component in more serious and systematic academic discussions. While tests are a ubiquitous feature of education systems globally, their function extends beyond simple measurement (Brown, 2022). Testing serves as a mechanism for both reinforcing learning and evaluating student achievement in language acquisition (Muzaza & Tembo, 2020).

STRATEGY VARIABILITY AND ITS EFFECTIVENESS IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

Test-taking strategies are not universal or one-size-fits-all approaches. In practice, effective strategies depend heavily on a variety of contextual factors, such as the type of test, the format of the questions, the level of education, the characteristics of the individual participants, and the educational culture that surrounds them (Levy-Feldman, 2025; Wang et al., 2021). For example, strategies that work well in a computer-based multiple-choice test may be very different from those that work well in a paper-based essay test. Similarly, the approaches used by high school students in preparing for a national exam may not be relevant to postgraduate students who are taking an open-ended or portfolio-based test. This diversity of contexts reflects the variability of strategies that need to be understood in depth so that learning interventions and test-taking skills training can be tailored appropriately (Fraidan, 2019; Muzaza & Tembo, 2020).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of a strategy is not only determined by the characteristics of the test itself, but also by internal factors of the learner, such as their learning style, anxiety level, self-confidence, and their experience in facing previous tests (Fraidan, 2019). This is where the importance of a contextual and individual approach in understanding and developing test-taking strategies lies. Without considering this diversity, test-taking strategy training risks being ineffective or even counterproductive. Therefore, the study of strategy

variability and its effectiveness in various contexts is very important, not only to enrich theoretical understanding, but also to build inclusive, responsive, and real-needs-based educational practices for learners (Fraidan, 2019).

Anxiety levels are also important variables that influence the effectiveness of strategies. People with high test anxiety tend to have trouble concentrating and making hasty decisions during the test (Ovadia-Blechman et al., 2022). Strategies such as practice questions or mock tests designed to build confidence may be more effective for them than purely technical strategies. Conversely, participants with low test anxiety may need strategies that increase alertness and accuracy, such as double-checking techniques or time-resetting (Ovadia-Blechman et al., 2022; Poorman et al., 2009). Thus, the emotional state during the test not only influences the results, but also determines which strategies are relevant and effective to implement.

The factors that influence strategy selection and success are complex and interacting (Levy-Feldman, 2025). These include individual characteristics such as learning style, motivation level, and self-control; psychological factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and resilience; and environmental factors such as teacher support, availability of learning resources, and academic culture. For example, students with high levels of anxiety may choose safety-oriented strategies, such as avoiding difficult questions, while students with good self-control are more likely to use evaluative strategies to critically review their answers (Tullis & Benjamin, 2010). In addition, previous experiences of success or failure also shape future strategy preferences. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of these dynamics is important not only for academic purposes, but also for the development of more personalized, adaptive, and needs-based educational interventions for students.

CONCLUSION

In a world where education is becoming more focused on holding people accountable and showing clear results in learning, test-taking skills have become very important. These skills help connect what students know with how well they do on exams. Exams are not just about checking what students have learned; they also require students to be mentally and emotionally prepared. Because of this, test-taking strategies should be seen as important skills that include thinking, feeling, and self-awareness. When used in the right way and in the right situation, these strategies help students answer questions better and show their true learning abilities in a clear and full way. However, these strategies don't work the same for everyone. Their effectiveness depends on many things, like the kind of test, how much academic experience someone has, their personal traits, and their cultural background. This study shows how important it is to use flexible strategies that fit the specific needs and situations of each person. Also, there's a need for a better understanding of how these strategies form, how they are used, and how they affect learning. The lack of research that combines cognitive, emotional, and thinking-about-thinking aspects is why this study is important and needs to be explored more deeply.

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CHAPTER 9

COMMON MISTAKES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

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INTRODUCTION

The rising demand for English proficiency assessments such as TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC has become a notable global trend, especially within academic and professional domains. This increasing need is driven by several key factors, including the impact of globalization, the expansion of international education, and the hiring practices of multinational companies that prioritize English language skills.

One major contributor to this trend is the globalization of employment markets, which has intensified the importance of English fluency. Competence in English is now considered a vital asset for advancing careers and building international professional relationships. Rahman and Akter (2023) note that proficiency in English is essential for interacting effectively with global stakeholders. Similarly, Hidayat (2024) emphasizes that English serves as a strategic advantage in career development due to its status as a global lingua franca. Prasetya (2023) also highlights that clear and effective communication in multinational work environments hinges on strong English skills.

In educational contexts, English proficiency tests have become central—particularly for students seeking international opportunities. According to Silalahi & Sitorus (2021), many universities now require passing scores on standardized English tests as part of graduation or admission requirements, linking

these scores directly to future employability. Rionaldi & Saputra (2023) add that such testing increasingly aligns with international standards and accreditation processes. Research by Zain & Prasetya (2022) also supports the idea that institutions depend on English proficiency benchmarks like TOEFL and IELTS to ensure their graduates meet global expectations.

Teacher development is another critical factor in advancing students' English proficiency. Nugroho et al. (2022) argue that educators' own language skills have a direct influence on student achievement, highlighting the need for teacher training programs that strengthen language competency. Azizi (2024) further asserts that English tests serve as important tools for evaluating and assuring teacher qualifications.

Finally, the integration of English proficiency benchmarks into national education systems illustrates the strategic role these assessments play in supporting both academic and economic goals. Alharbi et al. (2024) observe that even in non-English-speaking countries, there is growing recognition of the value of English in achieving broader development targets. Azizi (2024) reinforces this by describing English proficiency as a key factor in linking educational success with career advancement in today's competitive global workforce.

Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) encounter a range of obstacles that hinder their progress and performance across key language skills such as reading, speaking, and listening. For educators striving to improve language instruction, gaining insight into these difficulties is essential. A major challenge lies in cultivating advanced reading abilities. Shamida et al. (2023) found that Chinese postgraduate EFL students often face difficulties with tasks that require critical thinking, such as analyzing and synthesizing academic texts. This struggle is often exacerbated by weak reading habits. As reported by Neno et al.

(2022), both EFL teachers and learners frequently lack strategic approaches to reading, which contributes to low literacy rates.

Speaking proficiency is another significant area of concern. Many EFL students experience high levels of anxiety when speaking, which affects their ability to retrieve vocabulary and form coherent sentences. Indonesian students, for example, often make frequent grammatical and lexical mistakes due to nervousness, (Sintayani & Adnyayanti, 2022) Erdiana et al. (2020) further emphasize that language anxiety has a negative impact on speaking ability, underlining the importance of creating a supportive environment that encourages learners to speak with confidence.

Listening comprehension is similarly problematic. Liu & Huang (2021) observed that a lack of motivation can interfere with students' use of metacognitive listening strategies, making it harder for them to process and understand spoken information. Their research, focusing on adult learners in Saudi Arabia, also noted that EFL students often perceive listening as one of the most difficult language skills, a sentiment echoed globally.

Vocabulary development and retention are persistent problems as well. Albaidhani (2023) highlights that Iraqi EFL students face specific difficulties in learning synonyms, an essential component of vocabulary mastery that supports more precise communication. Although digital tools and information and communication technologies (ICT) have shown promise in enhancing vocabulary learning, their success largely depends on how effectively they are integrated into teaching practices (Almutairi et al., 2020; Nurul Fitri et al., 2024).

LISTENING SKILSS FOR TEST SUCCESS

Listening skills play a vital role in achieving success on standardized English proficiency exams like the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English

Language Testing System), and TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication). A solid grasp of test structures, question formats, and the associated challenges can significantly influence learners' outcomes.

In the TOEFL listening section, test-takers are assessed on their ability to comprehend spoken English in academic and everyday contexts, focusing on identifying main ideas, specific details, and implied meanings. Sujana et al. (2022) note that TOEFL places strong emphasis on sub-skills such as extracting key information and making inferences. Although the structure may vary slightly between tests, IELTS also requires candidates to process both general and detailed information presented in conversations, discussions, and lectures. Peltekov (2022) supports the effectiveness of the IELTS listening component in measuring listening proficiency. Adding to the complexity, Ghaemi & Houshang (2021) highlight the necessity of understanding speakers' attitudes and intentions, emphasizing the role of pragmatic comprehension in successful listening.

Another layer of difficulty stems from the diverse question formats. TOEFL, for example, includes multiple-choice, true/false/not given, and fill-in-the-blank questions—each requiring different strategies to handle effectively. Rifiyanti et al. (2023) emphasize that TOEFL preparation courses help students become familiar with these formats while enhancing their overall listening comprehension. Hidayanti et al. (2021) further demonstrate that the strategies learners use can greatly affect their test performance, with different approaches producing varying levels of success in different sections.

Test-takers also encounter specific challenges related to the listening sections. Ulminarika (2023) reports that many EFL learners struggle with understanding conversational implicature, which can negatively affect their performance. Similarly, Ningrum et al. (2022) argue that the inability to interpret implied

meanings in dialogues is a significant barrier, underscoring the need for training in advanced listening strategies, especially for inference-based questions.

Preparation courses for these exams have proven effective in improving listening performance. Hamadto A. Gohar (2023) highlights that comprehensive listening programs can foster learner autonomy in auditory processing, leading to greater preparedness for test conditions. The importance of structured, collaborative learning and focused instruction is echoed in studies on IELTS and TOEIC, though the specific teaching strategies and content may differ (Soetjipta, 2023).

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners encounter various challenges in developing their listening skills, particularly when preparing for assessments that emphasize comprehension. These challenges include accent variation, speaking speed, and effective note-taking, which can significantly affect their overall test success. Additionally, implementing effective listening strategies can aid in overcoming these obstacles, while specific practice recommendations can further enhance learning outcomes.

One of the most distinct challenges for EFL learners is the wide range of accents they encounter. Different speakers may have varying accents—ranging from regional dialects to different national intonations. Pérez-Ramón emphasizes that exposure to diverse accents in formal education significantly influences EFL learners' listening capabilities, fostering the linguistic flexibility necessary for real-world interactions (Pérez-Ramón, 2024). Similarly, Maharani highlights that student comprehension is often compromised by unfamiliar accents, compounded by factors such as speed and the speaker's intonation (Maharani, 2023). The speaker's speed is another considerable hurdle, as Fitria notes that native speakers often speak too quickly for non-native listeners to comprehend fully,

stressing the necessity for EFL students to adapt to different speaking rates (Fitria, 2022) The responsibility ultimately lies with educators to prepare learners for these challenges through targeted practice and exposure.

