

## International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

### ***What makes IELTS a good alternative to the TOEFL?***

The IELTS tests the complete range of English language skills that will commonly be encountered by students when studying in the English medium. Assessment of performance in IELTS depends on how the candidate's ability in English relates to the language demands of courses of study or training, not on reaching a fixed pass mark. A particularly attractive feature of the IELTS is the required face-to-face interview during which time the evaluator judges the student's English speaking abilities.

### ***How is the test administered?***

IELTS is jointly managed by University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL), British Council and IDP Education Australia: IELTS Australia. University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL) is an internationally recognized body in the provision of academic and vocational examinations. IELTS tests are administered at centers throughout the world - there are currently more than 270 centers, in over 110 countries. Centers supervise the local administration of the test and ensure the provision of qualified and trained examiners.

American academic institutions are increasingly accepting IELTS for admission purposes. In 2002 more than 350,000 candidates took IELTS, representing a 67% increase from the previous year and another significant increase is expected this year.

### ***How is the test structured?***

The test is designed to cover the full range of ability from nonuser to expert user. Candidates are tested in listening, reading, writing and speaking. The first three modules – Listening, Reading and Writing – must be completed in one day. There is no break between the modules. The Speaking Module may be taken, at the discretion of the test center, in the period seven days before or after the other modules.

A variety of question types are used: multiple choice, short-answer questions, sentence completion, note/summary/diagram/flow-chart/table completion, labeling a diagram which has numbered parts, classification, and matching. (Note: TOEFL uses mostly multiple choice.)

### ***How is the IELTS scored?***

IELTS provides a profile of a candidate's ability to use English. Candidates receive scores on a Band Scale from 1 to 9. A score is reported for each module of the test. The individual module scores are then averaged and rounded to produce an Overall Band Score. Overall Band Scores and Listening and Reading scores are reported in whole and half Bands; Writing and Speaking Band Scores are reported in whole Bands only.

*Band 9-Expert User*-Has fully operational command of the language: appropriate, accurate and fluent with complete understanding.

*Band 8-Very Good User*-Has fully operational command of the language with only occasional unsystematic inaccuracies and inappropriacies. Misunderstandings may occur in unfamiliar situations. Handles complex detailed argumentation well.

*Band 7-Good User*-Has operational command of the language, though with occasional inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings in some situations. Generally handles complex language well and understands detailed reasoning.

*Band 6-Competent User*-Has generally effective command of the language despite some inaccuracies, inappropriacies and misunderstandings. Can use and understand fairly complex language, particularly in familiar situations.

*Band 5-Modest User*-Has partial command of the language, coping with overall meaning in most situations, though is likely to make many mistakes. Should be able to handle basic communication in own field.

*Band 4-Limited User*-Basic competence is limited to familiar situations. Has frequent problems in understanding and expression. Is not able to use complex language.

*Band 3-Extremely Limited User*-Conveys and understands only general meaning in very familiar situations. Frequent breakdowns in communication occur.

*Band 2-Intermittent User*-No real communication is possible except for the most basic information using isolated words or short formulae in familiar situations and to meet immediate needs. Has great difficulty in understanding spoken and written English.

*Band 1-Non User*-Essentially has no ability to use the language beyond possibly a few isolated words.

Scoring is carried out at the test center by trained examiners whose work is closely monitored. Results are available within two weeks of the test and Test Report Forms are sent to the candidates and to the sponsor(s)/receiving institution(s). As a general rule it is recommended that a Test Report Form that is more than two years old should only be accepted as evidence of present level of ability if accompanied by proof that a candidate has actively maintained or tried to improve his/her English language proficiency.

***How should IELTS scores be interpreted?***

Both the Overall Band Score and the Bands recorded for each individual module should be considered when assessing applicants' English proficiency. While 7.0 will generally be the acceptable minimum score for Duke applicants, the appropriate level required for a given course of study or training is ultimately something that must be decided in the light of knowledge of courses and the experience of international students taking them. Language skills should be matched to particular programs/courses. For example, if a course has a lot of reading and writing, but no lectures, listening comprehension might not be quite as important and a score of, perhaps, 5.5/ 6 in Listening might be acceptable if the Overall Band Score was 7. However, for a course where there are lots of lectures and spoken instructions a score of 5.5/ 6 in Listening might be unacceptable even though the Overall Band Score was 7.