STUDY NOTES   EPISODE 13: READING SKILLS AND QUESTION TYPES

READING SKILLS AND QUESTION TYPES

The IELTS Academic Reading Test requires efficient and accurate reading of three separate texts of approximately 700 to 900 words each. The topics are drawn from current and global issues in society and the texts based on magazine, journal or newspaper articles. The three texts become progressively more difficult.

Text difficulty is determined by

- vocabulary
- length of paragraphs and
- language complexity

Each of the three sections of the test has 12-14 questions for a total of 40 questions that have to be answered in 60 minutes. So, on average, that is 1.5 minutes per question. There is not enough time to read three lengthy texts closely, so it is important to have good reading skills. These skills will be the tools which can help you manage your time more efficiently and help you find your answers in the reading passages a lot quicker.

Question Types
There is a variety of question types used in the Reading module, which you need to become familiar with.

- matching paragraphs with headings
- multiple choice
- short answer
- summary completion
- sentence completion
- true, false, not given/yes, no, not given (no information)
- matching lists/phrases
- classification
- table/flow chart completion
- labelling a diagram

> **IELTS Tip**
>
> Manage your time efficiently and effectively – if you can't answer a question quickly, leave it and return to it before you go on to answer questions in the next reading section.
>
> Use the strategies you have learnt for the different question types to help you answer more quickly.

These question types test a variety of reading comprehension skills including:

- scanning
- skimming
- previewing
- identifying main ideas
- understanding the relationship between words (synonyms, opposites, linking words)

Question Types, Strategies and Skills

Question Type: **Matching Paragraphs with Headings**

Matching paragraphs with headings is another question type used in the reading test. The purpose of this question type is to test the following range of reading comprehension skills:

Matching Paragraphs with Headings	
Skills	Explanation
skimming paragraphs for a general understanding	Skimming means reading very quickly to get a general sense of what the paragraph is about.
differentiating between main ideas and examples	Focus on the general idea and disregard any details in the paragraph such as examples.
understanding the relationship between words and phrases	Recognising synonyms, paraphrases and linking words help to more readily match relevant information with a heading.
identifying the topic or main idea in the paragraph	The heading is a paraphrase of the topic or main idea in the paragraph.

Because time is of the essence, it is important to use strategies so that you can answer the questions as quickly and accurately as possible. Here are some strategies for answering this question type.

Matching Paragraphs with Headings	
Strategies	Explanation
read the list of headings and highlight the key words	Familiarising yourself with the headings and key words gives you an idea what to look out for.
note any similarities in the headings	Some headings may be similar so check how they differ.
skim the paragraph to find the topic sentence or topic idea	Topic sentences can be the first, second or last sentence in the paragraph. Be prepared that there may not be a topic sentence. You will then need to look for ideas that are repeated or related.
think about synonym for or paraphrasing the topic sentence or topic idea	This helps to match the main idea in the paragraph with a possible heading.
choose the heading	Choose the heading which best summarises the general idea of the paragraph.

Question Type: **Short Answers**

This question type tests your ability to locate specific details or a particular piece of information in the reading text. The answers are in the order of the passage.

There are two kinds of short answer question.

- answering a *Wh*-question

Wh-question	Specific information
who?	person
what?	thing
where?	place
which?	thing
when?	time
why?	reason
how?	way, manner
how much? how many?	quantity, amount

- listing up to 3 things, e.g. names, names of objects, places and other things

Here are the skills tested and strategies to use in order to answer this question type quickly and accurately.

Short Answer Questions	
Skills	**Explanation**
scanning for specific details	Scanning means reading very quickly focusing on key words to find a specific piece of information that answers a particular question.
understanding the relationship between words and phrases	Recognising synonyms/paraphrases helps to match the relevant information.
following instructions	Use the correct number of words and/or number allowed for the question. If instructions are not followed accurately your answer will be marked wrong even though the information is correct.

Short Answer Questions	
Strategies	**Explanation**
highlight the *wh*-word and key words in each question	This helps to focus on the specific piece of information you need to look for.
scan the reading passage until you locate the same or similar information as in the question	Finding synonyms or paraphrases of the same information helps you to locate the area you need to read for your answer.
check instructions to see how many words and/or numbers you can write	You can easily loose marks by not following instructions.