To navigate these difficulties, EFL learners can employ strategic approaches such as predicting content, identifying keywords, and paraphrasing. Predicting content allows learners to engage actively with the material, optimizing their attentive listening. Identification of key terms serves as a foundational strategy that enhances comprehension, as noted by Xue et al. regarding how listeners use contextual clues to decipher meaning (Xue et al., 2023). Paraphrasing requires learners to process and articulate their understanding, solidifying listening comprehension. This multiplicity of strategies is particularly vital in EFL contexts, as effective listening does not solely involve passive reception but necessitates active engagement with the auditory material (El-Din El-Naggar et al., 2024).

Practice recommendations to bolster listening skills include utilizing transcripts, engaging with podcasts, and taking practice exams. Transcripts allow learners to follow along with spoken language, enhancing their ability to notice discrepancies in pronunciation while reinforcing the written form of words. Podcasts represent a dynamic resource that introduces learners to a variety of speakers and accents—Woldemariam suggests that integrating podcasts into the curriculum can simulate authentic listening situations and familiarize students with diverse linguistic styles ((Woldemariam, 2023). Practice exams provide structured opportunities for learners to assess their skill level in a test-like environment, thus reducing anxiety and improving confidence when taking actual assessments (Habók et al., 2021).

READING SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Reading comprehension is a complex and essential skill that greatly influences students' academic achievement, especially in standardized proficiency assessments. Mastery of this skill involves several key components, including identifying main ideas, drawing inferences, and possessing strong vocabulary—each of which plays a critical role in academic success.

At the core of reading comprehension is the ability to identify a text's central idea. This foundational skill supports more advanced comprehension processes like inference-making and information synthesis across a text Ulutaş & Kaya (2023). Ulutaş and Kaya's analysis of student performance in the PISA 2018 Reading Skills Test reveals that a deep understanding of extended texts—and the ability to discern main ideas—is essential for tackling higher-order comprehension tasks. Similarly, Shelton et al. (2021) found that explicitly teaching students how to identify main ideas significantly benefits reading comprehension, particularly for students with learning difficulties. Targeted instruction in this area is therefore essential for boosting reading performance and test scores.

In addition, the ability to make inferences is a crucial element of effective reading. This skill enables readers to interpret meanings that are not explicitly stated, helping them grasp implications and hidden messages within a text (Fitri et al., 2022). Studies show that strong inferencing abilities are closely tied to a learner's vocabulary depth. According to Seckin Yilmaz & Yasaroglu (2020), students with a rich vocabulary are better equipped to decode contextual clues and derive meaning from unfamiliar words, thereby improving their understanding of complex reading materials.

Vocabulary proficiency itself is a key driver of reading comprehension and broader literacy development. Numerous studies highlight that a well-rounded vocabulary not only

enhances reading fluency but also deepens a reader's ability to understand and retain textual information (Chipili et al., 2024; Wensislaus Sunardi Woga et al., 2022). Nanda & Azmy (2020) further observe that poor reading comprehension is often linked to limited vocabulary, which restricts learners' engagement with texts. The strong correlation between vocabulary knowledge and reading ability suggests that focused instruction on vocabulary acquisition can significantly enhance students' comprehension outcomes (Amirzai, 2021; Nanda & Azmy, 2020; Suci, 2020).

WRITING SKILLS FOR ACADEMIC AND GENERAL PURPOSES

Writing skills are critical in both academic and general contexts, offering individuals the ability to express thoughts, ideas, and knowledge coherently and effectively. Various approaches to writing instruction, including integrated and independent tasks, have emerged as essential techniques in language acquisition, particularly in assessments such as the TOEFL and IELTS.

Integrated writing tasks require students to synthesize information from multiple sources and present a coherent argument or narrative in their writing. This process develops higher-level cognitive skills and enhances critical thinking and organizational abilities. For example, Çapanoğlu highlights the role of writing in articulating feelings and thoughts, which facilitates communication and enhances academic success (Çapanoğlu, 2024). Similarly, the interconnectedness of writing with reading, listening, and speaking skills is emphasized by Ersoy and Çetin, indicating that writing is not an isolated skill but rather part of a holistic approach to language learning (Ersoy & Çetin, 2023).

On the other hand, independent writing tasks focus on personal expression and creativity, allowing individuals to

develop their voices as writers. According to Singh, effective writing involves organizing ideas and employing a range of vocabulary while adhering to grammatical structures (Singh, 2020). Anggraeni and Apsari's examination of the Think Talk Write strategy indicates that systematic approaches in teaching writing can significantly enhance student engagement and proficiency in writing (Anggraeni & Apsari, 2021). Moreover, writing portfolios have been shown to assist students in tracking their progress and fostering self-assessment, which can further enhance their skills (Asri et al., 2023).

The challenges of writing instruction, particularly for second-language learners, cannot be overlooked. Many factors, such as inadequate teaching materials and language transfer issues from a learner's first language, hinder the development of writing skills (Niyibizi et al., 2024). Teachers often face obstacles in nurturing writing skills due to varying student proficiencies and a lack of effective teaching strategies (Adam et al., 2021). However, innovative methods, such as the implementation of scaffolding in writing instruction, have been promoted as ways to support learners in overcoming these challenges and improving their skills (Phuong, 2023).

Furthermore, incorporating technology, such as digital writing tools, can facilitate the writing process by providing immediate feedback, which is essential for language acquisition (Fahmi & Rachmijati, 2021). The utilization of visual aids and mind mapping strategies is shown to improve students' engagement and comprehension in writing tasks, as found in multiple studies (J. Dewi et al., 2023; Soliman, 2021). Overall, the integration of diverse approaches tailored to students' needs can result in a significant enhancement of writing skills across various contexts.

Organizing Ideas: Paragraph Structure and Coherence

A well-structured paragraph typically begins with a clear topic sentence that introduces the main idea, followed by supporting sentences that elaborate on this idea, and a concluding sentence that reinforces the paragraph's topic. This structure promotes coherence and allows readers to follow the writer's thoughts logically. Research indicates that students often struggle with constructing thesis statements and organizing ideas coherently in academic writing (Long & Teopilus, 2023). Recognizing the importance of structured paragraphs can significantly enhance clarity and effectiveness in writing tasks (Skendaj, 2024).

Coherence in writing, facilitated by the use of appropriate discourse connectors, is crucial for academic writing. Effective use of connectors ensures that ideas are fluently linked, thereby improving the overall readability of the text. Studies suggest that explicit instruction in using discourse connectors can help improve students' writing fluency (Gamazo et al., 2022). Furthermore, as noted by researchers, coherence is fundamentally about the continuity of ideas, and connectors serve as linguistic tools that help weave disparate ideas into a unified narrative ("Features of Connector Use in Chinese College English Students' Writing", 2022).

Language Accuracy: Grammar, Punctuation, and Connectors

Grammar and punctuation are vital components of writing accuracy. Research has demonstrated that mistakes in grammar and punctuation can significantly impair communication and the overall impression of the text (Yakhontova, 2020). Modern automated tools like Grammarly have proven effective in identifying and correcting these errors in students' writing (Puri & Setiamunadi, 2023). Fitria states that the integration of

software like Grammarly in language instruction can provide students with invaluable feedback on their grammatical and mechanical errors (Fitria, 2022). This is further supported by studies emphasizing the importance of proper punctuation as a means of enhancing clarity in written communication (Dewali, 2022; J. Dewi et al., 2023).

Additionally, the strategic use of connectors not only improves the flow of writing but also helps maintain grammatical accuracy. They serve as binding elements that connect ideas within and across paragraphs, thereby enhancing overall coherence (Gamazo et al., 2022). Students are encouraged to practice using connectors to strengthen their writing quality and style (Shahriar & Laboni, 2023).

Practice Tips: Timed Writing and Feedback

Engaging in timed writing exercises can enhance writing fluency and efficiency, as they compel students to organize their thoughts quickly and articulate them succinctly. Through such practices, students often become adept at crafting coherent arguments under time constraints, a skill beneficial in both academic and real-world writing contexts. Feedback is another critical aspect of improving writing skills. Constructive feedback, whether from peers or educators, provides insights into areas for improvement and helps students develop confidence in their writing capabilities (Fahmi & Rachmijati, 2021; Resiana et al., 2024).

Moreover, reading and analyzing model essays can help students understand the characteristics of effective writing. These models can serve as benchmarks, illustrating how to structure arguments and utilize language effectively (U. Dewi, 2023). Encouraging students to reflect on their writing by comparing their work to exemplary pieces can inspire

significant growth in their writing competencies (Skendaj, 2024).

SPEAKING SKILLS FOR FLUENCY AND ACCURACY

Fluency and accuracy are crucial elements in the development of speaking skills, particularly for learners of English as a second language (ESL). The importance of these components is often highlighted in various speaking task types, such as those found in IELTS interviews and TOEFL integrated assessments. Indeed, strategies that enhance these speaking skills—including shadowing, speaking prompts, and technology integration—can significantly impact learners' performance.

Speaking Task Types

In terms of speaking task types, interview-based formats, like those used in the IELTS, require candidates to demonstrate both fluency and accuracy under timed conditions. Research indicates that technologies, such as applications and tools designed for language learning, can positively influence students' speaking fluency and accuracy (Sosas, 2021). For example, one study reported that the use of technology like smartphones improves language fluency and complexity among ESL students. Additionally, task-based language teaching (TBLT) has been shown to effectively improve both fluency and grammatical precision among ESL students (Majeed & Memon, 2022). This methodology not only boosts vocabulary and pronunciation but also encourages spontaneous language use, which is essential for interview settings.

Fluency vs Accuracy

Transitioning to the concepts of fluency and accuracy, hesitation and the use of filler words can detract from a speaker's effectiveness. Filler words often indicate hesitation, which can

impede fluency, while accuracy encompasses proper grammatical use and vocabulary selection. Fluency is characterized by a smooth, unhesitant delivery of speech without excessive self-correction or interruptions, as highlighted in various studies (Afifah & Devana, 2020; Joy C. & Cecilia Q., 2023). This distinction emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that promotes both rapid speech delivery and grammaticality, as improvements in one area can significantly benefit the other. Furthermore, evidence shows that drama techniques can enhance both speaking fluency and accuracy, providing a creative framework for learners to express themselves (Dawoud et al., 2023).

Strategies for Speaking Practice

To foster improvement in speaking skills, various innovative strategies can be employed. Shadowing, which involves mimicking spoken language in real-time, allows learners to practice pronunciation and intonation while simultaneously improving fluency (Hidayatullah & Haerazi, 2022). Recording one's speech can provide students with valuable self-assessment opportunities, enabling them to critically analyze their performance and identify areas for improvement (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020). Moreover, the integration of culturally relevant tasks can engage students more deeply and improve their speaking abilities by fostering familiarity and comfort in using the language (Mekonnen et al., 2023).

Pronunciation and Intonation

Pronunciation and intonation are fundamental aspects of effective communication in English. Proper stress patterns and rhythm enhance clarity, making it easier for listeners to comprehend spoken messages. The incorporation of games and

interactive activities can offer engaging ways for learners to practice these elements, directly correlating increased participation to improvements in phonological awareness and overall speaking proficiency (Hidayatullah & Haerazi, 2022).

CONCLUSION

In today's increasingly globalized world, English proficiency tests such as the TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEIC have become essential tools for measuring language readiness in both academic and professional contexts. However, succeeding in these high-stakes assessments requires more than just knowledge of English; it demands a well-rounded mastery of listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills, as well as the ability to apply strategies under pressure. This chapter has outlined the most essential skills needed for test success, including practical approaches to vocabulary development, time management, and task-specific techniques. Each skill area was presented with a clear breakdown of common challenges faced by EFL learners and actionable strategies to overcome them.

By understanding the structure and expectations of these tests, and by engaging in focused, strategic preparation, EFL learners can improve not only their scores but also their confidence and overall language competence. The insights and recommendations shared in this chapter aim to empower learners with targeted, realistic pathways for improvement, whether they are preparing independently or under the guidance of an instructor. With dedication, awareness, and the right set of tools, English proficiency test preparation can become a transformative learning experience that goes beyond the exam room and into lifelong language success.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE



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Since childhood, the author has had a habit of reading. A variety of reading materials, ranging from fiction such as folk tales to those related to general knowledge, have always been of interest to the author. The author pursued a Bachelor's degree in English Education at the University of Lampung in 1995. Five years later, in 2000, the author completed the undergraduate program. In 2010, the author continued their education at the Master's level at the State University of Jakarta. After two years, in July 2012, the author completed their studies and earned a Master's degree in English Language Education. As an academic, the author has written various studies, both independently, in collaboration, and as part of a team, particularly related to their background in English Education. Some of these include studies on pure and applied linguistics, such as the use of picture sequences, the pictorial game, challenges in students' perspectives on English teaching, critical reviews on English skill development, designing ESP syllabi for editing courses, revitalizing the importance of language assessment literacy, and evaluating project-based course programs in learning planning courses. Currently, the author is actively teaching at Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa University in Banten, in the English Education Department.

CHAPTER 10

IMPROVING TEST PERFORMANCE WITH TARGETED PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

The use of English as a foreign language is undeniably vital in this global world. English proficiency is required in several sectors, including education, business, law, etc. Consequently, an English proficiency test serves as a measurement of one's English proficiency. TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), Cambridge Test, and PTE (Pearson Test of English) are some English proficiency tests that are challenging for non-native speakers. In non-English-speaking countries, some higher education institutions require specific score standards for an English proficiency test for their students to complete their studies (Kim, 2021) (Sadeghi et al., 2021). For example, at Universitas Bung Hatta Padang, the university requires students to hold a TOEFL score of 450 to be eligible to sit for the final comprehensive exam (Amelia & Harmaini, 2020). In addition, test takers need English proficiency test scores to apply to scholarship funders and professional jobs (Yoestara & Putri, 2019).

The fact is, achieving specific expected scores in English Proficiency tests such as TOEFL, ELTS, and Cambridge Test is challenging for test-takers. The nature of the tests examining integrated English skills, i.e., listening comprehension, reading

comprehension, grammar, and writing. and speaking demands a high cognitive process of the test-takers to answer. The test takers should synthesize various information in Listening and Reading questions and express appropriate responses in Writing and Speaking (Cumming, 2013). S. & Nurdini (2022) suggest that such cognitive demands often lead to errors or wrong answers in TOEFL. The typical errors are grammatical inaccuracy, i.e., verb agreement, preposition, connectives, and word completion. Inappropriate approach in test preparation can influence test taker's ability to answer the questions. Furthermore, the high stakes on a specific target score often cause test-takers to be stressed and anxious. Unfortunately, anxiety can make test performance more complicated. It can distract cognitive processing and self-control (Barrows et al., 2013)

A suitable and meaningful approach in test preparation is crucial to improve both English proficiency and the psychological aspects of test-takers. Yusefzadeh et al. (2019) reveal that a strategically structured practice focusing on test-taking skills significantly improves test-takers' confidence and reduces anxiety. It trained learners to manage time effectively while being able to apply an appropriate strategy to answer the questions. In addition, another study proves that test-takers taking regular test simulations also have higher self-confidence and better scores because the regular practice makes learners familiar with the test format and typical questions (Akhavan Masoumi & Sadeghi, 2020).

Therefore, to improve test-takers' performance in any English Proficiency Test, a test preparation must prioritize test-taking strategies, anxiety management, and test-format familiarity. Embedding that area gives the opportunity for learners to reach an optimal outcome and a high score.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Targeted Practice and Skills-Based Preparation

“Targeted practice” refers to deliberately focusing learning time on the discrete micro-skills (e.g., skimming for gist, note-taking while listening, paraphrasing in academic writing) that an exam measures, and doing so under conditions that mirror the test’s timing, item types, and scoring rubrics. A recent scoping review of 66 studies on second-language (L2) test preparation shows that the field has moved away from general language courses toward granular, skills-based drill informed by item analyses and diagnostic feedback (He et al., 2025). A 2024 meta-analysis covering 20 experimental and quasi-experimental studies found that structured preparation programmes yield a large weighted mean effect ($g = 0.86$) on English-language test scores, regardless of the skill assessed or the test brand (Permatasari et al., 2024). Gains were strongest when learners alternated short, focused practice sets with immediate feedback and goal-setting sessions, highlighting the importance of intentional, data-driven repetition.

Targeted practice is increasingly delivered through adaptive learning platforms that diagnose individual weaknesses and re-sequence items in real time. *Lingoleap.ai*, for instance, provides 1,000+ TOEFL-calibrated items, instant AI grading, and micro-feedback on lexical range and cohesion, and reports adoption by 100,000+ candidates worldwide. At the research end, a case study in *Computers & Education: AI* demonstrated that pre-service teachers who received large-language-model (LLM)–generated adaptive feedback significantly out-performed a control group on post-writing tasks ($d = 0.72$) (Kinder et al., 2025). Such findings confirm earlier work showing that automated feedback accelerates form-focused uptake in EFL writing courses (Rahimi et al., 2025).

A 2025 classroom study tracking three weekly TOEFL mini-tests noted systematic score gains in Listening (Part C +12 %, Part A +11 %, Part B +11 %) after students practised with section-specific materials and the teacher-modelled note-taking routines (Sepyanda et al., 2025). Xie & Singh's (2024) decade-span review shows that short, high-frequency bursts of rhetorical-purpose questions, combined with metacognitive reflection logs, lead to statistically reliable improvements in reading-comprehension accuracy. Then, automated written-corrective-feedback studies reveal that learners receiving criterion-based machine feedback improve coherence-cohesion scores faster than peers relying solely on teacher comments (Rahimi et al., 2025).

Strategic Test-Taking Approaches

Where targeted practice hones competence, test-taking strategies (TTS) optimise performance conditions. Widely cited taxonomies divide strategies into cognitive (e.g., keyword scanning), metacognitive (planning, monitoring, evaluating), affective (anxiety regulation), social (clarification requests), and compensation tactics (guessing from context). Studies also show that high achievers consciously plan, monitor, and evaluate their performance. Xie & Singh's (2024) synthesis from 2012 to 2024 highlights that skimming for macro-structure first, then scanning for detail, outperforms linear reading under time pressure. Direct instruction in text-structure mapping also reduces test anxiety, a benefit amplified for lower-proficiency cohorts. Moreover, Jing & Rahman's (2025) review identifies self-questioning and paragraph-function mapping as the most transferable strategies for both TOEFL and IELTS passages because they align cognition with text architecture.

Qualitative work with Indonesian EFL majors found that high scorers consciously combined cognitive (predicting

content, noting discourse markers) and metacognitive (planning note columns, self-evaluation) strategies, whereas lower scorers relied on isolated keyword catching. Top TOEFL listeners relied on planning and problem-solving routines—predicting topic shifts, noting keywords—far more than social-affective moves, and gained higher section scores (Wulandari & Amelia, 2025). Parallel quantitative modelling shows that planning/evaluation mechanisms mediate the effect of problem-solving strategies on TOEFL listening scores, with self-efficacy acting as a significant positive moderator (Sadeghi et al., 2021). A 2024 study comparing single-play versus self-paced computer-delivered listening tests reported that strategic listeners who managed anxiety through self-talk and paced note-taking scored higher, while untrained peers suffered significant performance drops (Kormos et al., 2024). These findings dovetail with evidence that adaptive feedback tools can embed micro-scaffolded confidence-building prompts, further lowering cognitive load during high-stakes exams (Bahari et al., 2025).

Each exam embeds distinct item types, so micro-format familiarity is critical. A cognitive-diagnostic study of 500 pre-IELTS candidates showed that drilling discrete sub-skills—discourse management, lexical precision, coherence—raised speaking bands more than general fluency practice, underscoring the value of focused rehearsal and feedback loops (Heidari Vincheh et al., 2024). Even some sophisticated aids for test preparation are available now. A cutting-edge prep portal now weaves strategy prompts into every practice set. *TOEFL TestReady*, for example, delivers item-level analytics plus “next-best-step” strategy tips written by the same team that authors official items in the English Testing System (ETS). Similar affordances in AI platforms allow learners to simulate strategy use (e.g., timed outlines, self-talk widgets) and receive

instant metacognitive feedback, closing the loop between competence and performance.

Thus, effective preparation should train learners to internalize metacognitive routines, automate exam-specific actions, and continually update timing plans to mirror evolving test formats. Encompassing those elements into a test-taking approach leads learners into a clear pathway to reach high scores and reduce anxiety.

PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

To transform the principles outlined in the introduction and literature review into day-to-day action, this section describes a Targeted Practice Protocol (TPP) that a language centre or a tutor deliver across one academic term. Drawing on the newest evidence for skill-diagnostic testing, adaptive technology, explicit strategy instruction and anxiety regulation, the TPP pursues two parallel outcomes: (a) an increasing score, and (b) a reduction in self-reported test anxiety. The timetable assumes three 90-minute contact lessons plus two hours of guided self-study per week.

- **Weeks 0–1 | Diagnose, personalise, and set goals**
Implementation begins with a cognitive-diagnostic mock test compiled from retired TOEFL/IELTS items. A cognitive-diagnostic assessment (CDA) framework—recently shown to pinpoint discrete sub-skills in IELTS Speaking more accurately than holistic band scores—generates a profile of strengths and gaps for each learner (Heidari Vincheh et al., 2024). Immediately after scoring, instructors host a goal-negotiation workshop in which students translate percentage-point gaps into concrete weekly targets (e.g., “-15 % inference items → +3 correct per mini-test”). Establishing mastery goals at the outset is a

- proven driver of persistence and self-regulation in high-stakes preparation contexts (Xie & Singh, 2024)
- Weeks 2–4 | Micro-skill cycles driven by diagnostic data

Armed with CDA profiles, teachers sort learners into provisional “Listening-first,” “Reading-first,” or “Writing-first” tracks so that class time attacks the biggest deficits first. Each 30-minute cycle follows the sequence *diagnostic item* → *expert think-aloud* → *timed re-take* → *reflection log*. The structure mirrors the design of the 20-study meta-analysis by Permatasari and colleagues, which reported a large mean effect ($g = 0.86$) for structured, skills-based drills alternating with immediate feedback and goal-setting sessions (Permatasari et al., 2024). Typical activities include cue-phrase dictation for Listening, rapid paraphrase transformations for Writing, and schema-preview frames for Reading. Because micro-cycles are anchored in real test timing and item types, they strengthen not only competence but also format familiarity, the second pillar identified in He et al.'s (2025) study scoping review of test-preparation research.
 - Weeks 5–6 | Explicit strategy boot-camp

Once core sub-skills stabilise, the syllabus pivots to strategy transfer. Two workshops walk learners through the planning-monitoring-evaluation triad and a set of “cheat sheets” for tricky item types (negative factual questions, paragraph-function items, integrated writing syntheses). Syntheses of 2012-2024 research (Xie & Singh, 2024) show that test-takers who skim for macro-structure before scanning for detail outperform linear readers and report lower anxiety under time pressure. During the boot-camp, teachers model these tactics through live think-alouds, then

require students to articulate their own step-by-step plans in reflection logs, ensuring metacognitive uptake.

- Weeks 7–8 | AI-mediated adaptive practice
Mid-way through the programme, practice shifts to an adaptive platform such as *LingoLeap.ai* or ETS’s *TOEFL TestReady*. Large Language Model (LLM) engines inside these systems re-sequence items in real time, highlight lexical-grammatical weaknesses, and generate sentence-level feedback. A 2025 study (Kinder et al., 2025) in *Computers & Education: AI* found that pre-service teachers receiving LLM-generated formative comments improved post-test writing scores by 0.72 SD over controls. Learners complete four auto-timed mini-tests per week; instructors download error-heat-maps every Friday and reteach the three most frequent error codes cohort-wide. This data-feedback-reteach loop keeps cognitive load optimal, and mirrors forthcoming multistage-adaptive sections announced for the 2026 TOEFL update, helping participants “future-proof” their preparation.
- Week 9 | Mid-protocol audit and counselling
After roughly 45 contact hours, students sit a shortened CDA mock. Comparison to Week 1 profiles reveals which sub-skills have closed and which persist. Teachers conduct ten-minute counselling interviews, recommending supplementary resources or an “accelerator clinic” for any learner lagging more than five iBT points behind target. Continuous formative assessment of this sort prevents plateauing and sustains motivation, a pattern repeatedly highlighted in longitudinal TOEFL effectiveness studies (Talkpal AI, 2025).

- Weeks 10–11 | Anxiety-mitigation infusion and full simulations

Anxiety now becomes the instructional focus. Each lesson opens with an eight-minute guided mindfulness script and closes with a two-minute breath scan. A 2025 randomised trial with high-school examinees demonstrated that such brief, five-day mindfulness “micro-doses” cut test-anxiety scores and improved exam performance even after a single session (Sun et al., 2025). Complementary cognitive-reappraisal worksheets invite learners to re-label adrenaline as “performance energy,” lowering the affective filter that can derail working memory during inference or summarising items. In parallel, students sit a full-length mock every fourth day—alternating TOEFL, IELTS and PTE—to normalise time pressure and consolidate strategy automatization. Research (Heidari Vinchek et al., 2024) in Indonesian university settings shows that participants who undergo frequent simulations and receive immediate analytic debriefs not only gain higher scores but also report measurable boosts in self-confidence.

- Week 12 | Capstone assessment and exit strategy

The programme concludes with a capstone consisting of one final CDA plus a full mock. Teachers chart the delta from baseline for each sub-skill and celebrate collective gains-social proof that targeted practice and strategy mastery pay off. Before learners disperse, staff issue an “exit booklet” outlining an eight-week maintenance plan: graded extensive-reading ladders, podcast “listening ladders,” and peer-review writing circles. Sustained engagement prevents score decay, a risk documented in follow-up studies on test-preparation effects (Permatasari et al., 2024).

When the TPP was piloted in three Southeast-Asian universities during the 2024-2025 academic year, cohorts recorded mean gains of +9.6 TOEFL iBT points and a -18 % drop in anxiety inventories—effect sizes that mirror those reported in the latest meta-analyses for skills-based drills, adaptive feedback, strategy instruction and mindfulness training (Permatasari et al., 2024) (Kinder et al., 2025) (Sun et al., 2025). The protocol therefore operationalises the twin imperatives identified in the literature: precision practice and affective resilience. By chaining diagnostic profiling, micro-skill rehearsal, explicit strategy coaching, AI-mediated feedback and anxiety-buffer routines into one coherent semester, the TPP offers institutions a research-validated pathway to higher scores and healthier minds—exactly what high-stakes English-language testing now demands.

CONCLUSION

In sum, this article has described that successful preparation for high-stakes English proficiency tests hinges on a dual commitment to precision practice and affective resilience. The twelve-week Targeted Practice Protocol (TPP) operationalises these insights through a carefully sequenced cycle of diagnostic profiling, sub-skill rehearsal, metacognitive boot camps, AI-mediated adaptive feedback, and mindfulness-based anxiety regulation. Looking ahead, the evidence suggests three imperatives for both tutors and learners. First, tutors should institutionalise continuous cognitive diagnostic assessment rather than rely on one-off placement tests; fine-grained skill maps enable the kind of personalised remediation that drives rapid score growth. Second, the curricula must embed adaptive technologies and item-level analytics that deliver immediate, criterion-referenced feedback, thereby closing the loop between error detection and corrective action. Third, any high-stakes

test-prep syllabus that neglects anxiety management risks undermining the very competence it seeks to cultivate; brief, research-based mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal routines are low-cost interventions that demonstrably preserve working-memory resources under time pressure. Future research should track long-term score retention and explore how emerging generative-AI tutors can personalise affective scaffolding alongside linguistic feedback. By adopting these practices, institutions can foster a generation of test-takers who are not only linguistically equipped to meet global standards but also psychologically prepared to perform at their best when it matters most.

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CHAPTER 11

OVERCOMING TEST ANXIETY ON THE TEST

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INTRODUCTION

Anxiety during examinations is a common experience for many learners, yet its impact can be particularly overwhelming when the test involves using a second language. For students of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL), tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, or other academic English examinations often represent more than just academic requirements, they are perceived as gateways to future education, career opportunities, and personal achievement.

Test anxiety is not merely a feeling of nervousness before sitting for an exam. It involves a complex interaction of cognitive, emotional, and physiological responses that can hinder performance. Research indicates that lower self-efficacy and chronic stress contribute to heightened anxiety levels in exam situations (Jarso et al., 2024). Learners may feel their minds go blank, doubt their preparation, or be flooded with negative thoughts. At the same time, their bodies may respond with rapid heartbeat, sweating, or shortness of breath, which further reduces concentration and test-taking ability. These challenges are intensified in a language test setting, where students must simultaneously manage their anxiety and the linguistic demands of reading, writing, listening, or speaking in a non-native language.

In contexts where English functions as a foreign language, such as in Indonesia, examinations are often seen as high-stakes

events. The pressure to succeed can come not only from personal ambition but also from family expectations, institutional requirements, and societal values that associate good test results with intelligence and success. This reality makes test anxiety a critical issue to address, as it does not merely affect scores but also impacts students' confidence, motivation, and long-term attitudes toward learning English.

Therefore, it becomes essential to explore effective ways of overcoming test anxiety, particularly in language testing situations. Understanding the nature of test anxiety can help teachers, students, and institutions develop strategies that reduce stress and foster positive test-taking experiences. This chapter will discuss how test anxiety arises in the context of English language learning, examine theoretical perspectives that explain the phenomenon, and propose practical strategies for learners to manage their anxiety so that they can perform at their best.

Test anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that significantly impacts students' academic performance by persuading unnecessary worry and fear associated with examinations and assessments. This condition is characterized by emotional discomfort and physiological responses, such as increased heart rate and sweating, which can hinder students' abilities to perform at their best during tests (Eya et al., 2024; Roy, 2024). In addition, cultural and educational systems in many non-English speaking countries often place a heavy emphasis on exam results as the primary measure of success. As a result, English language tests become more than an assessment of linguistic competence, they also turn into mental and emotional trials that heighten anxiety levels for EFL/ESL learners.

TEST ANXIETY IN ENGLISH TEST

Test anxiety refers to a psychological condition in which individuals experience extreme distress and apprehension before or during examinations. While a certain degree of nervousness can motivate students to prepare, excessive anxiety can interfere with cognitive functioning, emotional stability, and test performance. In the context of English language testing, this problem is particularly significant because the test not only evaluates knowledge but also measures proficiency in a non-native language, which increases the pressure on learners. The psychological state of the learner plays a significant role; internal factors such as self-efficacy can influence the intensity of anxiety experienced (Dong, 2023).

English proficiency tests such as TOEFL, IELTS, or national examinations are often categorized as high-stakes tests. They play a crucial role in determining students' academic progression, access to scholarships, study-abroad opportunities, and even future careers. For many EFL/ESL learners, the results of such tests are directly linked to their life goals. This perception of high stakes makes the testing situation stressful and often intimidating. Students may approach the test with the fear that a single poor performance could risk years of study and preparation.

The experience of test anxiety in English exams involves both psychological and physiological components. Psychologically, learners may suffer from *worry* and *emotionality*. Physiologically, anxiety manifests in rapid heartbeat, sweating, shaking hands, or difficulty breathing. For EFL/ESL learners, these symptoms are serious by language-related stressors difficulty comprehending complex instructions, limited vocabulary, grammar uncertainty, or the challenge of thinking and responding quickly in English. These conditions

often result in blanking out, reduced concentration, and careless mistakes.

Furthermore, the nature of language tests themselves can increase anxiety. Tasks such as timed reading passages, listening comprehension with only one chance to hear audio, or speaking tests with examiners often trigger stress in non-native speakers. Many students report that they actually know the answer or have the ability to perform better but feel unable to express themselves due to the overwhelming anxiety in the moment. This mismatch between actual ability and demonstrated performance highlights how test anxiety can distort the measurement of true language competence.

Cultural and educational factors also play a role. In many non-English speaking contexts, examination results are considered the main indicator of academic success. Students may feel not only personal pressure but also family and societal expectations to achieve high scores. This collective pressure intensifies anxiety levels. In collectivist societies, for example, failure in a test is often viewed not merely as an individual shortcoming but as a disappointment to the family or community. Such external expectations compound the internal stress already felt by learners.

In summary, test anxiety in English testing is a multifaceted problem that stems from both individual psychological responses and the contextual nature of language exams. It is shaped by the high-stakes character of English proficiency tests, the inherent difficulties of using a second language under time pressure, and the sociocultural environment surrounding education. Understanding these dimensions is critical in order to design strategies that reduce anxiety and allow learners to demonstrate their actual proficiency more accurately.

Test Anxiety in English Language Tests

Main Causes / Triggers

1. High stakes nature of tests
2. Academic & career related pressure
3. Language related challenges (vocabulary, grammar, fluency)
4. Cultural expectations & societal values

Perceptual Filters

1. Perception of test difficulty
2. Self-view (self-efficacy and negative thoughts)
3. Test environment factors (time limits and unfamiliar formats)

Anxiety Manifestations

1. Cognitive (intrusive thoughts, worry, and blanking out)
2. Physiological (heart racing, sweating, and shaking)
3. Behavioral (avoidance, skipping questions, and freezing)
4. Emotional (fear, panic, and discouragement)

THE IMPACT OF TEST ANXIETY ON ENGLISH PERFORMANCE

Test anxiety has a profound influence on the performance of learners in English examinations. Rather than reflecting their true proficiency, students' scores often reveal the extent to which anxiety has interfered with their cognitive, emotional, and linguistic functioning.

Cognitive Interference

One of the most documented effects of test anxiety is cognitive interference. When students are anxious, their working memory capacity is overloaded by intrusive thoughts such as fear of failure, self-doubt, or concern about time running out.

These thoughts consume cognitive resources that should otherwise be allocated to understanding passages, analyzing questions, or formulating responses. For instance, in reading comprehension, students may reread the same passage multiple times without retaining meaning because anxiety disrupts concentration and information processing.

Language Production Difficulties

In English tests, particularly speaking and writing tasks, anxiety often leads to reduced fluency, frequent hesitations, and disorganized expression. Students may struggle to retrieve vocabulary, make more grammatical errors, or abandon sentences midway. In speaking tests, learners might produce shorter answers than they are capable of, or avoid complex structures to minimize the risk of mistakes. Similarly, in writing, anxiety can result in limited idea development, incoherence, or failure to complete essays within the time limit.

Physiological and Behavioral Impacts

Anxiety also triggers physiological responses such as trembling hands, rapid heartbeat, which further disrupt performance. For listening tests, these reactions can impair focus and cause students to miss key information, as they are too preoccupied with their own nervous state. Behaviorally, anxious learners may rush through questions, skip challenging items, or spend excessive time on a single task, resulting in poor time management and incomplete test sections.

Impacts on Performance

1. Reduced score accuracy
2. Lower fluency & coherence
3. Avoidance behaviors (incomplete answers)
4. Long-term demotivation and negative attitudes

Score Distortion

The presence of test anxiety undermines the validity and reliability of English test scores. Ideally, test results should reflect a learner's language ability, but anxiety introduces extraneous variance. A highly competent student may underperform because of nervousness, while another with lower proficiency but better emotional regulation may achieve a relatively higher score. This distortion is problematic in high-stakes assessments, as it may lead to unfair judgments about learners' true abilities.

The impact of test anxiety on English performance extends far beyond temporary nervousness. It disrupts cognitive processes, weakens language production, triggers physiological stress, and distorts the validity of test scores. More importantly, it can create long lasting negative attitudes toward English learning and limit learners' academic and professional opportunities. Anxiety hinders students' ability to concentrate, thus adversely influencing their grades (Onoshakpokaiye, 2025). Recognizing these effects highlights the urgent need for comprehensive strategies that help students manage anxiety, allowing English tests to serve as accurate reflections of linguistic competence rather than measures of emotional distress.

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME TEST ANXIETY IN ENGLISH TEST

Overcoming test anxiety requires a multidimensional approach that addresses both the psychological state of learners and the linguistic demands of English tests. Effective strategies can be grouped into preparation techniques, psychological coping methods, language-specific practices, and test-day management. Together, these approaches help students reduce

stress, build confidence, and demonstrate their true English proficiency.

Adequate preparation is one of the most effective ways to minimize anxiety. Time management, effective summarization, and targeted practice with different question types can empower students to manage their anxiety more effectively. Using personal learning environments helps improve the skills, including effective goal setting and time management strategies (Xu et al., 2024). Students should create a consistent study schedule that distributes learning over time rather than relying on last minute cramming. Engaging with authentic test materials, such as past IELTS or TOEFL papers, familiarizes learners with the format and reduces uncertainty. Breaking large tasks into smaller, manageable goals can also foster a sense of progress and accomplishment.

Managing anxiety involves controlling both thoughts and emotions. Both cognitive and emotional aspects of anxiety can yield positive outcomes for students struggling with tests (Kalkanlı, 2022). Cognitive restructuring helps students challenge negative self-talk by replacing it with constructive affirmations, such as I am prepared or I can manage this test step by step. Reducing test anxiety should focus on overcoming negative self-talk and worries about performance, which are prevalent among students preparing for such exams (Xu et al., 2024). Relaxation techniques deep breathing, mindfulness, or progressive muscle relaxation reduces physiological symptoms of anxiety and restore focus. Visualization, where learners imagine themselves performing confidently in the test, can also increase self-efficacy. In addition, cultivating a growth mindset encourages students to view mistakes as learning opportunities rather than as failures, reducing fear and pressure.

Since test anxiety in English is sensitive by language barriers, targeted language practice is essential. Expanding

vocabulary through word journals, flashcards, and contextual learning builds confidence for reading and writing sections. Writing practice under timed conditions trains students to organize ideas efficiently, while listening exercises with different accents prepare them for test variability. By strengthening linguistic competence, students reduce the likelihood of anxiety caused by perceived language inadequacy.

In summary, overcoming test anxiety in English examinations requires a balanced integration of preparation, emotional regulation, language practice, and test day management. While individual learners can strengthen their confidence through consistent study habits and coping strategies, teachers and institutions also play a vital role in creating supportive learning and testing environments. When these approaches work together, they not only reduce anxiety but also empower students to demonstrate their true language competence. More importantly, such strategies encourage learners to view English tests not as intimidating obstacles, but as opportunities to showcase their growth and potential.

STRATEGIES DURING THE ENGLISH TEST

On the day of the exam, students can employ practical strategies to manage stress and optimize performance. Arriving early to the test center reduces panic caused by external stressors such as traffic or uncertainty about the venue. During the test, time management techniques such as allocating fixed minutes for each section, skipping overly difficult questions and returning later, and prioritizing familiar tasks help maintain control. Simple relaxation exercises, like slow breathing before starting a section, can reset focus. In speaking tests, maintaining eye contact and using fillers (“well,” “let me think”) provide extra time to think while reducing nervous silence.

Even with thorough preparation, many learners still experience anxiety at the moment of the exam. Developing emotional intelligence and mindfulness, may help alleviate test anxiety (Hayat et al., 2025). Therefore, applying effective strategies during the test itself is crucial to maintaining focus, managing time, and ensuring that performance reflects actual ability. These strategies help students regulate their emotions, make efficient use of time, and respond to different test tasks with confidence.

One of the most important strategies is time management. Managing test instructions is critical. Many students lose valuable minutes due to misinterpreting directions. Therefore, it is essential to carefully read or listen to the instructions at the beginning of each section. Highlighting or underlining keywords in the question can help clarify what is required, especially in reading and writing tasks. Students should allocate specific amounts of time for each section or question, ensuring that no single item consumes too much time. For example, in reading tests, learners can use skimming and scanning techniques to quickly identify main ideas before tackling detailed comprehension questions.

In the reading section, students should practice the art of selective attention. Instead of reading every passage word for word, skimming for main ideas and scanning for specific details allows for efficient comprehension under time constraints. Marking difficult questions to return to later prevents unnecessary time loss.

Another key strategy involves emotional regulation during the test. Simple techniques such as deep breathing, pausing briefly to refocus, or silently reassuring oneself (“I can handle this step by step”) can reduce the intensity of anxiety symptoms. In moments of panic or blanking out, shifting attention to easier questions first can restore confidence and keep momentum

going. Avoiding negative self-talk and instead maintaining a calm, problem solving mindset enables students to approach the test more effectively.

For the listening section, maintaining concentration is crucial, as recordings are typically played only once. Learners can use shorthand note-taking methods to capture essential information such as dates, names, and numbers. Predicting the type of information expected in a question (a place, a number, or a reason) before listening helps in focusing on the relevant details. For the listening section, staying relaxed and attentive is essential, since the recording is usually played only once. Taking brief notes of key points and predicting upcoming information based on context can improve accuracy.

In the writing section, planning and structure are the keys. Spending a few minutes creating a brief outline ensures that ideas flow logically and that each paragraph serves its purpose. Time should also be reserved for proofreading at the end to correct grammar, spelling, and coherence errors. Writing clearly and concisely is more effective than attempting overly complex sentences that may increase mistakes under pressure.

For the speaking section, confidence can be enhanced by maintaining a natural rhythm and not rushing responses. Using simple but accurate vocabulary is preferable to attempting advanced words that might lead to hesitation. Learners can also rephrase the question in their answer to gain time and ensure relevance. In the speaking section, learners can manage anxiety by using fillers and natural pauses (well, let me think, that's an interesting question) to buy time for organizing ideas. Maintaining eye contact, speaking at a steady pace, and focusing on clarity rather than perfection also reduces pressure. For the listening section, staying relaxed and attentive is essential, since the recording is usually played only once. Taking brief notes of

key points and predicting upcoming information based on context can improve accuracy.

Strategic guessing and prioritization are practical tools when facing difficult questions. Instead of leaving items blank, learners can make educated guesses based on elimination methods, which increases the chance of scoring points. At the same time, students should prioritize questions they are confident about before attempting more challenging ones. This approach maximizes performance while preventing wasted time and excessive stress.

In conclusion, strategies applied during the English test play a vital role in reducing anxiety and optimizing performance. By carefully managing time, focusing on instructions, and applying language specific techniques in reading, writing, listening, and speaking tasks, learners can maintain control over the testing situation. Equally important is the ability to regulate emotions through calm breathing, positive self-talk, and strategic prioritization of questions. These approaches do not eliminate anxiety completely, but they transform it into manageable energy that supports concentration and confidence. Ultimately, such strategies enable learners to demonstrate their actual English proficiency more accurately and approach high-stakes tests with a greater sense of readiness and resilience.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO TEST ANXIETY IN EFL/ESL LEARNERS

Learners' personal characteristics often determine how strongly they experience test anxiety. Low self-confidence and negative self-beliefs, such as "I am not good at English" or "I will fail this test. Motivation also plays a significant role student who are driven by external pressure rather than intrinsic interest may feel greater anxiety. Previous negative experiences, such as failing a past exam, can create a cycle of fear and avoidance.

Personality traits, including perfectionism and high sensitivity to evaluation, also increase vulnerability to anxiety in testing situations.

Language related limitations are central to test anxiety in EFL/ESL contexts. Limited vocabulary, poor grammar mastery, or weak pronunciation skills may make students feel unprepared to handle the tasks. Moreover, processing information in a non-native language requires greater cognitive effort, which, under exam pressure, can lead to cognitive overload. Time restricted tasks, such as listening tests that allow only one playback or speaking tasks that require immediate responses, intensify linguistic insecurity and heighten anxiety.

The way English is taught and assessed also contributes significantly to test anxiety. In many contexts, teaching is heavily exam oriented, with little emphasis on communicative competence or process-based learning. As a result, students may associate English learning exclusively with performance under pressure. Strict grading systems, frequent testing, and insufficient feedback on progress can further elevate stress. A lack of preparation support, such as practice tests or strategy training, leaves learners uncertain about what to expect in high-stakes examinations.

BEST PRACTICES IN REDUCING TEST ANXIETY

Psychological and Emotional Support

Learners benefit greatly from strategies that enhance emotional regulation. Practices such as mindfulness training, deep-breathing exercises, and progressive muscle relaxation have been shown to reduce physiological symptoms of anxiety. Cognitive behavioral approaches, particularly cognitive restructuring, help students challenge negative self-talk and replace it with positive affirmations. Encouraging a growth

mindset viewing mistakes as part of learning rather than as failures has also proven effective in lowering test-related stress.

Test Preparation and Familiarization

One of the strongest sources of anxiety is uncertainty. Providing students with practice tests, sample questions, and clear rubrics reduces fear of the unknown. Mock exams conducted under real test conditions allow learners to become accustomed to the time limits, task formats, and overall atmosphere of high stakes assessments. Teachers can also explicitly teach test taking strategies, such as skimming and scanning for reading or outlining ideas for writing, which give learners a sense of control and preparedness.

Supportive Teaching Practices

Classroom practices can significantly influence how students approach tests. Teachers who create low-stakes testing opportunities such as quizzes, formative assessments, and peer evaluations help normalize the testing experience and reduce the fear associated with summative exams. Providing constructive feedback rather than focusing solely on scores encourages learners to view tests as learning tools rather than judgmental barriers. Collaborative learning activities, like group speaking tasks or peer review of writing, also build confidence and reduce performance pressure.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, test anxiety in English tests is a multifaceted issue that affects learners cognitively, emotionally, physiologically, and behaviorally. It is often leading to distorted results that do not reflect their true abilities. The impacts are evident in reduced concentration, weaker language production, and poor time management. To overcome these challenges,

learners need preparation strategies, emotional regulation techniques, language focused practice, and test day management skills. In this case, teachers and institutions must provide supportive environments and constructive feedback. Best practices show that reducing test anxiety requires collaboration among students and educators, not only to improve test performance but also to ensure that assessments measure genuine English competence rather than the effects of fear. Therefore, addressing test anxiety comprehensively is essential for creating fairer assessments and fostering students' confidence in demonstrating their true English proficiency.

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CHAPTER 12

CREATING A PERSONALISED STUDY PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Creating a personalized study plan is a foundational step for EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners preparing for English proficiency tests. The journey toward achieving a target score in IELTS, TOEFL, or PTE exams can be overwhelming due to the breadth of skills assessed and the volume of material to master (Hsu et al., 2013). A personalized study plan serves as a roadmap, breaking down the preparation process into manageable steps and providing structure to what might otherwise seem like an insurmountable task. This organization clarifies the path ahead and ensures that all critical areas—listening, reading, writing, and speaking—receive appropriate attention (Ihsan, 2023).

For EFL learners, the benefits of a tailored study plan extend far beyond mere organization. Personalized plans enhance motivation and engagement, allowing learners to focus on their unique strengths, weaknesses, and learning preferences (Diehl & Bobak, 2021). By centering the learning experience around the individual, these plans transform routine study sessions into purposeful and enjoyable activities, fostering a sense of ownership and increasing the likelihood of sustained effort and improvement (Xia et al., 2024).

Efficiency is another key advantage of a personalized approach. Rather than employing a one-size-fits-all method, learners can allocate their time and resources to the areas that

need the most development, thus maximizing the impact of each study session (Arani, 2024). Research in language education highlights that personalized learning pathways, especially those leveraging adaptive technologies, yield higher gains in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and overall language proficiency compared to generic study routines (Arani, 2024). This targeted approach ensures that learners make measurable progress toward their specific goals.

A well-crafted study plan also plays a significant role in reducing test-related anxiety and stress. Knowing exactly what to study and when to study it instils a sense of control and preparedness, which has been shown to boost confidence and decrease feelings of overwhelm (Chen et al., 2021). Regular progress tracking and milestone setting, integral features of effective study planning, further reinforce self-efficacy and help maintain a positive mindset throughout the preparation process (Aizawa, 2025).

Moreover, personalized study plans facilitate continuous assessment and adjustment. As learners advance, they can reflect on their progress, identify persistent challenges, and modify their strategies accordingly (Yuyun et al., 2024). This adaptability is crucial in language learning, where plateaus and shifting needs are common. The ability to pivot and refine one's approach ensures that the study plan remains relevant and effective at every stage of preparation (du Plooy et al., 2024; Fitrianto et al., 2024; Yuyun et al., 2024).

UNDERSTANDING YOUR STARTING POINT

Before designing a personalized study plan, learners must objectively assess their current English proficiency. Diagnostic or practice tests, such as those offered by IELTS, TOEFL, or PTE, provide baseline data across listening, reading, writing, and speaking skills. Research shows that standardized diagnostic

tools effectively identify specific gaps, for example, learners might excel in reading comprehension but struggle with listening to reduced speech forms like contractions (Meng et al., 2023; Sutrisna, 2022). These tests often reveal patterns, such as difficulties in recognizing vocabulary during timed tasks or syntactic complexity in writing prompts (Kahn-Horwitz & Goldstein, 2024; Norris & Lee, 2023). A 2023 study demonstrated that learners who took a cognitive diagnostic assessment improved their listening comprehension by 22% after targeting identified barriers like semantic recognition and pragmatic inference (Meng et al., 2023).

To identify strengths and weaknesses, learners should analyze performance across all four skills systematically. For listening, challenges might include processing natural speech rhythms or understanding colloquial expressions (Benitez-Correa et al., 2024; Sutrisna, 2022). Reading weaknesses often involve slow processing speed or limited academic vocabulary. Writing assessments frequently expose issues with grammatical accuracy or coherence, while speaking evaluations may highlight pronunciation difficulties or limited fluency under pressure (Norris & Lee, 2023; Widiastari & Fithriani, 2024). A longitudinal study of EFL learners found that targeted practice on weak areas (e.g., sub-word reading skills) led to 35% faster progress compared to generic study approaches (Kahn-Horwitz & Goldstein, 2024).

Self-reflection complements formal assessments. Learners should document their experiences: Does reading a text multiple times improve retention? Do interactive speaking exercises feel more effective than rote memorization? Research indicates that learners who align study methods with their VAK (visual, auditory, kinesthetic) preferences achieve 40% higher retention rates (Norhasanah et al., 2022). For instance, auditory learners might benefit from podcast-based listening practice, while visual

learners could use infographics to master grammatical structures (Gonzales-Torres & Solano, 2024; Norhasanah et al., 2022).

Daily routines significantly influence study effectiveness. A 2024 analysis revealed that learners maintaining consistent 30-minute daily practice sessions improved twice as fast as those using sporadic, longer study periods (Hanif, 2023; Permatasari et al., 2024). Effective self-assessment includes tracking productive hours (e.g., morning vs. evening focus capacity) and eliminating distractions during peak concentration windows (Gonzales-Torres & Solano, 2024).

Learners should integrate technological tools for continuous assessment. Apps like Duolingo or IELTS Prep provide immediate feedback on speaking fluency and writing coherence, while platforms like Flipgrid enable peer evaluations of pronunciation (Benitez-Correa et al., 2024; Widiastari & Fithriani, 2024). Studies show that combining AI-powered diagnostics with human tutor feedback increases error-correction effectiveness by 58% compared to standalone methods (Meng et al., 2023; Norris & Lee, 2023).

SETTING CLEAR AND ACHIEVABLE GOALS

A crucial first step in preparing for any English proficiency test is to define your main test goal. This goal should be specific to your personal or academic needs, such as achieving a required score for university admission, meeting a job application criterion, or qualifying for a scholarship. Clearly articulating your main test goal provides direction and motivation throughout your preparation process. Setting specific and challenging goals leads to higher performance compared to vague or easy goals, making it essential to know exactly what you are aiming for (Locke & Latham, 2002).

Once your main goal is identified, the next step is to break it down into smaller, manageable sub-goals. These sub-goals

should address the key skills assessed in most English proficiency tests: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. For instance, if your main goal is to achieve an overall band score of 7.0 in IELTS, you might set sub-goals such as improving your reading speed to answer all questions within the allotted time or practising essay writing to consistently score above 6.5 in the writing section. Research by Zimmerman (2008) emphasises that subdividing larger goals into specific, skill-based objectives enhances self-regulation and increases the likelihood of success (Zimmerman, 2008).

Time-bound sub-goals are particularly effective for maintaining momentum and tracking progress. Assigning deadlines to each sub-goal, such as mastering a specific grammar point within two weeks or completing five listening practice tests by the end of the month, creates a sense of urgency and accountability. Learners who set time-bound goals are more likely to engage in sustained and focused study sessions, which are critical for language acquisition and test performance (Schunk, 2003).

Effective goal statements are both clear and actionable. For example, instead of stating, *“I want to improve my listening,”* a more effective goal would be, *“I will complete three full-length TOEFL listening sections each week and review my errors to increase my score by 5 points within one month.”* This statement specifies the action to be taken, the frequency, and the desired outcome within a set timeframe. Such goal statements not only clarify what needs to be done but also provide a basis for self-assessment and adjustment of strategies as needed (Bandura & Wessels, 1997).

Another example of an effective goal statement could be: *“I will write one IELTS Task 2 essay every other day and seek feedback from my teacher to achieve a band 7 in writing within eight weeks.”* This goal is realistic, measurable, and tailored to

the learner's context, thereby increasing motivation and the likelihood of achievement. Research shows that learners who set and monitor specific goals are more persistent and adaptive when facing challenges (Locke & Latham, 2002).

ANALYSING TEST REQUIREMENTS

Overview of Common English Proficiency Tests

English proficiency tests such as IELTS, TOEFL, PTE, and Duolingo English Test (DET) are widely recognized tools for assessing the language skills of non-native speakers, particularly those seeking to study or work in English-speaking environments (Aizawa, 2025; Devi, 2024). These tests serve as gateways for university admissions, immigration, and professional opportunities, ensuring that candidates possess the necessary linguistic competence to succeed academically and professionally (Barkaoui, 2025; Ruegg et al., 2024). Each test evaluates core language skills- listening, reading, writing, and speaking- though the structure, format, and emphasis may vary (Ihsan, 2023).

Understanding Test Formats, Sections, and Timing

Each proficiency test has a distinct format and timing, which candidates must understand to prepare effectively. The IELTS consists of four sections: Listening (30 minutes), Reading (60 minutes), Writing (60 minutes), and Speaking (11–14 minutes), with the first three sections taken consecutively and the Speaking section scheduled separately (Nicholson, 2024). TOEFL iBT, delivered online, also assesses reading, listening, speaking, and writing, with a total test time of approximately 2 hours: Reading (35 minutes), Listening (36 minutes), Speaking (16 minutes), and Writing (29 minutes)(Armstrong, 2025b). PTE Academic integrates Speaking and Writing (54–67

minutes), followed by Reading (29–30 minutes), and Listening (30–43 minutes), with a variety of question types in each section. The Duolingo English Test is shorter and more adaptive, assessing all four skills in a single session, with unique tasks for each skill and a total duration of about one hour (Peterson, 2024).

Identifying Key Sections for Focus

While all sections are important, test-takers often find certain components more challenging depending on their individual strengths and weaknesses. For example, in the PTE, reading and speaking are frequently cited as the most difficult modules due to the complexity of vocabulary and the demand for accurate pronunciation and fluency. Similarly, the TOEFL Reading section requires strong academic reading and analytical skills, while the Writing section demands the ability to synthesize information from multiple sources and express ideas coherently. For IELTS, the Speaking section is unique in its face-to-face interview format, which can be daunting for many candidates (O’Loughlin, 2001). Understanding which sections are typically more challenging allows learners to allocate preparation time more strategically.

The Importance of Familiarizing with Question Types

Each test includes a variety of question types designed to assess different aspects of language proficiency. For instance, IELTS Reading features multiple-choice, matching, and diagram labelling questions, while Writing tasks may require data description or argumentative essays (Bridgeport, 2024). TOEFL includes integrated tasks that combine reading, listening, and writing skills, as well as independent speaking and writing prompts (Windsor, 2025). PTE tasks range from “Read Aloud” and “Repeat Sentence” in Speaking to “Fill in the Blanks” and

“Write from Dictation” in Reading and Listening (Armstrong, 2025a). The Duolingo English Test employs adaptive questions, including written and spoken responses, to measure proficiency efficiently. Familiarity with these formats can significantly improve test performance, as research indicates that targeted test preparation leads to measurable score improvements (Permatasari et al., 2024).

Strategic Preparation Based on Test Analysis

A thorough analysis of test requirements enables EFL learners to develop targeted preparation strategies. By reviewing official test guidelines, practicing with authentic materials, and identifying personal areas of weakness, candidates can focus their efforts where they are most needed. For example, those struggling with speaking may benefit from mock interviews and pronunciation practice, while those finding reading sections challenging should focus on skimming, scanning, and vocabulary expansion (Yuyun et al., 2018). Ultimately, understanding the specific demands of each test and section empowers learners to approach their English proficiency exam with confidence and maximize their chances of success (Barkaoui, 2025; Khoiruman & Irawan, 2025).

DESIGNING YOUR STUDY SCHEDULE

Designing an effective study schedule is a cornerstone of successful English proficiency test preparation. A well-structured plan not only ensures that all test components are covered but also helps maintain motivation and reduce anxiety throughout the preparation period. Self-regulated learning strategies, including goal setting and time management, are strong predictors of academic achievement. Therefore, establishing a clear and realistic study timeline is the first step

for EFL learners aiming to maximize their test performance (Zimmerman, 2008).

When choosing a study timeline, it is important to be realistic about your current proficiency level, daily commitments, and the specific test date. Some learners may benefit from a longer preparation period, such as three to six months, allowing for gradual skill development and deeper learning. Others, who already possess a strong foundation, might opt for an intensive four- to eight-week plan focused on targeted practice. A consistent, distributed practice over several weeks leads to better retention and skill transfer than last-minute cramming (Huang & Hung, 2013). Thus, learners should honestly assess their starting point and set a timeline that balances ambition with practicality.

Allocating study time based on individual strengths and weaknesses is essential for efficient learning. Diagnostic tests or self-assessment tools can help identify which language skills- listening, reading, writing, or speaking- require the most attention. For example, a learner who excels in reading but struggles with speaking should devote more time to oral practice and less to reading exercises. Targeted practice in weaker areas, rather than equal time allocation across all skills, yields greater overall improvement (Alderson, 2005). Additionally, understanding the demands of the chosen test, such as the integrated tasks in TOEFL or the face-to-face speaking component in IELTS, should inform how study time is distributed.

Developing a weekly and daily study plan provides structure and accountability. A typical weekly plan might designate specific days for each skill area, with more frequent sessions for areas of weakness. For instance, Mondays and Wednesdays could focus on listening and speaking, while Tuesdays and Thursdays are reserved for reading and writing.

Daily study sessions should be manageable, ideally ranging from 60 to 90 minutes, as research suggests that shorter, focused sessions are more effective than prolonged, unfocused study marathons (Cepeda et al., 2006). Incorporating regular review sessions at the end of each week helps consolidate learning and track progress.

It is equally important to incorporate regular breaks and rest periods into the study schedule. Cognitive science research consistently demonstrates that breaks enhance concentration, prevent burnout, and improve long-term retention (Dunlosky et al., 2013). For example, the Pomodoro Technique- studying for 25 minutes followed by a 5-minute break- can help maintain focus and energy. Longer breaks, such as a half-day off each week, allow the brain to rest and process new information. Learners should also prioritize sleep, as adequate rest is closely linked to memory consolidation and cognitive performance (Walker & Stickgold, 2006).

SELECTING STUDY STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES

Selecting the right study strategies and resources is a crucial step for EFL learners preparing for English proficiency tests. This section explores effective methods for each language skill, highlights the value of official materials and digital tools, emphasizes the importance of immersion and real-life practice, and provides guidance on adapting your study plan to your personal lifestyle and commitments.

Choosing Effective Study Methods for Each Skill

For listening, begin by familiarizing yourself with the test format and question types. Practice active listening by focusing on the main ideas rather than trying to understand every word, as this helps you avoid missing key answers during the exam. Note-taking while listening can also enhance comprehension

and retention. Regular exposure to English through podcasts, news, and films, especially those featuring various accents, will further develop your listening skills and prepare you for the range of voices you may encounter on test day (Afyanti, 2019; Sirajuddin & Yahrif, 2023).

When preparing for the reading section, it is essential to practice with authentic exam materials and sample tests. Develop strategies such as skimming for the general idea and scanning for specific information. Reading headlines and titles can help you predict content, while underlining keywords can aid in quickly locating answers. Remember, you do not need to understand every word; instead, focus on grasping the overall meaning and answering questions accurately (Nabilla & Hadi Asmara, 2022).

For writing, understanding the test format and practicing with real exam questions is vital. Work on planning your responses, organizing your ideas logically, and using a variety of grammatical structures and vocabulary. Practicing under timed conditions will help you manage your time effectively during the actual test. Reviewing model answers and seeking feedback on your writing can further enhance your skills.

In the speaking section, familiarize yourself with the types of questions and topics commonly used in the test. Practice speaking about familiar subjects and more abstract topics to build confidence. Avoid memorized, scripted responses; instead, focus on expressing your ideas naturally and using a wide range of vocabulary and grammar. Recording yourself and participating in mock interviews can provide valuable feedback and help you track your progress (Afyanti, 2019; Kota, 2023).

Utilizing Official Test Materials, Apps, and Online Resources

Official preparation materials are among the most reliable resources for test-takers. These include practice tests, sample questions, and study guides provided by organizations such as IELTS, TOEFL, and Duolingo. Using these materials allows you to become familiar with the test structure, question types, and scoring criteria, thereby reducing anxiety and improving performance (Sirajuddin & Yahrif, 2023).

In addition to official resources, a wide range of apps and online platforms can support your learning. For example, apps like Duolingo, Open English, and specialized Duolingo English Test practice apps offer interactive lessons, unlimited practice questions, and instant feedback powered by AI. These digital tools are convenient, affordable, and accessible, making them ideal for busy learners. They also provide personalized study plans and progress tracking, which can help you identify areas for improvement and stay motivated (Budiman et al., 2023).

Online platforms such as the British Council, Cambridge English, and FluentU offer extensive libraries of practice exercises, authentic videos, and interactive activities tailored to each skill. Many of these resources are free or low-cost, making them accessible to learners worldwide (Nurteteng et al., 2024).

Incorporating Immersion and Real-Life Practice Opportunities

Immersion is a powerful strategy for language acquisition. By surrounding yourself with English in both formal and informal settings, you accelerate your proficiency, deepen your cultural understanding, and strengthen cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving (Genese, 1994; Illés & Akcan, 2017). Immersion can be achieved through activities like joining English-speaking clubs, participating in language

exchange programs, or attending workshops and seminars conducted in English. Engaging in real-life conversations with native speakers or fellow learners helps you apply your knowledge in authentic contexts, boosting your confidence and fluency (Supriyono et al., 2020).

Adapting the Plan to Fit Personal Lifestyle and Commitments

Balancing test preparation with work, study, or family obligations requires careful planning and flexibility. Start by assessing your daily routine and identifying time slots for study. Even short, consistent sessions can be highly effective if used wisely. Prioritize the skills that need the most improvement and allocate more time to them, but also ensure that all four skills receive attention (Andriyani, 2016).

Use a planner or digital calendar to schedule study sessions, and be realistic about your goals. If your schedule changes, adjust your study plan accordingly. Incorporating study into daily activities, such as listening to podcasts during commutes or practicing vocabulary during breaks, can make learning more manageable and less overwhelming (Mala & Wahyuningsih, 2024). Joining study groups or finding a study partner can provide motivation, accountability, and diverse perspectives, making the learning process more enjoyable and effective (Emilizar, 2025).

MONITORING PROGRESS AND STAYING MOTIVATED

Setting Milestones and Deadlines to Track Improvement

Establishing clear milestones and deadlines is a proven strategy for maintaining momentum and ensuring steady progress in English proficiency test preparation. By breaking

down the overall goal, such as achieving a target score, into smaller, manageable objectives, learners can monitor their advancement and stay focused. For example, a learner might set a milestone to complete all listening practice exercises within two weeks or to master a specific set of academic vocabulary by the end of the month. Goal-setting not only clarifies the learning path but also increases self-regulation and persistence among language learners (Zimmerman, 2008).

Using Practice Tests and Self-Assessment Tools to Measure Success

Regularly engaging with practice tests and self-assessment tools is essential for measuring progress and identifying areas that require further attention. Full-length practice exams, available from official test providers, simulate the real test environment and help learners become familiar with the format, timing, and types of questions they will encounter. Self-assessment checklists and reflection journals can further support learners in evaluating their performance and adjusting their strategies. Frequent self-assessment fosters greater learner autonomy and leads to more effective test preparation outcomes (Cheng et al., 2004).

Rewarding Achievements and Maintaining Motivation

Celebrating achievements, no matter how small, is vital for sustaining motivation throughout the preparation process. Rewards can range from simple self-acknowledgement to more tangible incentives, such as taking a break, enjoying a favorite activity, or sharing progress with friends and family. Positive reinforcement has been shown to boost learners' intrinsic motivation and reinforce productive study habits (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011). By recognizing their own efforts and successes,

learners can maintain a positive outlook and remain committed to their long-term goals.

Adjusting the Plan as Needed for Flexibility and Continued Progress

Flexibility is key to effective test preparation, as learners may encounter unexpected challenges or discover new areas of difficulty as they progress. It is important to regularly review and adjust the study plan based on ongoing performance and feedback from practice tests. This adaptive approach ensures that learners address their weaknesses and capitalize on their strengths, leading to continuous improvement. The ability to revise learning strategies in response to self-assessment results is a hallmark of successful language learners (Andrade & Du, 2007).

SAMPLE PERSONALISED STUDY PLAN

Sample personalized study plans are essential for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners preparing for proficiency tests, as they address individual strengths, weaknesses, and goals. Effective study plans are not one-size-fits-all; rather, they are tailored to the learner's current proficiency level and specific needs, ensuring a strategic and efficient approach to test preparation (Aisyah et al., 2024; Safura et al., 2023). Below, example study plans for beginner, intermediate, and advanced learners are outlined, followed by guidance on customising these templates for individual requirements.

For beginner learners, the focus should be on building foundational vocabulary, basic grammar, and developing confidence in all four language skills. A typical week might involve daily short sessions, such as 20–30 minutes of vocabulary and grammar practice, listening to simple English audio, and practicing speaking with basic sentences. Beginners

benefit greatly from structured routines and frequent repetition, as well as visual aids and language support strategies to scaffold learning. Setting clear, achievable goals, such as learning ten new words per day or mastering the present simple tense, helps maintain motivation and track progress (Adara & Puspahaty, 2021).

Intermediate learners, who can already communicate in everyday situations but lack fluency and accuracy, should aim for a balanced improvement across listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A sample plan might allocate specific days to each skill: for example, listening to podcasts or watching English videos on Mondays, reading articles on Tuesdays, practicing writing on Wednesdays, and focusing on speaking with a partner on Thursdays. Incorporating grammar and vocabulary review throughout the week, as well as tackling more complex texts and tasks, prepares intermediate learners for the demands of proficiency tests. Regular self-assessment and feedback from peers or tutors are especially valuable at this stage (Roki'ah et al., 2023).

Advanced learners preparing for high-stakes tests like IELTS or TOEFL should focus on refining their skills, mastering test strategies, and simulating exam conditions. Their study plan might involve dividing sessions by skill area, with targeted practice using authentic materials such as academic articles, news broadcasts, and sample test questions (Aljabri, 2024). Advanced learners should set specific goals for each section, such as achieving a certain accuracy rate in reading comprehension or delivering a ten-minute spontaneous speech without hesitation. Regular full-length practice tests under timed conditions are crucial for building stamina and managing test anxiety (N.K.A. Sudianthi et al., 2021).

Customizing these templates for individual needs begins with a thorough self-assessment or diagnostic test to identify

strengths and weaknesses(Xu et al., 2025). Learners should priorities areas where improvement is most needed, such as dedicating extra time to speaking if that is a weak point, and adjust their plans accordingly. Flexibility is key: if a learner finds that certain activities are particularly effective or enjoyable, these should be emphasized, while less productive methods can be replaced (Umam, 2017). Incorporating personal interests, such as reading about favorite topics or practicing speaking in contexts relevant to the learner's goals, further enhances engagement and retention (Andriani et al., 2023).

It is also important to integrate regular review and reflection into the study plan. Learners should periodically assess their progress, adjust goals, and modify their schedules as needed to address evolving challenges (Fathi et al., 2025). Seeking feedback from teachers, tutors, or language exchange partners can provide valuable insights and accelerate improvement (Banu, 2024). For those with limited preparation time, focusing intensively on the most challenging sections and practicing under exam-like conditions can yield significant gains in a short period.

CONCLUSION

Creating a personalized study plan stands at the heart of effective preparation for English proficiency tests. For EFL learners, this process begins with a careful assessment of individual strengths and weaknesses, followed by a thorough understanding of the specific requirements of the chosen exam. Setting realistic and attainable goals is essential, as it allows learners to tailor their study activities to address personal challenges while making the most of available resources. Through this targeted approach, learners can optimize their preparation and significantly increase their chances of achieving their desired test scores.

Equally important is the practice of ongoing self-reflection and regular adjustment of the study plan. As learners progress through their preparation, it is vital to periodically evaluate performance, identify areas that require further improvement, and modify study strategies as needed. This dynamic and flexible approach ensures that preparation remains relevant, focused, and motivating. By staying attuned to their evolving needs, learners can maintain momentum and continue making meaningful progress toward their goals.

In addition to strategic planning and self-reflection, several practical tips can further enhance test readiness. Consistent practice is key, as is seeking constructive feedback from teachers, peers, or language partners. Familiarizing oneself with various test formats and question types helps reduce surprises on test day and builds confidence. Managing test anxiety through relaxation techniques and maintaining a positive mindset are also crucial, as emotional readiness can greatly influence performance. A holistic approach that balances skill development with mental well-being empowers learners to perform at their best when it matters most. Utilizing authentic practice materials and simulating real test conditions are highly effective ways to build both confidence and time management skills. Engaging in group study sessions or participating in language exchange programs can provide valuable opportunities for speaking practice and cultural exchange, further enriching the learning experience.

A well-structured and personalized study plan, combined with continuous self-assessment and strategic, flexible preparation, forms the foundation for success in English proficiency tests. With dedication and informed effort, EFL learners can confidently navigate their test preparation journey and unlock new academic, professional, and personal opportunities in the English-speaking world.

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ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST PREPARATION

Essential Skills for EFL Learners

The book English Proficiency Test Prep: Essential Skills for EFL Learners serves as a comprehensive guide for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who are preparing for international English proficiency examinations such as TOEFL, IELTS, TOEIC, and other similar tests. It is designed not only to help readers understand the format and question types of each test component but also to develop the essential language skills required for success in these assessments. Through a systematic and learner-centered approach, this book explores the four fundamental language skills such as listening, reading, speaking, and writing along with key supporting aspects such as grammar and vocabulary. Each chapter provides theoretical explanations, test-taking strategies, and useful tips to enhance both accuracy and speed. Moreover, the book highlights the importance of communicative competence and academic literacy, encouraging learners to use English effectively in real-world contexts beyond the testing environment. Written by experienced educators and practitioners in English language teaching, the book combines empirical insights with modern pedagogical approaches relevant to students, teachers, and language instructors. By focusing on essential skill mastery and competency-based strategies, this book aims to be an inspiring and practical resource for anyone seeking to achieve optimal results in English proficiency tests while strengthening their ability to communicate confidently and effectively in a global context.



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